

# CONGRESS OF MEDIATORS ROMED

Brussels, 17-18 January 2013

## SPEECH OF SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, MR THORBJØRN JAGLAND

Dear Commissioner Vassiliou,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking Commissioner Vassiliou for her initiative to convene this Congress, which comes at a good moment of the ROMED programme. I regret I could not be with you in person today at the Congress of Mediators, but I know that the Council of Europe is well represented.

You have all been doing an excellent work. In the past two years, more than 1000 mediators in 20 countries have been trained and supported. More than 700 national and local actors have been involved in the programme. A European network has now been created, allowing exchange of experiences across the continent.

I have said it in the past - mediation is not sufficient to achieve a successful access of Roma people to their rights – in education, health, employment, and housing. Appointing mediators and equipping them

with professional skills is useful and necessary. It is an important tool, however, it is far from enough.

The role of the mediators has to be more clear. They cannot replace the voice of Roma and they certainly cannot replace the administration. They are not Roma representatives, they are not teachers, they are not doctors, they are not policemen and they are not social welfare officers. They are "enablers" – helping the civil service to do its job better.

A long-term employment perspective for the mediators and recognition of this profession is a must. We see mediators whose employment is precarious or who are hired on short-term contracts. We see cases where mediation has simply been passed on to local NGOs. This situation does not serve anybody, neither the civil service nor the Roma communities.

Today, in the midst of a financial and economic crisis, it is also important to ensure that Roma mediators are not seen as a "privileged service" for Roma but as a pragmatic tool for overcoming disadvantages and inequality. Announcements of 'projects for Roma' have, in some cases, worsened the relationships between communities. Local administrations need to make sure that the role of Roma mediators is properly understood, not only by the civil servants and Roma, but also by others.

Our ambition goes beyond mediation. As long as Roma face human conditions far worse than the rest of the Europeans, we cannot be fully

satisfied with the results of our work. We cannot be satisfied as long as Roma people live in ghettos, as long as children attend segregated schools and as long as there are groups who de facto cannot vote. We cannot be satisfied as long as the injustice towards Roma people persists.

The programme is only one important element of a complex change. The result needs to be reinforced further with other elements of democratic participation. This means creating opportunities for the involvement of the Roma in decision-making processes. This means enabling Roma to assume responsibility for their own future.

We have to invest in the emerging younger Roma generation. A new generation of the Roma leaders, empowering others to exercise their rights, demanding equity in services and equality in justice.

This is my vision. It is clear that the Council of Europe cannot do this alone and that we have to work with partners. I am happy with the excellent co-operation with the European Commission, which will continue over the next two years. I also believe that the ROMED Programme can be reinforced by the co-operation with others.

The Programme has the potential of contributing to the larger picture of democracy and the Europe we strive for. A Europe where governments and public service are held accountable by the citizens.

I wish you every success in your work and a fruitful and inspiring Congress.