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Thank you very much Chair it is a real pleasure for me to be here. Yesterday you listened to a presentation by a representative of the Advisory Committee of the FCNM, which is another Council of Europe monitoring mechanism. I am here to represent the European Commission Against Racism and intolerance. This is a non-treaty based mechanism of the Council of Europe, which covers all 47 member states of our organisation. You have heard the reference to the work of ECRI, my commission, earlier this morning concerning one of the countries that has not ratified the Framework Convention. ECRI puts a lot of emphasis on discrimination on grounds of race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion and language in a number of fields including employment, education, housing and health. You will understand that this meeting is very important for us and we congratulate you very much on this initiative.

I wanted to say a few words about meaningful and effective participation in economic policy-making. And among the many, many groups that we deal with in our work. The most important one perhaps is the Roma. It is a group that faces discrimination in almost every Council of Europe member state. Of course many member states have responded to the needs of the Roma community and we see that there is an increased awareness for measures in so far as this group is concerned. A lot of countries have put in place specific programs for the Roma community. So how does ECRI evaluate these programs, we consider, first of all, that it is very important for the Roma community to be involved in the design, in the implementation, and also in the evaluation of these programs. Here one of the major challenges is the representation of the Roma community, because quite often in many of our member states there are issues concerning their representation.

The second big issue is the real impact of these programs. We have heard a lot of complaints in this connection. Of course, these programs in order to be effective need a large amount of resources. And how do you convince governments to these amounts of resources at a time of economic crisis? I think the reply should be that heavy moral responsibility vis-à-vis the Roma community, because political and economic development in our member states has often made the traditional way of life of the Roma communities impossible. So this is what we are trying to tell our governments. There are also some practical difficulties in the implementation of the programs, quite often these difficulties have to do with the design of the programs. For example in member states that have given a lot of leeway to the municipalities in order to implement the program. But not all mayors are willing to do so because there is a lot of pressure from the local voters not to implement the programs. However, there is also the question of the trust of the Roma community. We need to gain the trust of the Roma communities and their institutions of mediators, people who are going to manage their relationship between the communities and the authorities of member states is very important. Recently, in the Council of Europe we had a high level meeting to discuss the response to the problems of the Roma and the issues of the Roma, one of the outcome of the meeting was to strengthen the institution of the moderators and we are going to conduct training on that. The second outcome was sharing of good practices. And this is a field where good practices are badly needed, so I would call on the European states to contribute to the development of this program by sharing good practices.

Thank you very much madam Chair. Congratulations on this event.