

TO: DELEGATES AT OSCE SUMMIT, KAZAKHSTAN
FROM: ROMA CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS, ROMANIA, BUCHAREST

1st DECEMBER, 2010

SUBJECT: PROTEST AGAINST THE CHANGE OF DESIGNATION FROM “ROMA” TO “TIGAN”

As human rights activists of the main Roma organisations in Romania, we would like to inform the OSCE Summit that the Romanian Government is considering a legislative proposal to change the designation “Roma” to the pejorative term “tigan”. The proposal has the support of the Romanian Academy but is opposed by the Foreign Ministry and the Roma Organisations (who have not been consulted).

The proposal, drafted by a pro-Government MP, is similar to an initiative submitted by a pro-government MEP to the European Parliament in September this year. Romania’s President, Traian Basescu, has stated on public radio that he considers the designation Roma to be a “mistake”.

We are not sure if this is a covert policy (disguised as a private members bill) of Romania’s ruling party, but we are concerned that it could encourage intolerance towards the Roma minority.

The word Roma is an ancient Romany word meaning ‘human being’ and has been the preferred designation of Roma civic organizations in Romania since 1919. We are aware that in Romania there is an unfortunate semantic confusion with the word Romania, but this can be overcome by goodwill, consultation and effective public communication.

The word “tigan”, on the other hand, is associated in the collective memory of the Roma with the slavery that existed in Romania from 1385 to 1856, and also the forced deportations in WW2.

We call on the OSCE summit to join our opposition to this legislative proposal from Romania by considering its intervention as international mediator in this matter, and remind the summit of the following statement that was agreed at the OSCE’s Meeting on the Human Dimension Issues in Warsaw (October 1995):

“The lack of consultation by one OSCE State with its Roma group about their official designation was seen by many delegates as discriminatory. The wish was expressed that Roma groups should be allowed to identify themselves by means of their own choice.”