

PROTEST LETTER

Diplomatic speech with a racist content
**Anti-discrimination NGOs are demanding the resignation of the Romanian
Minister of Foreign Affairs Baconschi**

Bucharest, February 16, 2010

The signatory organizations are protesting against the public racist statements of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Baconschi, on the occasion of an official meeting with the French State Secretary for European Affairs, Pierre Lellouche, on 11.02.2010, as well as against the content of the press release of the Romanian Government on the same date, informing the public opinion on the discussions between the Prime Minister Emil Boc and the French State Secretary Pierre Lellouche.

When referring to the Roma community in France, Minister Baconschi declared, according to the official press statement on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

"We have some natural, physiological problems, of criminality within some of the Romanian communities, especially among the communities of the Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity".

The Minister directly associates criminality with ethnicity. What is more, in a manner of maximum gravity, he gives a biological explanation for associating criminality with ethnicity, an explanation common to Nazi Germany when "justifying" the Holocaust.

Mr. Baconschi is probably not aware that associating criminality with ethnicity, the so called "racial profiling" is neither in the spirit nor in the letter of the European law of the 21st century he invokes, quite to the contrary. Mr. Baconschi's statements are severely infringing upon the right to dignity of the Roma ethnics as Romanian and European citizens. Further more it constitutes a breach of Romanian and European legislation in the field of anti-discrimination.

A similar type of discourse is present on the official press release of the Romanian Government released on the same date, after the official meeting between the Romanian Prime Minister Boc and French State Secretary Lellouche.

"An important issue on the agenda of the meeting concerned the measures considered by the Romanian authorities in order to prevent and discourage the crimes committed in France by the Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity."

Through its content, the press release of the Romanian Government is explicitly and deliberately linking criminality to an ethnic group.

This type of message, given by the Romanian Government, over the course time has the effect of strengthening the generalized hate and the negative stereotypes against the Roma. Furthermore, arguments pertaining to *physiology* and *nature* as those put forward by Mr. Baconschi, throws Romania back into a dark moment of history. In our opinion, public discourse, especially the public discourse promoted by a fundamental institution of the Romanian state, especially by two out of the 3 statesmen with the right to engage Romania in external relations, should all the more represent a position worthy of a democratic state. Such discourse should also represent a catalyst for a more responsible public discourse in general when it comes to the perception of Romani people in society.

We consider that the way in which the ethnic origin of the community accused of committing crimes in France was established is not legitimate. More than that, making public such hypothetical “data” linking criminality to ethnicity is illegal, and of a nature which could lead to inter-ethnic conflicts.

We also condemn the “natural” way of approaching criminality from a racist perspective in the content of declarations on the margin of bilateral meetings among governmental officials representing EU member states.

Because of the seriousness of the statements of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Baconschi we request his immediate resignation or his dismissal. We consider that, by keeping Mr. Baconschi at the helm of the Romanian MoFA following such statements, infringes upon the right to dignity of Romanian citizens in general. In addition, we request from the Romanian Government and Embassy of the French Republic in Romania to publicly clarify their position regarding the association of Roma ethnicity with criminality, as well as the initiation of a genuine dialogue with civic organizations aiming to identify durable solutions for problems which neither the Romanian government nor the French one have been able to address thus far.

We highlight that the worsening situation of Roma communities in Romania, deepened by the economic crisis - extreme poverty and lack of revenues – is transforming many Romani families into victims of the human trafficking networks. We strongly believe that criminality has no ethnicity and that all too often Roma are trapped into the net of organized crime.

We remind the Romanian and French governments that copying the “solutions” of the Italian government, dealing with Roma issues only from a national security perspective, only based on increased police and judicial cooperation with a target to a specific ethnicity is not legal. There is a need for real action towards social inclusion and for genuine protection of fundamental rights.

Contact persons: Delia Niță, Anti-discrimination Programme Manager, Center for Legal Resources, 0729 120383, 0728 033480, e-mail: delia@crj.ro

Iulian Stoian, Public policy and advocacy expert, Romanian Roma Civic Alliance, 0754 575268, e-mail: iulian.stoian@acrr.ro

Signatory organizations, members of the anti-discrimination coalition:

- ActiveWatch-Media Monitoring Agency, Razvan Martin, Coordinator of the Anti-discrimination Department
- Romanian Roma Civic Alliance (ACRR), David Mark, Executive Director
- ACCEPT Association, Florin Buhuceanu, President
- Center for Legal Resources, Delia Niță, Anti-discrimination Program Manager
- Euro-regional Center for Public Initiatives, Iustina Ionescu, Programme Manager

Organizations supporting the protest

- The network of NGOs member of ACRR:
 - Romani CRISSS, Bucharest
 - Roma Center AMARE RROMENTZA, Bucharest
 - 'DIVANO-ROMANO' Association, Botoșani
 - Association Agency for Community Development INTER-ACTIVA, Botoșani
 - 'Şanse Egale' Association, Zalău
 - 'ROMII ROMAŞCANI' Association, Roman
 - Ruhama Foundation, Oradea
 - Parudimos Association, Timișoara
 - Roma ACCESS Association TOMIS, Constanța
 - The Association Equal Chances for Women and Children, Zalău
 - 'Amare Suno' Center for Roma Youth, Craiova
 - ADOSER/S Association for Equal Chances for Roma and Sinti, Zalău
 - The Alliance for Roma Unity, Brăila
 - 'O Del Amenca' Association, Fetești
 - Thumende Association, Petroșani/Valea Jiului
 - The Association of Roma "Ursari", Iași;
- Inpreuna Community Association, Giana Prisan, Executive President
- Generation 2008 Association, Brașov, Batir Steluța, President
- Ketaness Association 2005, Giurgiu, Elena Marin, President

- Pro Nobis association, Kernaszt Huba Attila, Executive Director
- Roma in Europe Association, Bratu Sorinel, Director
- Center for Community Development Neamț, Carmen Andrei, Executive director
- Amare Prhala Organization Cluj-Napoca, Doghi Pavel, Președinte
- Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Valeriu Nicolae, Executive Director
- TRUST - Young Roma for Unity, Solidarity and Transparency, Craiova, Alin Banu, President
- Cultural Democratic Union Valea Jiului, Marcel Rad, President