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EU ROMA POLICY COALITION



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ERPC urges EU Member States to stop stigmatizing Roma and Travellers after France's announcement of repressive measures

1. The ERPC is deeply concerned by the measures announced by France on 28 July which collectively implicate French Travellers and migrant Roma. We are troubled that France's reaction to a quite specific set of incidents is targeting and perpetuating negative stereotypes about Roma and Travellers in general. President Sarkozy's populist, discriminatory discourse is making scandalous amalgams between Travellers, Roma immigrants, irregular migration and violent crimes. Moreover, it overlooks the incidents that happened in Saint-Aignan were sparked by the police killing of a young Roma man suspected of robbery who was in a car that ran a police roadblock.

2. The ERPC is alarmed at France's call for the systematic dismantling of illegal settlements and the involvement of tax authorities in verifying the status of the occupants. The ERPC considers that the first priority for France should be to ensure the implementation of its own law requiring that towns whose populations exceed 5,000 provide suitable camping grounds for Traveller communities. Moreover, the ERPC calls on the French authorities to respect international law during any evictions of Roma or Travellers. Evictions, even from unlawful settlements, should only take place after all other alternatives have been exhausted, following consultations with all affected residents and the offer of adequate alternative accommodation.

3. In this context, the ERPC is concerned with the French call to the European Union to tackle problems posed by the difficulties of integration of the Roma communities. While we agree with the French Government that measures need to be adopted to advance Roma integration across European communities, we are gravely concerned about the associations the French government made between Roma, Travellers and criminal behavior. Making blanket characterizations linking Roma communities to illegal settlements, illicit trafficking and exploitation of children for begging, prostitution or crime risks reinforcing prejudices and discriminatory perceptions about these ethnic groups that are already the most discriminated against in the EU. The ERPC calls on the EU and its Member States to refrain from making statements which collectively characterize Roma and Travellers in a negative light and inflame public opinion against them.

4. Furthermore, the intention to deport immediately Roma migrants from other EU countries and to reform immigration law to facilitate the removal of such persons for reasons of public order may be in violation of France's obligations under the European Union Directive 2004/38/EC on freedom of movement. The ERPC urges France and other EU Member States to guarantee that each EU citizen who receives an expulsion decision is notified on the grounds for expulsion, given a minimum of a month to leave the territory and provided access to appeal in accordance with Directive 2004/38/EC.

5. Finally, the ERPC calls for a stronger reaction by the European Commission towards President Sarkozy's discriminatory discourse and potential fundamental rights violations through implementation of the measures announced by the French government. The ERPC recalls the European Commission's commitment to fight discrimination and advance Roma inclusion, as well as its role of guardian of EU Treaties and Community Law which clearly prohibits discrimination on the ground of race and ethnicity. ERPC reminds the EC to tackle Roma issues in the EU in a strategic, coordinated and inclusive manner.

6. The ERPC fervently hopes European Governments will focus its reaction on combating the long-standing legal and societal discrimination that Roma and Travellers face, instead of embarking on a populist and security driven agenda.