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PROJECT: The Accountability of EU Funding to Romani Women's Issues and Priorities

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How can EU Funds be used more effectively to achieve greater inclusion and more equality for Romani women?

Funding the Decade for Roma Inclusion (hereafter 'the Decade') is a vital condition for its successful implementation. The Decade relies on "reallocation of existing resources in national budgets and aligning these plans with funding instruments of multinational, international, and bilateral donors."¹ Therefore, the mobilization of financial resources remains a central concern for all the Decade stakeholders. Earmarking already scarce resources for projects, programs, and eventually long-term policy strategies that target gender in the Decade seems an even harder task. Nevertheless, the availability of some form of EU funding in all the countries that have signed the Decade provides an opportunity to generate financial resources in support of greater inclusion and more equality for Romani women. In fact, the use of EU funding for better addressing the situation of Romani women is a measure of the accountability of the European Commission and national governments to their political, strategic, and legislative commitments to protect human rights, fight discrimination, promote the social inclusion of Roma, and advance gender equality.²

During the period May 2006 – May 2007, I am conducting an independent policy research into the accountability of EU funding to Romani women's issues and priorities. The research is supported by an IPF fellowship. My research focuses on Hungary, Romania and Slovakia and the particular type of EU financial assistance that is available in these countries: Structural Funds for Hungary and Slovakia³; continuing PHARE funds and up-coming Structural Funds for Romania. The research project is advocacy driven, and it is therefore intended to become a useful tool for advocates of Romani women's issues working for NGOs, national governmental bodies, local administration, political parties, European institutions, or independently.

Support for Roma at the level of European institutions

The European Commission has repeatedly pledged its support for the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The European Commission has also encouraged Member States to use community financial support (Structural Funds) to finance Roma programs. During negotiations with Hungarian and Slovak authorities over the two countries' Community

¹ "What is the Decade?", description available on the official site of the Decade for Roma Inclusion: www.romadecade.org, last accessed by the author on June 29, 2006.

² These commitments are enshrined in literally thousands of international, European and national legal instruments, political statements, policy strategies, action plans and other documents that would be impossible to review here. The Decade of Roma Inclusion is the latest and currently among the most significant of these commitments.

³ Assistance through Structural Funds in Hungary and Slovakia is available since May 2004. Assistance from Structural Funds for Romania is envisioned to become available from January 2007. The term EU funding may be somewhat misleading, as matching funds from national, regional or local authorities are always necessary for specific projects to actually be implemented.

Support Frameworks for 2004-2006 (CSF), the European Commission intervened and insisted that Roma be specifically mentioned in relevant sections of the documents. The result was the specific targeting of Roma in several of the CSF objectives, and the ensuing operational programs.⁴ The EC continues to urge national governments to use Structural Funds for Roma programs, in the next programming phase, 2007-2013.⁵ In the view of the Commission, the allocation of financial assistance through Structural Funds is also an important opportunity to work with the national governments toward the effective implementation of the goals of the Decade.⁶

Against the backdrop of ongoing reform of the cohesion policy that has granted Member States more freedom with respect to managing and evaluating EU funding, the European Commission remains nevertheless a key player, if not one of the driving forces in the advance of successful Roma policies in the Member States. The European Commission and the European Parliament have often demonstrated stronger political will and more commitment to improving the situation of Roma than the governments of Member States.

Most recently, on June 1, 2006, the European Parliament has adopted the Report on the Situation of Romani Women in Europe prepared by MEP Livia Jaroka, for the Commission on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. The report contains a motion for a resolution, which *inter alia* "urges the Commission to support, through its many relevant financial mechanisms, activities targeting Romani women in particular, and to review rules for the allocation of all funding, to ensure that particular provision is made for the inclusion of Romani women and urges the Member States to pursue similar practices at the level of national, regional and local institutions."⁷

Currently, the EU cohesion policy provides only general guidelines that give few specific references to target groups. The EU cohesion policy is specifically designed to support the "growth and jobs" goals of the Lisbon strategy. Improved access to finance by "outreaching to specific groups such as young or female entrepreneurs or those from disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities" is part of the Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013 and it should consequently be reinforced in the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programs. In addition, the Commission calls for "specific action to increase women's participation in employment".⁸

⁴ The provisions of the Hungarian and Slovak Community Support Frameworks and their Operational Programmes are summarized in the Commission Staff Working Paper, Annex to the 16th Annual Report on the implementation of the Structural Funds (2004), Brussels, SEC (2005) 1348. For references to the EC's intervention in support of specific objectives with regard to Roma, see for example: Andrzej Mirga. "Roma and EU Accession: Elected and Appointed Romani Representatives in an Enlarged Europe" in Peter Thelen (ed.) 2005. *Roma in Europe – From Social Exclusion to Active Participation*. Skopje: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, pp. 117-150.

⁵ Speech by Iulius Rostas, Acting Director, OSI Roma Initiatives Office, at the Minority Rights Group Conference, "The European Union and Roma", Budapest, 6-7 June, 2006.

⁶ Report of the 8th International Steering Commission Meeting of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Brussels, June 12, 2006. **(Not yet available!)**

⁷ Report on the situation of Romani women in Europe, 2005/2164(INI). Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/registre/recherche/NoticeDetaillee.cfm?docid=182265&doclang=EN>

⁸ Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013, COM(2005) 0299, Brussels, 05.07.2005.

The overall policy framework for allocating EU financial assistance through Structural Funds (the cohesion policy) could therefore be read as supporting the allocation of more funds for programs designed to increase economic opportunities for Romani women – both through employment and entrepreneurship. This is especially important to emphasize, as previous PHARE funding for Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic has been evaluated as unevenly targeted, with less than 10% of the funds allocated “to address long-term unemployment that is endemic in Roma communities”.⁹

Financial assistance under Structural Funds has the potential of (1) ensuring (at least, short term) sustainability for projects that have been initiated with PHARE funding; and (2) enlarging the scope of programs or projects that aim to generate development in Roma communities. Given this potential, the present project aims to identify mechanisms that would allow for more responsiveness of EU funding to Romani women’s specific situation of multiple discrimination and inequality.

Challenges for advocates at the national and local levels

National authorities are the central decision-makers on funding

As a result of the reform of the cohesion policy, even more responsibility may be devolved to national or regional governments in the areas of financial management and control.¹⁰ With respect to Structural Funds, for example, the system for the 2007-2013 round “gives Member States more freedom to manage the Structural Funds – but they must do so within the regulations and within the broad parameters agreed in the Community Strategic Guideline”.¹¹ The additional freedom, compared to previous rounds, comes as a result of a reduction in the number, size and content of the documents that Member States have to negotiate with the European Commission. Program complements, for example, outlining specific measures, target groups and indicators do not exist anymore.

Effective targeting

The challenge for Roma activists, leaders of communities or political representatives at this point is to find new strategies for influencing the drafting of specific objectives and strategies for the allocation of funding at the level of managing authorities, and to be part of the monitoring and evaluation processes.

⁹ *Review of the European Union Phare Assistance to Roma Minorities, Interim Evaluation of Phare Support Allocated in 1999-2002 and Implemented until November 2003*, p. 12. December 2004. The report was produced by the EMS consortium. Available at: <http://www.phareinterimevaluation.org/documents/>.

¹⁰ See *Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013* (COM 2005 (0299), Brussels, 05.07.2005) and *A New Partnership for Cohesion: convergence, competitiveness, cooperation – Third report on economic and social cohesion* (COM 2004 (0107)).

¹¹ *Manual on the Management of the European Union Structural Funds*, 2nd edition, 2006, written by Bryan Harvey, with support from the European Anti Poverty Network Structural Funds Task Force, p.

Research questions and advocacy objectives

My research project aims to develop mechanisms and advocacy strategies for increasing the accountability of EU funding to Romani women's issues, at the levels of the design, allocation and evaluation of funding.

The project asks to what extent social inclusion, gender equality and anti-discrimination objectives are included in the current programming documents for the planned allocation of Structural Funds, 2007-2013: Community Strategic Guidelines, the specific regulations for each Fund, National Strategic Frameworks, Operational Programs, the objectives and internal documents of the managing authorities, the objectives and internal documents of the Monitoring Committees. If these objectives are included, to what extent they account for Romani women's issues?

More importantly, the project aims to map the current obstacles to using EU funding for and by Romani women. Using a questionnaire for governmental bodies, and national managing authorities, personal communications with EU personnel and in-depth interviews with Romani women activists, I aim to answer the following questions: How accessible has the EU financial assistance been for Romani women's activists and advocates? How have 'intermediary agencies' influenced accessibility? How and how much has EU funding been used for improving economic opportunities for Romani women? Do existing evaluation mechanisms for EU funds (both at the EU level and at the level of national managing authorities) contain indicators that measure the impact on Roma, and also specifically on Romani women? How have the evaluations been conducted and how are they used to inform current EU funding policies? How shall the new financial instruments be evaluated, and how could such evaluation be made more responsive to the needs of Romani women?

The project has an evaluative dimension. However, making evaluations relevant for advocacy is often difficult, because financial programming happens ahead of program evaluation. A choice of focus is necessary. My project is an advocacy-oriented project. It does not aim to provide an evaluation of existing EU-funded Roma projects, but rather to use already conducted evaluations and new research in order to identify advocacy objectives. Effective lobbying targets for Romani advocates will also be identified at the level of **design, allocation** and **evaluation** of EU Structural Funds.