



'TAKING STOCK AND LOOKING FORWARD'

HIGH LEVEL STAKEHOLDER SEMINAR
28 March 2017, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium

Democratic Governance and Community Participation through Mediation

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ROMED Programme

Democratic Governance and
Community Participation through Mediation

**A European Union
and Council of Europe
Joint Programme**

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Photos: Marina Vasic, National Support Teams of the ROMED Programme

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The ROMED Programme started in 2011 as a European Training Programme for Intercultural Mediation with the Roma Communities (ROMED1) and subsequently evolved from 2013 onwards into a tool for Democratic Governance and Community Participation through Mediation (ROMED2).¹

With 54 very diverse municipalities where participation and dialogue processes were initiated through ROMED2 bringing closer the Roma communities and local authorities, and a large pool of mediators trained through ROMED1, the joint programme of the European Commission and Council of Europe **brought about a dynamic of change at community and individual levels** for the Roma citizens outreached by the implementation. The programme was implemented by the Council of Europe's Support Team to the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma issues and the Office of the Directorate General of Programmes.

An external evaluation² conducted in 2016 showed that the methodologies created through ROMED, as well as

through the National Support Teams and International Pedagogical Team who designed and tested them together, have had a real impact on the empowerment of Roma communities.

The work conducted through this partnership in the field of education for democratic citizenship and participation of Roma communities is the proof that such processes are not only possible, but that they also sow trust and improve living conditions in those places where it is applied. **National and local governments are therefore encouraged to take on this approach and benefit from the know-how and understanding generated** through the ROMED Programme between 2011 and 2017.

The ROMED High Level Seminar "Taking Stock and Looking Forward" organised by the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and the Support Team to the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues, aimed to draw a balance of the learnings provided by the programme and define steps for future action.

1 www.coe-romed.org

2 <http://coe-romed.org/sites/default/files/experiencing-romed.pdf>



Ms Olga Mariano facilitator for ROMED2 Portugal and Ms Armandina Saleiro, Municipal councillor for Social Affairs and contact person for ROMED within the municipality of Barcelos, Portugal.

THE WAY FORWARD IS DIALOGUE, PARTICIPATION AND EDUCATION

“Men often hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don’t know each other. They don’t know each other because they cannot communicate. They cannot communicate because they are separated.” Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission, opened the seminar with these words from Dr. Martin Luther King before questioning today’s divided societies and democracy.

Fear, lack of trust, the banalisation of discrimination and “alternative facts” were some of the main concerns about the wider international context expressed by Mr Timmermans, as well as by MEP Corazza-Bildt, MEP Preda, Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General for Democracy of the Council of Europe, and Mr Valeriu Nicolae, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues, during their introductory speeches.

Indeed, Roma issues and anti-Gypsyism are part of today’s challenges for Europe which remain high on the agenda along with competing issues such as the rise of extremism, radicalisation and migration. Furthermore, geopolitical conflicts generate instability and a greater need for emergency responses and a solid social inclusion system that can withhold these new shifts.

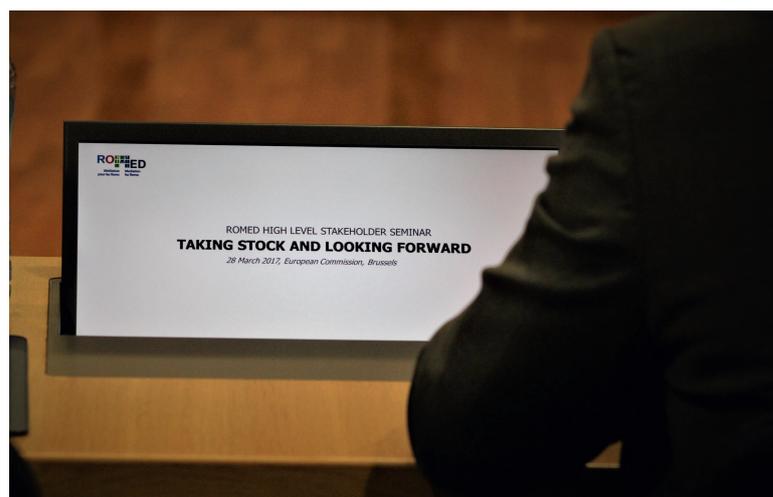
Whilst deep problems persist, progress concerning Roma issues has undoubtedly taken place in the past 10 years as observed by several speakers during the seminar. ROMED, as presented in the testimonials of the two panels dedicated to ROMED1 and ROMED2, including the head of the project team and a representative of the external evaluation team, showed that change at local, and further down at community, level is not only possible, but has become the prerequisite for a holistic approach to Roma inclusion at the local level.

ROMED, as experienced by citizens in Roma communities, and as a programme in itself, was often described as “**unique**” during the seminar. This was on account of **having placed community mobilization and engagement at the heart of its action, along with its interaction with local authorities.** ROMED has helped communities regain the trust that “their voices matter” and has made use of the rights-based approach common to the Council of Europe and European Commission, favouring in both phases the

empowerment of individuals – men and women – instead of trapping them in a dependency mechanism.

It was through such **empowerment** that the Roma communities involved in ROMED2 could establish a close co-operation environment with local authorities and bring about results that directly impacted their lives: in Portugal, several Roma communities engaged in philanthropic actions seeking to reduce the gap between Roma and the majority; with the help of scholarships, around 25 persons involved in the Community Action Groups took the decision to continue their studies in university; and 30 short-term positions were negotiated by CAGs within seven municipalities, allowing members of the Roma communities to access employment³.

The last stage of this empowerment through ROMED1 and ROMED2 has been the **political participation** of Roma people – not only in decision-making at local level through consultation processes, but also through building up the courage to participate in local elections for seats in the local councils. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, close to 20 Roma persons, some of whom were trained mediators, participated in the country’s First Roma Political Academy – 10 were elected in their



municipalities. Along the same line, in Ukraine 12 Roma women mediators are preparing their participation in the next local elections.

³ More on the achievements of CAG members in Portugal in the documentary “Experiencing ROMED” produced by the National Support Team: <http://bit.ly/2rKiny0>



ROMED also **fit the vision for diversity of municipalities where it was implemented**. Indeed, as confirmed by high-ranking representatives of the European Commission's DGs (JUST, EMPL, NEAR and EAC), it is the dialogue between local authorities and local populations in this context that brings changes in the lives of beneficiaries on both sides. **The political will of local authorities** has been primordial in solving crucial issues identified by the communities themselves. In the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", the 10 municipalities involved in ROMED2 not only applied for EU-funded Roma-related projects, but they also earmarked modest amounts in the local budgets as a gesture representing a basis of trust-building and institutional memory for future capital investments for the development of the Roma community. Similarly, in Jászfényszaru (Hungary), local authorities allocated 17 000 euros from the local budget to address various priorities related to housing, as defined by the Community Action Group.

One possible direction for the future also resides in dialogue. **Synergies** at the very local level, as recommended by local authorities themselves, platforms for co-operation, as well as pairing up with initiatives at national and European level, help enhance the results of community participation. **Recently, the Portuguese government announced that, as of 2018, ROMED2 will become part of the governmental approach to addressing Roma issues**⁴.

ROMED was also unique in **uniting the European Commission and the Council of Europe** around common fundamental values and, forced by a deep concern with realities on the ground, have them step out of the silo logic, allow flexibility of implementation and emulation to local contexts, and think strategically of the long-term effects of the democratic participation of Roma.

4 <http://coe-romed.org/articles/portuguese-government-take-over-romed2-2018-several-new-municipalities>

Today, both institutions are stepping up their priorities concerning Roma. The European Commission's DG JUST has announced a mid-term review of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies with the aim of identifying areas of improvement and guidance for implementation until the end of the framework span (2020). On the Council of Europe side, the recent designation of a Roma Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues was a strong symbolic gesture. Furthermore, the **"10 goals for 10 years"**⁵ focusing largely on Roma children, education and addressing the immediate challenges in a child's development, have been recently announced by the Secretary General and are bound to put in motion new movements towards the 10 defined goals. Furthermore, DG EMPL and DG NEAR committed to the continuation of working together with the Council of Europe in the promoting of Roma participation and solid local authority responses to the aspirations of the Roma communities, through the continuation of ROMACT and the launching of ROMACTED respectively.

The way forward is education. During the seminar, several speakers announced the imminent launching of a new European Commission and Council of Europe Joint Programme around "schools as engines for social inclusion" which will build on the understanding of dialogue as conceived by ROMED, aiming at a holistic approach to the child's learning environment. The new programme will aim to address what Mr Timmermans described as the new form of illiteracy in the society of tomorrow, namely the incapacity to learn.

5 <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/10-goals-for-the-next-10-years>

OPENING SPEECHES

As mentioned earlier, the seminar was opened by high-level representatives of both the European Commission and the Council of Europe, among them the **European Commission's First Vice-President, Frans Timmermans, the Director General for Democracy within the Council of Europe, Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, the SRSG for Roma Issues of the Council of Europe, Mr Valeriu Nicolae, as well as two Members of the European Parliament (EPP Group), Ms Corazza Bildt and Mr Cristian Preda.**

Mr Valeriu Nicolae thanked participants for their time and opened the seminar with a brief introduction to

made since. He expressed his trust in the new Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues, Mr Valeriu Nicolae, and his will to support in any way possible the co-operation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The first Vice-President of the European Commission continued with the need for more inclusive schools, the need for a comprehensive approach and the need to fight discrimination in schools around Europe, mentioning three infringement procedures launched since 2014 against European Union Member States on account of discrimination of Roma children in their education. He concluded with remarks on the ROMED Programme and the participatory decision-making initiated through it, as well as the need for mediators as agents of change.

Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković took to the floor to talk about the differences that unite us, as Roma and non-Roma. She reminded participants of the fact that Roma continued to be the most discriminated and vulnerable ethnic group in Europe, but also underlined the impressive progress achieved during the past ten years in this field. Ms Samardžić-Marković praised the co-operation between the Council of Europe and European Commission as instrumental in what experts regard as best practices in the field of Roma social inclusion.



“Separation is the source of fear, education is a solution for that.”

the next speaker's allocution. **Mr Frans Timmermans** began with a quote from Martin Luther King on hate, fear and lack of communication. He linked this to the lack of contact between polarized parts of societies, emphasizing that diversity is an asset although it might seem that it has become a challenge. He linked the pigeon-holing of societies to democratic processes and the results in elections around the world, and more specifically in Europe, stating that the issues related to Roma and anti-Gypsyism are deeply linked to these shifts in societies. In his opinion, education would become the key element in addressing these trends. Currently, 50% of Roma children in Europe do not have access to education, and so the additional challenge, besides ensuring basic literacy for these children, would be the incapacity to learn, the new form of illiteracy in the world of tomorrow. Mr Timmermans shared with the audience the story of his first visits to Roma communities 10 years previously, his impressions at that time and the progress

“Co-operation between our institutions is of utmost importance in order to help our member states. It is, I believe, the best way to have the positive impact we all want to make.”



She provided a brief overview of past, present and future joint programmes born out of the co-operation between the two institutions: ROMED; ROMACT – a programme built on the ROMED approach working in over 100 municipalities and focusing on local authorities and transnational co-operation; JUSTROM – a new joint pilot programme on access to justice for Roma and/or Traveller women in Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Romania; ROMACTED as a new joint programme between the European Commission’s DG NEAR and the Council of Europe combining the experience of ROMED and ROMACT and transferring it to seven other beneficiaries in the Western Balkans and Turkey; a new joint programme on education of Roma children and inclusive schools; and finally, a new joint project on Schools as Engines of Reinsertion for Roma Victims of Violence and Exclusion, “SERVE those in need”, aimed at combatting violence and exclusion, in particular gender-based violence against Roma women and girls. Ms Samardžić-Marković concluded by recalling the primordial role of both the Council of Europe and the European Commission as guardians of human rights reminding member States to put into application the legal instruments and the standards of the two organisations.

MEP Corazza-Bildt took to the floor next with a speech focusing on the rise of intolerance and the situation of Roma children in Europe. She pointed out that, through the work of the LIBE Committee and the Inter-Group for Children’s Rights, she reached the conclusion that at European level there was a lack of political will in



“Let’s say that it is a total scandal, that it is outrageous, that it is unacceptable that there are children that are discriminated today in Europe.”

addition to a lack of resources. She underlined that the EU’s mission should be to work on the political will of Member States. Ms Corazza-Bildt went on to speak of the importance of the work of grassroots organisations in non-formal education, and of their understanding of the

needs. She went on to address the issue of EU funding and the lack of absorption capacity at national level. Ms Corazza-Bildt concluded with an appeal concerning the link between the rejection of the EU among European citizens and the unresolved situation of poverty among Roma. She expressed her support for the “10 goals for 10 years” put forth by the Council of Europe and the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues.

The opening panel continued with a presentation by **MEP Preda**, who also talked about the rise in anti-Gypsyism and the need for long-term action and dedication in

“Communities are key actors in making sure that public policies are designed properly and have a meaningful impact. I am happy to learn that the co-operation between the European Commission and Council of Europe in ROMED and ROMACT Programmes focuses on these aspects.”

order to achieve significant results in Roma inclusion. He emphasised the importance of the participation of Roma communities in the decision-making process at local level and expressed his satisfaction at seeing the ROMED and ROMACT Joint Programmes of the European Commission and Council of Europe addressing precisely these aspects. He suggested that a new initiative on schools as engines for social inclusion should be built on the foundation of the 147 municipalities involved in the two programmes so far. Mr Preda went on to suggest that the European Parliament supported this type of pilot initiative and that it also endorsed two new initiatives of the Council of Europe: the “Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society”⁶ and the “10 goals for 10 years”. MEP Preda ended his speech with a powerful statement on migration, children and the need for more co-operation between the Council of Europe and the EU on addressing exclusion and racism, as well as on preventing populism and extremism.

6 <http://bit.ly/2quSkXS>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF ROMED1 AND ROMED2

The session on the results and recommendations of the external evaluation began with an introduction by **Ms Aurora Ailincai, Head of the Strategic Partnerships Unit within the Support Team to the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues**, followed by a complete presentation by **Ms Mariana Milosheva-Krushe, head of the external evaluation team of Blomeyer & sanz s.l.**, contracted in 2016 to conduct the evaluation of the ROMED Joint Programme in seven focus countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Ukraine).

Ms Ailincai began by underlining the breakthrough that the co-operation between the EU and the Council of Europe had achieved through ROMED and ROMACT, namely stepping away from a restricted short-term vision towards thinking and acting in the long-term. In

2011, when the first phase of ROMED began, the logic from the start was not to increase the number of trained Roma mediators in member States, but rather to set European standards on mediation, to look into how mediation was performed and to propose solutions on how it could become effective. As direct outcomes of ROMED1, Ms Ailincai highlighted the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on mediation as an effective tool for the inclusion of Roma⁷, as well as the complete methodology for the Training of Mediators⁸. Ms Ailincai went on to explain that it was the conclusions drawn from ROMED1 – namely that the inclusion of a Roma community cannot rely on one person – that brought about ROMED2, which looked into the working environment of the mediator and how the community could be empowered to enter directly into dialogue with local authorities. ROMED2 thus became a process of democratic governance, of civic education, of capacity-building and of empowerment of the members of the Roma community.

Ms Ailincai also brought into the discussion an invisible side of Roma communities in public discourse – the Roma middle class which is generating change and which needs to be strengthened and acknowledged more in order to address stereotypes and racism. She concluded by underlining the importance of the co-operation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe, and the capacity to adapt and emulate the needs at each local level in order to effectively address Roma inclusion.

Ms Milosheva – Krushe then took to the floor to share her initial surprise at finding out that the Council of Europe and the European Commission were co-operating so well at grassroots level. She invited those present to give a round of applause to the National Support Teams, the International Pedagogical Team and the management team, without whom the success of the programme would not have been possible. **She affirmed that, overall, the external evaluation had very positive results, with certain areas of learning**

7 <http://bit.ly/2iL4qJP>

8 ROMED1 Trainer’s Handbook: <http://bit.ly/220scS3>

“The results of ROMED2 show that the potential of the people is within people, in the community, and that they can access services directly in contact and dialogue with the local authorities, public institutions and authorities.”



and improvement. Within ROMED1, after having conducted focus groups with mediators as well as surveys, the evaluators' conclusion was that there were several areas where real impact could be tracked, and this resided mostly in the increased functional capacities of mediators. Another success factor for ROMED1 was that it



“Some of the major success factors were the national teams, the facilitators, the international pedagogical team, and the team of the Council of Europe.”

managed to create and support the startup of mediators' networks and associations. In addition, it brought Roma onto the EU agenda, thanks to the declarations it sparked at political level. On the shortcomings side, Ms Milosheva-Krushe underlined on several occasions the lack of resources allocated to the programme and the high expectations concerning its rapid extension and fast implementation pace, as well as the lack of data available on the situation of mediators, which prevented a more in-depth analysis of the impact of the training on the individuals and Roma communities. Ms Milosheva-Krushe explained that the recognition of the profession is indeed crucial, as well as the allocation of funds and the instauration of a monitoring body that ensures that data is collected on their work. Last but not least, the head of the external evaluation team underlined that communities also need to be made aware of their right to request a Roma mediator.

Concerning ROMED2, in Ms Milosheva-Krushe's opinion, the programme turned out to be a unique experience which put the community activation and mobilization at its centre alongside the interaction with local authorities. She explained how impressed she was with the change produced in Roma citizens involved in the Community Action Groups, as well with the feedback from institutions which started recognizing this type of more structured communication with Roma communities.

According to Ms Milosheva-Krushe, some of the most important results of ROMED2 were the “small victories” brought about through local authorities addressing the

concrete needs defined by the communities. In turn, this triggered the much bigger result of regaining the trust of Roma communities that “their voices matter” and the countering of defeatism amongst them. It was necessary therefore to strengthen the communities and the CAGs in order to ensure the sustainability of the process and the importance of providing seed fund for occasional activities of the CAG. In addition, the role and support of local and national authorities were crucial factors in ensuring the sustainability of the participation of Roma communities.

Ms Milosheva-Krushe presented the main recommendation arising from the evaluation, which was to continue the ROMED Programme and to ensure local and national ownership. She encouraged working in synergies with other initiatives and with stakeholders at all levels. Concerning mediators, she recommended supporting networks and ensuring monitoring at national level. Finally, as a general recommendation and conclusion, Ms Milosheva-Krushe encouraged investing in education and Roma political participation as the main way of producing long-term results for Roma communities.

Questions and Answers

Mr Jose Manuel Gonzalez Cotano, ROMED1 Trainer in Belgium, took to the floor to share his experience in mediation and, in particular, facts and emotions in the context of the relationship between Roma and the majority. Whilst he believed that communication was indeed important, he underlined that it needed to be done in such a way to break down stereotypes.

Mr Demetrio Gomez, National Project Officer for ROMED2 in Spain, intervened to talk about the need, beyond communication, of legal instruments to fight Romaphobia and anti-Gypsyism.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM ROMED1

TESTIMONIES FROM MEDIATORS AND PARTICIPANTS

The first major panel of the High Level Stakeholder Seminar of the ROMED Programme concerned the ROMED1 phase of the programme (Training of Mediators), and benefitted from the testimonies of several stakeholders involved, including mediators, state representatives and a member of the International Pedagogical Team.

The series of testimonies was initiated by **Ms Isabelle Martijn**, National Roma Contact Point and CAHROM Member in Belgium, who began by explaining how the PPS Social Integration became the National Focal Point for the ROMED1 Programme in Belgium. In 2012, mediation became a priority for Roma integration thanks to the then federal State Secretary for Social Integration and Combating Poverty who was responsible for coordinating the National Roma Integration Strategy.



Ms Martijn shared the challenges that the new function represented for a structure such as the PPS Social Integration⁹, and mentioned the importance of the support of the Council of Europe, the experienced trainers and the mediators in this context.

In Belgium, four training sessions were organised resulting in the training of around 40 mediators, combining intercultural and health mediators from the Brussels region, Flanders and other various locations in Belgium.

Among the elements that brought an added-value to the training, Ms Martijn mentioned the importance of exchanges of experiences among mediators,

the integration of a rights-based approach, the heterogeneity of the groups (combining Roma and non-Roma mediators) and the diversity of contexts (with mediators from different cities in Belgium) in making the trainings a success. One of the challenges encountered in Belgium was, however, to meet the expectations of both experienced and less experienced mediators. According to Ms Martijn, the main achievements of the training were the opportunity for networking and peer support, the reinforcement of skills and expertise, the rise in the importance of mediation in Roma inclusion with ROMED included in two national action plans, and finally the fact that the local authorities became more aware of the importance of mediation for Roma inclusion.

Mr Ján Hero, CAHROM Member, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, provided the context of his involvement in ROMED1 during the inception phase of the programme. At the time, ROMED was born out of the Strasbourg Declaration and a working group was set up to start discussing how to tackle the area of Roma mediation. Mr Hero shared his delight at seeing how the programme evolved over the years from a straight-forward training programme to a very practical programme for mediators. He also mentioned the importance of the ROMED1 curriculum (Trainer's Handbook) and the fact that mediators found it helpful and relevant. He gave the example of mediators who, by using the individual work plans, managed to resolve the issue of connection to water and sewage networks in several locations.

Mr Hero mentioned that, in the past, there had been confusion in terminology between legal mediators and Roma mediators, which was overcome finally by acknowledging the need for Roma mediators and by using the term "assistants" to refer to them. The ROMED Programme played an important role in promoting the visibility of the mediators. This ultimately led to the Slovak Government creating several hundred positions for school, health and community mediators. Mr Hero concluded that, although there are still barriers to accessing European structural funds for financing their sustainable employment, the national budget should cover these positions up to 2020.

The floor was given next to **Ms Alexandra Raykova**, international expert on Roma and youth issues, member

9 <https://www.mi-is.be/en>

of the ROMED International Pedagogical Team and ROMED Trainer from Bulgaria. Ms Raykova talked about the development process of the ROMED1 methodology and its **uniqueness given by both its universality – meaning a set of methods that can be applied to any context – and its flexibility – meaning its capacity to be adapted to trainers’ and mediators’ needs.** According to Ms Raykova, another important factor making ROMED1 unique was the fact that it was developed with a rights-based approach in view, which made it focus more on enhancing the participation of Roma communities than on sustaining their dependency. She underlined the fact that, out of experience, the work of mediators is often the only service provided in

“In ROMED1 we trained 2 international groups of trainers, [...] and between 2011 and 2016 these trainers trained around 1500 mediators working in around 500 municipalities in 22 countries.”

Roma communities which is appreciated and needed by Roma in accessing social rights. Ms Raykova gave a few examples of processes generated through ROMED1, including the institutionalisation of school and health mediators in the “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, the reinforcement of mediators’ networks in Bulgaria, employment of school mediators in Lithuania and, finally, the strengthening of the dialogue between Roma communities and local authorities.

Ms Raykova highlighted the empowering effect ROMED1 has had on mediators’ personal and professional development, as well as in pushing the topic of mediation much higher onto the agenda of European governments. Ms Raykova concluded with a set of four recommendations for the future: better dissemination and visibility of the results of the programme; supporting the institutionalisation of the profession of mediator; supporting mediators’ networks and their advocacy efforts; and the importance of international institutions continuing to fight for equal access of Roma to social and human rights.

Ms Sabina Salimovska, Roma school mediator and ROMED2 facilitator in Germany, informed participants of the challenges of school mediators, their impact on Roma and non-Roma children and the effect of their intervention in terms of reducing school drop-out, improving regular attendance of children in schools and addressing discrimination. She underlined that, whilst these results are indeed cause for celebration, they also need to be sustained and so the ROMED1 approach needs to continue. Ms Salimovska talked about the

recent interest of the University of Potsdam in the ROMED1 methodology and her intervention within the framework of a master degree in the same structure.

To illustrate the importance of school mediators and their impact on each Roma child benefitting from this service, she gave the example of Larisa, a Roma young girl from Romania who faced difficulties in enrolling into a school in Germany due to language issues and who



“Since the beginning of my work as Roma school mediator up till now, I have seen a few positive changes, such as: regular school attendance of Roma pupils has improved, the number of drop-outs has decreased...”

risked being sent to a special school. Ms Salimovska assisted by providing explanations to the school about the girl’s educational, social and economic situation on the one hand, and by keeping in touch with Larisa’s parents, familiarising them with the education system in Germany and presenting them with the available options on the other hand.

Ms Valentyna Zolotarenko shared her testimony in the Romani language as a lifelong human rights activist. She is the member of the first Roma NGO that helped start the Roma movement in Ukraine. Ms Zolotarenko became a Roma mediator in 2010 and went through the ROMED training from 2011 onwards. To demonstrate the impact of her work, particularly with regards to Roma women, she gave the example of a Roma mother of three who was being domestically abused. After having consulted with Ms Zolotarenko as a mediator, the mother gained the necessary confidence to turn her life around which also provided her daughters with the right example to follow. Ms Zolotarenko concluded by underlining the importance of mediation in Ukraine and her wish to see the programme continue its work.

Still in the context of Ukraine, the next speaker – **Ms Zemfira Kondur**, National Project Officer for ROMED2

in Ukraine – started by providing figures on the achievements of ROMED: 55 mediators were trained between 2011 and 2013, out of whom 37 were women, covering 12 regions in Ukraine. Ms Kondur talked about how ROMED became a tool for the empowerment of Roma women and the strengthening of their role in their communities. In this respect, at legislative level, a Roma integration strategy was adopted by the Ukrainian



Government in 2013. Two years later, governmental representatives participated in a ROMED-supported event on gender and youth. Ms Kondur reminded those present that the political context in Ukraine has had a deep impact on the work carried out on Roma issues. The conflicts in Eastern Ukraine have generated a mass of Roma internally displaced persons (IDPs) who moved to more Western regions of Ukraine: Kharkiv, Odessa, and Kiev to name just a few. In this context, Roma mediators were the first to respond to the urgent needs of IDPs. Ms Kondur gave the example of a Roma mediator from the Logansk region who helped evacuate more than 300 Roma people from that region, providing them with humanitarian assistance.

Thanks to the quality work of the mediators, further synergies were possible with state bodies, such as the State Institute of Youth and Family Policy, where Ms Kondur and the National Support Organisation in Ukraine (International Charitable Organisation Roma Women Fund “Chiricli”) organised training sessions for more than 300 social workers. Moreover, based on the mediators’ experience, the Ministry of Social Policy developed and adopted two state social standards: on social mediation and on the representation of social interest. The co-operation with the State Dragomanov University resulted in the launching in September 2016 of a course on mediation as a form of social work with minorities. The course was developed by the ROMED national trainers based on the ROMED1 curriculum and includes 72 hours of lectures and practical work.

At national level, co-operation with the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other partners, led to the creation of an inter-ministerial group on the implementation and coordination of the NRIS under the Cabinet of Ministers, with the participation

of five Roma representatives, three of whom are Roma mediators, two of which are Roma women.

As for future prospects, Ms Kondur talked about the planned training session of 12 Roma women – who are also mediators – with the aim of preparing them to run for the next round of local elections.

Ms Kondur concluded by underlining that, in spite of these achievements, officially the profession of mediator is not yet recognised by the State. Further legislative changes are needed in order to institutionalise the mediator in the official registry of professions.

Ms Elena Radu, school mediator and president of the Association of School Mediators in Romania provided a brief testimony in Romani. She started by mentioning a change in the legislation concerning recruitment of mediators in Romania since 2011, when the required level of studies was raised which led to the loss of around 400 persons already acting as school mediators. The same year, ROMED1 was initiated in Romania



which provided certificates to trained mediators. The school mediators at risk could thus be kept in their position, under the condition emitted by the Ministry of Education, that they continue their studies. The need for an Association of Mediators came directly from mediators during the trainings provided by Ms Radu, which aimed at representing the interests of mediators at higher levels. For instance, the issue of the low wages of mediators is on the agenda of the association - since the salaries provided to them are not always adapted to the level of their studies. Ms Radu concluded by reminding of the fragile status of mediators and the risk of losing more and more mediators in the future.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM ROMED2

TESTIMONIES FROM ROMED MUNICIPALITIES AND SHARING OF BEST PRACTICES

The second panel of the ROMED Seminar brought together testimonies from representatives of the municipalities involved in the programme, members of the National Support Teams in several countries, as well as a Roma woman municipal councillor from Visoko (Bosnia and Herzegovina) who shared her testimony of the empowerment process she experienced through ROMED.

Opening the panel, **Ms Ana Umbelino**, Councillor of the Social Department in the Municipality of Torres Vedras, Portugal, brought into the discussion the perspective of local authorities in the context of implementation of the ROMED2 Programme which focused on community organising among Roma. Ms Umbelino explained how ROMED2 was initiated in Torres Vedras in 2014 and how



“ROMED narrowed distances between Roma and the majority, but also among other Roma communities in Portugal and abroad, raising a sense of alterity and a sense of awareness.”

the programme fit the vision of the municipality in terms of addressing diversity in general and Roma inclusion in particular. The councillor’s intervention focused on three key words, which in her opinion best reflected the ROMED experience in Torres Vedras: **“awareness”, “visibility” and “we” (instead of “me”)**.

“Awareness” is linked to acknowledgement by the majority and by the Roma themselves of the existence of the community as a collective with a story and culture. It is also linked to the new ability to hear the voices of the young and women both within and outside of the community. According to Ms Umbelino, this awareness also reached public authorities who started to pay more attention to the role they played in Roma inclusion. As a result, a local action plan for the inclusion of Roma was designed with the participation of Roma citizens and several different inter-sectorial stakeholders and representatives to ensure real changes in the life of citizens on the ground.

“Visibility” is linked to the dissemination of Roma culture and history, Ms Umbelino provided several examples of events in the municipality that fostered this type of visibility of the Roma community from a different perspective. One such example is the intercultural event entitled **“Voyages”** which brought together the talent of a local visual artist and Roma culture and traditions. At the request of the Community Action Group, this event will become an annual activity. Ms Umbelino talked about the importance of art acting as a mediator between Roma communities and the majority and the important role it plays in the self-image and confidence of Roma individuals. She also underlined the importance of bringing to light the stories of Roma persons who completed their education and other stories of resilience concerning education.

The municipal councillor also talked about the philanthropic initiatives of the Roma Community Action Group, which undertook a food collection campaign for the benefit of local food banks or worked together with the municipality for the employment of six members of the Roma community in municipal services. According to Ms Umbelino, such symbolic gestures had a positive impact, particularly in breaking down the stereotypical perceptions of the majority society about the Roma community such as the passive attitude, dependency on social welfare and unwillingness to contribute.

Ms Umbelino concluded with a strong note on the importance of co-operation at all levels, and thus the importance of **using “we” instead of “me”** in such processes as the one initiated by ROMED2.

The next speaker, **Mr Bruno Gonçalves**, National Project Officer for ROMED2 in Portugal, started with a brief overview of the implementation of the programme at national level which targeted seven municipalities between 2014 and 2017.



“It is historical: for the first time a team made of Roma people had the possibility to manage a programme, for the first time Roma communities (men, women and young Roma) sat at the table with Mayors or Councilors to put forward proposals and establish a democratic dialogue as citizens.”

Mr Gonçalves underlined the important historical landmark that ROMED provided, since it was the first time that a team made up of Roma persons were entrusted to run a programme, and could sit down with authorities at the same table and negotiate as citizens.

Mr Gonçalves provide several examples of the direct and indirect impact of ROMED in Portugal, including the scholarship programme which enabled 25 Roma students to gain access to university, the large majority of whom were active members of Community Action Groups. The second example provided was the creation of 30 jobs for Roma persons in the seven implementation municipalities.

The National Project Officer for ROMED also voiced concerns over the forthcoming local elections planned for October 2017. He considered this to be the first challenge for the ROMED-initiated CAGs, since the elections are bound to bring about some changes at local level and affect how the CAGs will continue to relate to city councils and civil society platforms and organisations.

To illustrate the need for patience and resilience in the long battle ahead, Mr Gonçalves quoted two Roma

proverbs: “You cannot go straight when the road is curved!” and “The eagle flies high, but cut off its wings and it becomes a big chicken”.

The next speaker, **Mr Ferdi Ismaili**, National Project Officer for the “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, also provided a brief overview of the commitment of the 10 municipalities involved in ROMED since 2014 in the country.

Mr Ismaili highlighted the concrete outcomes of the programme in terms of infrastructure projects, as well as the symbolic importance of the gesture of all local authorities involved on the occasion of the 8th of April – International Roma Day – when the Roma flag was raised over the city halls. This was a moment which Mr Ismaili qualified as “historical”.



“Such bridging and outward forms of social, cultural and identity capital need to be reflected in the development of the Roma Movement, which should seek to build broad intersectional alliances across Roma communities and constituencies, incorporating not only interests but solidarity and altruism. This is our theory of change.”

In addition, Mr Ismaili specified that the 10 municipalities involved in ROMED2 have not only applied for EU-funded Roma related projects, but have also earmarked modest amounts in the local budgets as a gesture representing a basis of trust-building and institutional memory for future capital investments for the development of the Roma community. Mr Ismaili expressed his trust in the new Joint Programme of the European Union and Council of Europe, ROMACTED, targeting Western Balkans and Turkey.



“A year ago, I came to realise that I had the courage and knowledge to become one of the candidates for the Municipal Council in Visoko. With the support of the ROMED team and my Roma community, I was elected as Councillor.”

Ms Melina Pirija, Local Councillor in Visoko Municipality, Bosnia and Herzegovina, mediator and CAG Member in the same city, presented her testimony on how ROMED helped her to engage in political participation. Having started as a Roma mediator integrating the Community Action Group, Ms Pirija detailed the type of outreach the work involved: more than 100 interventions in the Roma community; 50 mediators trained; local Roma strategies adopted in five municipalities; and over 30 mediators employed through the support of various donors. Most of these mediators were still employed, three of them within local institutions.

As a result of this process, 20 Roma persons participated in the first Roma Political Academy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. 10 of these were subsequently elected in the Municipal Councils of 10 municipalities, including Ms Pirija herself. She went on to underline the importance of the visibility of Roma as active citizens in democratic societies, an area in which ROMED was able to bring about real change.

Ms Pirija concluded by acknowledging the fact that she will have to continue working in the community and in mediation, although at a higher level of intervention and with a different set of instruments – the first of which will be the adoption of local action plans and various strategies for Roma.

Following the intervention of Ms Pirija, it was the turn of the former National Project Officer for ROMED2 in Hungary, Ms Szilvia Rezműves, to take to the floor. She began her testimony by underlining that, in a national context where political will concerning Roma inclusion is scarce, the commitment of municipalities involved in

ROMED2 in Hungary could not be questioned. This fact went hand in hand with the capacity of communities to mobilise and came to show that Roma were able to act as active citizens.

Ms Rezműves continued by providing examples of the “small victories” gained by the Roma community at local level, as was the case in Pécs, in Istvan-Akna neighbourhood, where Roma citizens managed to obtain the changing of the bus schedule to fit their needs better. In addition, in Jászfényszaru, the local authorities allocated 17 000 euros from the local budget to address



“Municipalities showed that Roma were able to act as active citizens and participate in local decision-making. These are few municipalities, but it happened in Hungary.”

various priorities related to housing, as defined by the Community Action Group. Furthermore, in Nyírbátor, the CAG composed of 12 members representing the 3 000 Roma living in the municipality, was involved in co-operation and discussions with four multinational firms, together with schools and church representatives, to develop two local scholarship programmes with the aim of supporting the school performance of disadvantaged children and the future employment of Roma people.

Ms Rezműves reminded those present that, without the commitment and involvement at national level and systemic changes, overcoming serious issues such as anti-Gypsyism and school segregation will remain impossible to achieve. Ms Rezműves called for European support in this sense and concluded by underlining that Roma participation contributes to social cohesion.

Mr Manolis Rantis provided a brief testimony with a focus on the empowerment provided by ROMED2 and the learning experience it became even to an experienced Roma figure as himself. He talked about the importance of the connection of activists and those fighting for minority rights, to people in the communities



“ROMED is the proof that: “YES” Roma can participate, can cooperate, can consult, can propose, can claim and can consist a considerable Social Capital of each Local Society”

in order to understand and be in touch with the issues extremely poor communities face. Ms Rantis talked about ROMED as a **“continuous improvement process”** - of individuals, of Community Action Groups, of the local society, of relations and Good governance and finally, improvement of democracy. He admitted being impressed with the changes and evolutions of the persons involved in the participatory processes brought by ROMED2, often persons who had given up on any claim on being treated equally. Self-esteem is a factor that is crucial in the fight for equal rights and it is an investment in the future.

Questions and Answers

The questions and answer session revolved around the issue of sustainability of the achievements of ROMED and the type of support European institutions should continue to provide at local level.

When talking about the **sustainability of the results, most speakers mentioned the importance of the adoption of local action plans at local level and allocation of budgets for implementing the measures related to Roma.** One participant underlined the need for the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the support and monitoring of the implementation of local action plans through, for instance, “Councils for Social Development” as is the case in Portugal (Ms Umbelino), and which also requires investment on the side of multiple stakeholders. **Through a multi-stakeholder approach, the pressure is taken off the municipal council and thus mitigates the risk of complete overturn upon political changes.** Others mentioned that while LAPs are a pre-requisite to accessing EU funds, in reality the measures targeting Roma are rarely

addressed (Ms Rezmüves).

The political changes that will occur at local level after local elections were mentioned by participants. While in certain municipalities the risk of radical changes is low (Mr Gonçalves), in others this might affect not only the local authorities and their relationship with Roma, but also relationships among Roma themselves, as witnessed by Mr Emmanouil Rantis, former National Project Officer for Greece.

Keeping national teams in place was considered to be important for the sustainability of the participatory processes sparked through ROMED2 and for co-ordinating the developments at national level (Ms Umbelino).

A question was raised by Mr Leucht (National Focal Point of ROMED2 for Germany and member of the International Pedagogical Team), concerning the added value brought by the implementation of such local initiatives through European institutions (European Commission and Council of Europe). In response, participants mentioned the added value of having a methodology developed by and with the Council of Europe as the programme unfolded (Ms Rezmüves), as well as the empowerment and consolidation effect the backing of institutions has had. For instance, Mr Ioannis Christou, National Project Officer for ROMED2 in Greece, noticed that for the national team as well as for persons at the grassroots level, including persons from the community, the backing of European institutions has had an uplifting effect and an innovative one as well, having brought schools of active citizenship in the Roma communities.

ROUND TABLE ON THE COMMISSION & COUNCIL OF EUROPE COOPERATION ON ROMA INTEGRATION

Mr Adam Tyson, Acting Director for Policy Strategy and Evaluation, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture within the European Commission, opened the roundtable which brought together representatives of various directorates general of the European Commission and the Council of Europe's Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues.

Mr Tyson started by underlining the noticeable changes in tone and content of the conference in comparison to those in the previous decade. He talked about the importance of the role of mediators in ensuring that Roma citizens have access to basic rights and in the empowerment of individuals. Mr Tyson talked about the real added value of ROMED in terms of very specific local action, as well as the challenges the programme encountered, including the thin spreading of resources and the lack of involvement and commitment of national and local authorities in certain places. **To support the sustainability of programmes such as ROMED, he encouraged the creation of synergies with national programmes, advocating for political support, as well as the diversification of funding (through European and national funding).**

Mr Tyson talked about the importance of education in the current context of increasingly divergent societies in Europe – particularly in addressing racism on the one hand and the radicalisation of communities on the other. In this context, he announced the imminent launching of a new joint initiative of the European Commission and Council of Europe focusing on inclusive schools in five countries within the European Union and aiming to work at school level, in co-operation with the respective national ministries in charge of the education portfolio.

Ms Marie-Hélène Boulanger, Acting Director for Equality and Union Citizenship within the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers of the European Commission, presented a series of past, present and future initiatives led by the European Commission in relation to the inclusion of Roma. Starting with the European Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS), DG JUST's main mission since 2011 has been to monitor its implementation, as well as to create a network of contact points and to issue yearly reports on the advancements made. Building on the experience of the EU Roma platform (bringing together national governments, EU institutions, international organisations and civil society organisations), DG JUST has been encouraging countries to create their own platforms of dialogue. DG JUST has also been focusing on monitoring the *acquis* in terms of legislation, which led in certain cases to infringement procedures (concerning segregation in schools), and a specific intervention concerning hate speech through the establishment of a high-level group on the code of conduct on the internet and hate speech¹⁰.

Ms Boulanger also mentioned the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme¹¹, under which the European Commission finances action plans for pro-Roma organisations, Roma national platforms, national Roma contact points, networks and the EU Roma platform.

In light of the ROMED seminar, Ms Boulanger announced a similar exercise concerning the progress made towards the main goals of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, with a mid-term review report scheduled for publication in 2017 with the aim of identifying areas of improvement and guidance for implementation until the end of the framework span (2020).



Ms Boulanger concluded by mentioning the current Joint Programme of DG JUST and the Council of Europe called JustROM which focuses on the precarious situation of Roma women and consents access to justice, emphasising the importance of continuing such co-operation with the Council of Europe to achieve common objectives.

Next to speak was **Ms Emmanuelle Grange**, Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission. Ms Grange's presentation focused on ROMED's sibling programme, ROMACT, which first emerged as an idea in 2013 upon the realisation that the political will of local authorities would become crucial in the implementation of the NRIS and for the expenditure of the European Social Fund. ROMACT emerged as a result of the co-operation between DG EAC and DG EMPL with the aim of building the capacity of local authorities to respond to the priorities of local communities. ROMACT focuses on countries where the needs of Roma are greater in terms of population and vulnerability: Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, the Czech Republic, Romania and the Slovak Republic. Ms Grange mentioned that, although it had not always been easy,

“If we establish dialogue between the municipalities and local populations, and the key basic needs have been heard, and there is a way of remedying that issue, perhaps we haven't made dramatic sweeping changes but we have certainly brought changes in the lives of those affected. On the basis of that, we can continue to build.”

the programme had managed to change the working environment in municipalities and had created a method that brought results in terms of response to the needs of local communities as unexpected as they may be: in one municipality, fees for crèche and kindergarten were abolished to enable Roma children to attend; in another, bus stops were added closer to the community so that children could get to school more easily.

The dialogue between local authorities and local populations in this context is what brings changes in the lives of beneficiaries and provides the basis on which progress can be built. ROMACT is being implemented in over 100 municipalities, a figure which shows the positive impact of the programme. Ms Grange mentioned that

this was possible thanks to both the co-operation with the Council of Europe and the fast coordination on common objectives, as well as the local partners – namely local institutions – without whose commitment nothing would be feasible.

The series of presentations of the European Commission's DGs was closed by **Mr Colin Wolfe**, Head of Unit, Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programmes, Directorate-General Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. Mr Wolfe's presentation focused on answering the question of why Roma should be a key point in the enlargement of the EU, particularly in a context where competing issues are emerging – namely migration and other tensions in the Western Balkan area. Mr Wolfe insisted on the fact that what is being applied within the EU should be expected outside the EU, particularly concerning European values, since the proportions of Roma populations are very similar in the Western Balkans as in some of the EU Member States.

The prospects are that, following on from the ROMED and ROMACT experiences, DG NEAR would continue to remain active in its co-operation with local authorities and more particularly with the communities themselves, making sure that an inclusive approach is used so that young people and women can also have their voices heard, and understood, in the national and public sectors. The emphasis of the work of DG NEAR has also been on gathering better data and improving the analysis of it, since this has proven to be necessary in the past. This is also linked to the importance of the involvement of communities in the dialogue with civil society in general in the Western Balkans region about its future. As such, this particular point is bound to remain a priority for DG NEAR.

The roundtable was concluded by **Mr Valeriu Nicolae**, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues, who thanked the speakers and presented his proposal to continue building upon the ROMED and ROMACT experiences, namely schools as engines for social inclusion. This concept takes into account the good co-operation between local administration and existing mediators, uses a pragmatic life-cycle approach for Roma children and should have an impact on the most disadvantaged communities, including one-stop-shops for integrated services. Mr Nicolae expressed his high hopes that positive co-operation will continue between the European Commission and the Council of Europe and thanked the audience for supporting the idea.

Questions and Answers

The representative of the government of the “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” took briefly to the floor to raise awareness of the importance of including mediators in the administrative apparatus

on a permanent manner. **She announced that the government she represents aimed to employ mediators on a permanent basis as of 2018.**

The representative of the Ministry of Education in Portugal spoke about the importance of focusing on mediation within the school context and encouraged the audience to work more in that direction.

The National Contact Point for Germany talked about the need for time to help the ongoing ROMED processes become sustainable. She addressed a question to Mr Tyson concerning the future of ROMED, requesting more information on the rationale behind the discontinuation of programme funding. A similar question was asked by Mr Jose Manuel Gonzalez Cotano on the prospects of continuation of ROMED. Mr Tyson linked his reply to the intervention of the Ministry of Education of Portugal, specifying that ROMED will continue through the education perspective: the focus will be on schools and adapting the school approach to involving school leaders, training them, training teachers and involving mediators and communities. He stated that, if change was expected in education, the involvement of mediators and the community was needed, the approach of ROMED2 becoming very relevant in this context.

The next set of recommendations was addressed by the representative of the Eurochild¹² civil society network, who welcomed the priority of education and inclusive schools. She mentioned that education was not, however, only limited to schools and that the unique way in which ROMED had built active citizenship for local authorities and Roma communities could be further transferred so that children themselves became active citizens. The speaker reminded participants that the third pillar of the recommendation on investment in children of DG EMPL revolved around child participation¹³, which remained the one pillar that was less implemented and understood since it went beyond the span of DG EMPL competencies, being linked to rights, education and health and thus more relevant for DG JUST and DG EAC. As such, the Eurochild representative recommended that the European Commission think outside of silos and explore co-operation possibilities on the subject with the Council of Europe, who has a very comprehensive strategy on the rights of the child¹⁴.

Ms Grange responded to the recommendations of Eurochild by underlining that the recommendation in question was quite recent, from less than four years ago. Ms Grange acknowledged that the third pillar was not the best developed even though the whole communication was still in development in terms of implementation. She announced that DG EMPL had prepared a staff

working document on the implementation of the recommendation that was currently in inter-service consultation and would thus benefit from contributions from DG EAC and DG JUST. The document would represent a good basis for discussions with NGOs and the civil society, as well as with other DGs on what needed to be done for the implementation of the recommendation and in the framework of the European pillar of social rights. Ms Grange assured all present that the concern was shared on the third pillar of the recommendation but that it would take time for the work on it to become more consistent as was the case for the first two pillars, and that this would be possible with the contribution of NGOs.

The representative of the Secretary of State of Youth and Sport in Portugal talked about the importance of the synergies created between the youth and Roma movements in Portugal through ROMED2 and the No Hate Speech initiative of the Council of Europe. The speaker suggested that such synergies should be further

“Generally, the accepted idea is that 70% percent of anybody’s learning takes place in a non-formal context. There’s another 20% that is in informal contexts like sports clubs and social clubs, after school activities – structured but not really devoted to education. Only 10% of children’s’ learning takes place in formal education in school.”

taken into account with other social environments and other programmes.

The Questions and Answers session was closed by Mr Tyson, who reinforced the assertion of the Eurochild representative that education did not only occur in schools. For that reason, whole school approaches were needed in the future, involving the community using the school as a hub and the community in the education of the children.

Mr Tyson reminded the audience of the importance of the co-operation of the European Commission and Council of Europe, two institutions sharing the same vision of Europe in terms of how it should develop as a continent, how it needed to mobilise its energy, and how it should demonstrate its commitment to the values of democracy and respect for fundamental values. Joint programmes were an expression of the commitment of the two institutions to fundamental values.

12 <http://eurochild.eu/>

13 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX-:32013H0112>

14 <https://rm.coe.int/168066cff8>

Concerning education, Mr Tyson talked about the importance of empowering teachers and schools in helping young people to acquire values and a future. In this context, he announced the intention of the EU to provide a policy framework to help Member States in supporting schools to deliver that objective. A public consultation was scheduled which should lead to a Council Recommendation on inclusive education and shared values.

Furthermore, very recently the European Commission had produced a white paper on the future of Europe¹⁵ which tackled the different scenarios in which the 27 Member States would be able to cooperate in the future. The one thing that bound them all together was the commitment to deliver on the shared values, the key point of the white paper, together with the co-operation between the Council of Europe and European Commission.

15 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/content/news/white_paper.html

"The ROMED Programmes [...] start from the premise that we do this together – with the communities and not just for the communities. You tell us what you need, you define it and we work on it together. We need mediators who can act as agents of change." - Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President, European Commission

"The development of the programme, together with the integrated approach that ROMED has favoured, have triggered an expanded coordination with several Directorates in the European Commission. We cannot speak about education without speaking about housing, health, employment, etc. ROMED became a solid basis for an integrated and coordinated action for the inclusion of the marginalized Roma." – Ms Snežana SAMARDŽIĆ-MARKOVIĆ, Director General of Democracy, Council of Europe

"The result of ROMED2 is to show that the potential of the people is within people, in the community, and that they can access services directly in contact and dialogue with the local authorities, public institutions and authorities." - Ms Aurora AILINCAI, Head of the Strategic Partnerships Unit, Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma issues of the Council of Europe

"All these resolved urgent problems that were identified by the CAG - like missing water, or broken roads, or a school that needs refurbishment - all these things were identified by the people in the community who were in the CAG. [...] All the resolved problems brought back some trust in the community that "OUR VOICE MATTERS". - Ms Mariana MILOSHEVA-KRUSHE, External Evaluator, Blomeyer & Sanz s.l. and Creda Consulting

"It is historical: for the first time a team made of Roma people had the possibility to manage a programme, for the first time Roma communities (men, women and young Roma) sat at the table with Mayors or Councilors to put forward proposals and establish a democratic dialogue as citizens." - Mr Bruno GONCALVES, ROMED National Project Officer, Portugal

"I think ROMED is more than "Programme" and could be characterized as a "continuous improvement process": Improvement of each individual person involved, improvement of the Community Action Group, improvement of the Roma community, improvement of the local society, improvement of relations, of communication, of dialogue, of contact, of consultation, of Good Governance, and finally, improvement of the quality of Democracy." - Emmanouil RANTIS, Former Deputy Mayor of Agia Varvara and Former ROMED2 National Project Officer, Greece

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