



Press release

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Centre for Legal Resources asks for an official position of the European Commission on Romanian President's racist statements made at EU Roma summit

The Centre for Legal Resources asks the European Commission to state its official position as to the statements made by the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, on April 4, 2014, at the EU Roma summit – “EU Roma policy goes local”.

Among others, during his statement at the opening session, the Romanian President declared the following:

“At the same time, the Roma minority has a clear responsibility in eliminating prejudice. The Roma minority must understand that it is part of societies founded on rules, be they formalized through laws, or informal, transmitted through culture. I consider that the Roma strategy will be successful if the Roma themselves assimilate the principles of citizenship as principles of life in the European society, without these affecting the cultural traits which define their ethnic identity.”¹

We heard no words of disagreement, let alone condemnation of the statements of the Romanian President from vice-president of the Commission Reding or from Commissioner Andor who spoke after the Romanian President, during the same opening session.

Are we to understand then that the European Commission agrees with the Romanian President in that the Roma are to blame for the prejudice they face since they would be unable to assimilate the values of the European culture?

Are we to understand that everyone in Brussels, just as in Bucharest, is at best unbothered by and at worse agrees with the philosophy of the Romanian President, the one who coined the phrase „filthy gipsy” in relation to a woman journalist in 2007, and who is the only president of a European country fined for racist statements – namely for stating that many of the nomadic Roma „traditionally live off what they steal” in an official visit to Slovenia in 2010?

Does not the Commission however consider it a moral outrage to have a survivor of the Holocaust, Mr. Zoni Weisz, speak right after the Romanian President? A president who once again was presented with the opportunity to exhibit a racist philosophy of the kind which led to the Holocaust? And, on top of that, to have EU officials speaking afterwards in the same session go on with business as usual as if nothing had happened, and as if all said before them would have been ok?

And if the Commission finds all this to be ok, we do not!

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Notes for editors:

The statements of the Romanian President made at the summit can be found at Președinția României (Romanian Presidency), *Alocuțiunea președintelui României, domnul Traian Băsescu, la Sesiunea de deschidere a Summitului cu tema „Incluziunea socială a romilor prin promovarea acțiunii la nivel local”* (The statement of the Romanian President, Mr. Traian Băsescu, at the opening session of the summit on “EU Roma policy goes local”) , 04.04.2014, available at: <http://presidency.ro/?RID=det&tb=date&id=14938&PRID=lazi> (accessed at: 06.04.2014);

The Roma are a transnational minority of around 10-12 million people, most of whom live across Europe, with Romania having the largest number. See Roma population map by World Bank here: <http://go.worldbank.org/LGZN671T10> (accessed at: 06.04.2014). After centuries of discrimination, Roma are

¹ Own translation

excluded from society, continue to face discrimination while serious gaps exist between the Roma and the majority population in all areas of life. See further data here: <http://www.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/roma-in-central-and-southeast-europe/roma-data/> (accessed at: 06.04.2014).

RED Network, *Romanian President Traian Băsescu calls a journalist “filthy gypsy”*, available at: <http://www.red-network.eu/?i=red-network.en.items&id=709> (accessed at: 06.04.2014)

European Network of legal experts in the non-discrimination field, *Romanian national equality body fines the Romanian President for discriminatory statements against nomadic Roma*, 11.02.2014, available at: <http://www.non-discrimination.net/content/media/RO-117-NCCD%20sanction%20Basescu%20Slovenia.pdf> (accessed at: 06.04.2014) and RED Network, *President Băsescu on nomadic Roma: many of them, traditionally, live off what they steal*, available at: <http://www.red-network.eu/?i=red-network.en.items&id=727> (accessed at: 06.04.2014)

Recordings from the EU Roma summit – “EU Roma policy goes local” can be found at: <http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/ebs/schedule.cfm?sitelang=en&page=1&institution=0&date=04/04/2014> (accessed at: 06.04.2014)

The Centre for Legal Resources is a watchdog non-governmental, non-profit organization established in 1998 by the Open Society Foundation Romania (current Soros Foundation Romania), which actively advocates for the establishment and operation of a legal and institutional framework that safeguards the observance of human rights and equal opportunities, free access to fair justice and which contributes to the capitalization of its legal expertise for the general public interest.