

ROMA YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP

Event organized in cooperation with UET Centre

Tirana, July 3, 2014

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to today's conference on behalf of the Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

I would like to thank our partner organization the UET Centre for the excellent cooperation which we have had so far. I would like to extend these thanks to the Sheherezade Foundation, an important NGO that is active in many countries, its mission being to serve children from all backgrounds, the Albanian government which has sent representatives to this event and all the other experts that will address the conference.

(...)

The topic of our conference was carefully chosen: Minority Rights in Albania: Roma youth empowerment through education and leadership. Of course we will analyze and talk about the problems of discrimination and social exclusion during this conference. But we chose a positive approach. We want to empower Roma youth and not patronize them with the objective of full social inclusion.

The specific objectives of our project are:

- to offer Roma youth a platform to engage in an in-depth analysis of the human rights system in Albania with a particular focus on minority rights;
- to enhance and promote Roma youth leadership as an instrument of engagement in the fight against discrimination and promotion of minority rights;
- to establish a network of partners working towards the empowerment of Roma minority group in Albania through the development of their knowledge on human rights system and leadership.

We must, however, realize that immense challenges are ahead of us, not only in Albania.

In 2012 the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights published a survey on the situation of Roma in 11 European member states, Albania not being one of them, but the problems of Roma in this country are not that much different to those in the countries that were analyzed.

Of those surveyed in the report one in three is unemployed, 20% are not covered by health insurance and 90% are living below the poverty line. Many face prejudice,

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intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion in their daily lives.

This undermines social cohesion and sustainable human development, hampers competitiveness and generates costs for society as a whole.

In this country according to a study titled "Roma decade and the situation of Roma community in Albania 2012" published by the NGO Open Society Foundation for Albania 42 % of Roma, especially women and young people, were unemployed, 90 % did not have work contracts and did not pay for social insurance. 81% of them did not have any profession, 9 % had profession for which the demand was decreasing and only 6 % had professions for which there is a demand on the labour market.

Due to poverty and social exclusion from the formal labour market Roma work in the informal economy, mainly in the collection of recyclable materials, trade of used clothes, occasional work, and construction. These sorts of work provide them with insufficient and unstable incomes for their families. According to self-declarations, household income is sufficient only to provide for the survival of family members and even this function cannot be fulfilled for a considerable number of cases.

With regards to public services Roma are:

- Divided regarding Healthcare Service. About half of Roma respondents are satisfied whereas the other half is not satisfied.
- Relatively satisfied with regard to Pre-university Education. About 56 % of Roma respondents, who are members of families with school-age children, state that they are satisfied, whereas 28 % state that they are not satisfied.
- Dissatisfied with "the social assistance system", 34 % of respondents stated that they are "dissatisfied" with the service while 47 % declared themselves "very unsatisfied".

- Dissatisfied with the Employment Offices, however, out of those who declared themselves unemployed, only 29 % state that they are registered at the Employment Office. 79 % of the respondents, who are unemployed and who could use the Employment Office services, are not registered at this office.

In its Progress Report on Albania published in October 2013 the European Commission came to the conclusion that regarding Roma inclusion, the implementation of policies, including the operational conclusions of the December 2011 seminar on inclusion of the Roma and Egyptian communities in the framework of Albania's EU integration, remained inadequate overall. Therefore Albania needs to swiftly improve the living conditions of the Roma in line with the national action plan on the Roma Decade.

The Progress Report, however, also acknowledges that Albania has taken some concrete steps to reinforce protection of human rights, and to effectively implement anti-discrimination policies – both areas are among the key priorities of the EU.

Only a couple of days ago Albania has become an official candidate to join the European Union, an acknowledgement of the progress that has been made in this country in many areas and a great success for those who have worked hard to achieve this status.

The European Community has, however, also made very clear that the reform process in Albania must continue, among other things the country must intensify its efforts in the protection of human rights and antidiscrimination policies.

We as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation want Albania to be successful and we are prepared to support the country in its efforts to become a full member of the European Union.

In the Thessaloniki Declaration passed on 21st June 2003 the EU reiterated its unequivocal support to the European

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perspective of the Western Balkan countries. The future of the Balkans is within the European Union. The big challenge ahead now is the adoption of European standards.

I am delighted to see so many young and enthusiastic faces. Whether Albania will move in the right direction will also be decided by your generation. You are talented and skilled and therefore have a special responsibility for society and for your country. I am very pleased that by participating in this project you have already shown your determination to work for a better future for society as a whole.

I hope that this conference will provide some support for Albania. The Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation gladly supports this projects and looks forward to a further cooperation with our partners.