I. Overview: The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies

A. Introduction

In 2011, the institutions of the European Union finally adopted a European Framework for National Roma Integration Policies (hereinafter “EU Framework”) that should lead to a better inclusion of Roma through closing the gap in the living conditions between Roma and the majority populations; an ambitious endeavour that also includes the countries in the accession process. The EU Framework calls upon the member states to develop national policies for the inclusion of Roma. Regarding the countries in the accession process the relevant European Commission (EC) communication states that “the EU Roma integration goals are equally relevant to these countries” and that they should review their existing policies in line with these goals.1

Parallel to the process of developing and adopting the EU Framework, Europe again experienced another phenomenon that further accelerated the adoption of the EU Framework: an increased migration of Roma from Central Europe or Southeast Europe to Western Europe. The attention of Western Europe focused on Roma originally from the EU member states Romania and Bulgaria who moved to France and Italy, on their expulsion from France and on the introduction of anti-Roma measures by the Italian authorities. That large numbers of Roma from

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these two countries migrated to Germany and other Western European countries received less attention outside the countries concerned.

Thousands of Roma from Hungary, among the applicants a former member of the European Parliament, asked for asylum in Canada. Those asylum requests, swiftly followed by requests from Roma from Slovakia, also did not receive adequate attention outside the countries concerned.²

However, the migration of a few thousand Roma from the Western Balkans to Western Europe, including Switzerland, received a different kind of “attention”. It triggered the threat by the European Union to reintroduce visa requirements for citizens of Serbia and Macedonia, if the migrations did not stop, and it culminated in the “request” that the governments of Serbia and Macedonia stop the legal migration of their citizens. The authorities in Serbia and Macedonia were forced to reject Roma at border crossings (based on “face-screening”) or to invalidate passports to prevent legal migration. Measures which led to the restriction of freedom of movement for citizens of Romani origin and clearly limit the right of the persons concerned to leave their own country.³

Politicians in Europe and society at large categorically insist on the assessment that Roma from the Western Balkans have no right to claim asylum, although the Progress Reports of the European Commission state that discrimination of Roma prevails. However, according to the Progress Reports in one country, discrimination does not prevail: this also happens to be the country with the largest number of “failed asylum seekers” of Romani ethnicity in Western Europe: Kosovo.

Instead of recognising these migrations as an indicator that the situation of the Roma urgently requires serious intervention, the institutions of the European Union threaten the countries in the Western Balkans, asserting that a few thousand people trying to cross borders pose a threat to the integration of these countries into the European Union. The media in the Western Balkan countries then adopts and reiterates this viewpoint to increase an anti-Roma sentiment.

The European Union should have learnt in recent decades that these migrations can only be stopped if the situations in the countries of origin are improved; tighter border control—including unlawful procedures—will only slow down the migration and increase human trafficking with all its consequences.

In light of the migrations from the Western Balkans to Western Europe, it is important to notice that the EU Framework does not refer to the Roma who are citizens of a non-EU country, but who live in the European Union. Roma from the Western Balkans or Turkey who live as migrant workers in the EU or who are at any stage of an asylum procedure are not targeted by the EU Framework.

Illegal evictions of Roma from informal settlements, in particular in Serbia but also in Albania is another intervention by the authorities that does not solve problems, but only prolongs them if the Roma concerned are not offered alterna-

² In 2009, Canada reintroduced a visa regime for citizens of the Czech Republic.