



CLR condemns the scapegoating mechanisms employed by the Romanian President against the Roma
Bucharest, 27.09.2011

The Center for Legal Resources (CLR) firmly protests to the racist and irresponsible remarks of the Romanian President made on a televised show on September 22, 2011, regarding the Roma.

Against the background of a firm opposition of the Netherlands and Finland to Romania and Bulgaria's entry in the Schengen zone, the Romanian President explained on a televised show on September 22, 2011: "Diplomacy has its limits. For example, you cannot tell the Finn 'it is not true, Gypsies were not in the center of Helsinki and did not beg' (...) What can diplomacy do when the Government finds that the Gypsies are begging, begging aggressively, have started stealing in busses, in; what can diplomacy do, because there you have the reaction of a public opinion and any Government firstly looks at the public opinion from its own country."

The assertions of the Romanian President are unacceptable. Using common stereotypes and prejudice associating the Roma with criminality, the President blames his own external failures of a nature to negatively affect all Romanian citizens, on an ethnic minority already blamed by the majority of Romanians for the bad image of Romania abroad. Such an attitude is outrageous and irresponsible. It is all the more serious since it comes from the President of Romania. Furthermore, it is not the first time when the President makes discriminatory statements against the Roma, and not the first time he talks about the bad image the Roma are creating for Romania either. On February 22nd, 2010, the President declared: "Let us be honest: we have a big image problem. Go to Paris, go to Oslo, go to Rome, go to Milan, the Roma minority is present at every corner, in front of any museum, and not in order to enter the museum. So, we either admit a double responsibility, of the state and of the minority, or, if we are not willing to admit this double responsibility for a positive evolution of the minority, I assure you that all Governmental and European programs are doomed to failure."

Scapegoating has represented in history the main driving factor for ethnic violence leading to ethnic cleansing and genocide. The assertions of the President come in the context where, in Romania, at present, mayors build walls around the Roma, thus reviving ghettoization, and Romanian communities sign petitions opposing Roma families being relocated to their neighborhoods. Furthermore, violence against the Roma has already happened in Romania in the recent years, in 2009, in the Sanmartin and Sancaieni communities in Harghita country, and has also broken in other European countries.

In this context, the Center for Legal Resources asks the National Council for Combating Discrimination to initiate an *ex officio* investigation against the President for his statements concerning the Roma. If the state institutions assigned to sanction discrimination do not send a strong anti-discrimination message to match the harm done by the President's assertions, then the road to violence against the Roma is open.

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Note to editors:

B1TV, *Ultimul cuvânt/Last word* show, Host: Ion Cristoiu, Guest: Traian Băsescu, Romanian President, 22.09.2011, from 21.18 to 21.19, recording available at: http://inregistrari.b1.ro/view-22_Sep-2011-ultimul_cuvant-89.html (last accessed: 26.09.2011);

The Speech of the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, at the launching conference of the Report on the National Strategy for the Improvement of the Situation of the Roma "The Voice of the Communities" (Bucharest, February 22nd, 2011), available at: <http://www.presidency.ro/?RID=det&tb=date&id=11883&PRID=ag> (last accessed: 26.09.2011);

A.LU, "Târgu Mureș. Protest împotriva mutării romilor într-un cartier./Târgu Mureș. Protest against moving the Roma in a neighborhood" on *Antena3*, 23.09.2011, available at: <http://www.antena3.ro/romania/targu-mures-protest-impotriva-mutarii-romilor-intr-un-cartier-137687.html> (last accessed: 26.09.2011);

AFP material on youtube, *Wall highlights divide between Romanians and Roma*, published on August 1st, 2011, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COs7f4VPGt0> (last accessed: 26.09.2011);

AmnestyInternational material on youtube, *Violent Attacks against the Roma in Hungary*, published on November 10, 2010, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMRq90MTxo0> (last accessed: 26.09.2011).

According to the Insomar poll commissioned by the National Council for Combating Discrimination in 2009, 48% of the respondents agree with the statement that the "Roma are a disgrace for Romania". The poll is available at: <http://www.cncd.org.ro/files/file/Fenomenul%20discriminarii%202009.pdf> (last accessed: 27.09.2011)