STATEMENT[1] ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ROMA[2] DAY

The Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, together with the European Youth Forum and several European youth organisations, representing the young people in Europe, take the opportunity of the International Roma Day to send their warm wishes to all Roma around the world.

On this day we would like to encourage and support young Roma to build a strong sense of their Roma identity and be proud of it!

With a population of over 12 million, Roma make up the largest ethnic minority in Europe. For centuries, Roma experienced different forms of discrimination, persecution, slavery, Holocaust, marginalization and limited access to rights. As a result, their participation in public and political life was hindered. Roma are poorly represented in decision-making bodies, especially the Roma women and youth. In recent years, the anti-Roma racism has increased, due to the rise of extremist, neo-Nazi groups and the far right political parties, which seriously violate the democracy, human rights and rule of law on the European continent.

In the last decade, especially Roma youth have succeeded to considerably advance in the field of education, there are Roma intellectuals, politicians, etc. with a great potential to improve the situation of Roma. We believe that young Roma activists are crucially contributing to the advancement of the Roma community, thus the space for their public and political participation (and inclusion) in the decision-making processes should be provided. We appreciate the positive developments; however, we believe that the current situation of Roma youth is far from satisfactory.

As Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, European Youth Forum and friends and supporters of Roma, we:

- unitedly stand against all forms of anti-Gypsyism, racism and hate speech against Roma;
- work against the oppression against the minorities of all kind;
- call the European institutions, (e.g. European Union, Council of Europe) national, regional and local authorities to develop programs that would directly enable the public and political participation of young Roma;
- call for the recognition of Roma minority in the Council of Europe member states and for the ratification and implementation of pertinent standards regarding the protection of minorities (e.g. Council of Europe Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities), by the countries that have not done so yet;
- strongly encourage the Council of Europe member states, the European Union and other stakeholders to provide political and financial support to the Roma Youth Academy, a new initiative under the framework of 2016-2020 Roma Youth Action Plan that will focus on further capacity-building of young Roma and their organisations;
- encourage the youth organisations and National Youth Councils to further explore the possibilities of enabling Roma youth inclusion in their activities, structures and decision making bodies.

On behalf of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum

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Luis Alvarado Martinez, President of the European Youth Forum

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[1] The opinions expressed in this statement are the responsibility of the Advisory Council on Youth and do not necessarily reflect policy of the Council of Europe.

[2] The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.