

Good afternoon, dear participants of the Forum!

Today I speak on behalf of the Eastern Partnership Minorities Network and the Ukrainian Charity Foundation “Gorenje”; in my speech I would like to touch upon the issue of the protection of rights of national minorities in Ukraine. I would like to mention positive and negative trends illustrated by the example of the Roma national minority.

Ukraine has adopted the State Strategy for Integration of the Roma minority and the corresponding Action Plan; however, both instruments are rather declarative in nature and do not provide any financing or precise implementation structure.

The Ministry of Culture of Ukraine is responsible for the implementation of the Action Plan, and for the issues concerning other nationalities and religions. In our view, the structure of the Ministry does not provide for diverse activities with regard to nationalities, such as tackling issues of integration, social protection, protection of the rights of the Roma, etc.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has established an institution of the Government Commissioner for ethnic policy in May this year. Public organisations welcome the establishment of such an institution. However, the scope of its powers should be further expanded for more effectiveness of its activities, thus reforming it into the post of a Minister without portfolio for interethnic relations and reconciliation.

The Roma remain the most discriminated minority in Ukraine, despite the involvement of the government agencies in solving this issue.

There is a lack of precise statistics and information on the needs of the Roma national minority. According to the study “The legal needs of the Roma population in the Trans Carpathian and Cherkasy regions”, the basic

needs of the Roma population are primarily those with regard to social and legal issues.

One of the biggest issues facing the Roma minority is the lack of identity documents. Members of the Roma national minority in the vast majority lack appropriate documents, which leads to almost complete social isolation – they are barred from getting an employment, conducting an official business, receiving state-guaranteed aid in the form of pensions or social benefits. When trying to legalise their status in the areas of residence, the Roma face an increased attention from the law enforcement authorities, who by all means do not genuinely assist Roma in this endeavour.

The adoption of the Strategy for integration of the Roma minority did not trigger any “affirmative action” (proactive policies in original text) on behalf of the public authorities, as, for example, the issuance of temporary identification documents. At the same time, the low level of legal awareness and bureaucratic procedures in place generate additional hurdles for equal unrestricted access to the right to identity documents.

The question of Ukraine's accession to the intergovernmental initiative “Decade of Roma Integration” is a different subject matter. Despite considerable efforts of NGOs, various experts and the Government Commissioner for ethnic policy in this regard, the subject remains an open question. Accession to the Decade would allow Ukraine to significantly expand its sphere of competence on issues of integration of the Roma minority and to take a step further in development and implementation of a more effective state policy towards Roma.

On the other hand, the recent trend reveals that there is an increase in the number of reconvening communities in matters of temporary migrants, represented mainly by the members of national minorities. The authorities start to take part in social adaptation of members of national minorities by providing them with temporary housing, offering possibilities for

employment and joining forces with community initiatives on the implementation of mechanisms for the protection of their rights.

Common issues bring together various communities and promote deeper integration among different national groups. We believe that by enhancing the informational impact and achieving systematic levels of the educational (*ed. translator: original provides no subject, but there is evidently a word missing. Most probably, the author meant “systematic educational activity”*), we will be able to contribute substantially to the social adaptation of the representatives of various national groups in Ukrainian society.