

To:

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

Cc:

Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament

Joseph Daul, Chair EPP Group in the European Parliament

Martin Schulz, Chair S&D Group in the European Parliament

Guy Verhofstadt, Chair ALDE Group in the European Parliament

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Co-Chair of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament

Rebecca Harms, Co-Chair of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament

Michał Tomasz Kamiński, Chair of the ECR Group in the European Parliament

Lothar Bisky, Chair of the GUE/NGL Group in the European Parliament

Francesco Enrico Speroni, Chair of the EFD Group in the European Parliament

Official designation of Roma in Romania

Brussels, 10 December 2010

Your Excellency,

In September 2010, Romanian majority MP Silviu Prigoana (PLD) submitted a legislative initiative to change the designation of Roma people in official documents to 'țigan'. While the press agency Mediafax reported government support for the initiative on 2 December¹, the Chamber of Deputies might vote on the proposal after its Human Rights Committee issue an opinion on 14 December 2010.

The European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) strongly condemns this draft law for its discriminatory nature and impact. It replaces the preferred and self-chosen designation of an overwhelming majority of Roma citizens in Romania, with the term 'țigan', which has profound pejorative and racist connotations. The motivation for the proposal – to avoid alleged international confusion of Roma and Romania – is offensive for Roma citizens as it implicitly stigmatises them for tainting Romania's image abroad.

The rights and freedoms enshrined in international treaties to which Romania is party imply that minority groups should be free to define their own identity, both individually and as a community. So changing how they are designated cannot be decided without their active consent. None of Romania's Roma associations has been consulted on the proposal. Of the nineteen public bodies consulted, only the Romanian Academy of Sciences has – on dubious grounds – supported the draft law.

As was pointed out in an open letter issued jointly by the Roma Civic Alliance of Romania, Romani CRISS, the Center for Education and Social Development (CEDS), Policy Center for Roma and Minorities on 3 December, the proposal violates the guarantees for fundamental rights in Romania's own constitution. The proposal also runs counter the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (art. 3) and most specifically the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance General Policy Recommendation, no. 3 of 6 March 1998.

¹ Guvernul este de acord cu schimbarea denumirii de rom în țigan, Mediafax, 2 December 2010.

The proposal is also clearly in opposition to article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, which defines the EU as "founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities". The proposal's stigmatising effect also breaches the right to human dignity, which is enshrined as inviolable in the European Charter for Fundamental Rights.

The ERPC appeals to the European Parliament and the European Commission, as guardian of the Treaties, to publicly condemn this proposal and to take the strongest possible action towards the Romanian Government and parliamentarians to dissuade them from passing the proposal into law.

Yours Sincerely,



Ruus Dijksterhuis
Executive Director
ERGO Network

The ERPC is an informal gathering of non-governmental organisations operating at EU level on issues of human rights, anti-discrimination, anti-racism, social inclusion, and Roma and Travellers' rights. Its members are Amnesty International, the European Roma Rights Centre, the European Roma Information Office, the Open Society Institute, European Network Against Racism, Minority Rights Group International, the European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, the Roma Education Fund, and Fundación Secretariado Gitano.

*From October 2010 to April 2011, the rotating chairmanship of the ERPC is held by ERGO Network, in close cooperation with Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC).
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