



## Statement regarding conference on Roma Inclusion organized under the auspices of the Bulgarian EU Presidency

Brussels, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2018

The European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO) and its Bulgarian member Integro Association together with the European Roma Rights Center and a number of Bulgarian Roma activists and organizations support the position of prominent advocates for Roma rights in Bulgaria concerning today's event entitled "Roma inclusion - where we stand and where we are heading to".

We would have appreciated the effort to prioritize Roma inclusion as a topic if the event had stood up for values such as meaningful Roma participation, not just tokenism, and the fight against antigypsyism. As this is not the case, we join the 51 Bulgarian organisations, coalitions and individuals participating in the *Roma Standing Conference*, who decided not to take part in the event in a letter supporting a society free from antigypsyism.

Today's conference is organized by the Bulgarian National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues, an institution that fails to implement the priorities of the National Roma Integration Strategy. The institution is chaired by Valeri Simeonov, who in 2017 was convicted by the regional court of Burgas and the Commission for the Protection Against Discrimination for his antigypsyist statements.

For these reasons, we characterise this event as yet another illegitimate attempt to represent 'Roma issues'. We call upon the authorities to include the Roma community and Roma CSOs as equal stakeholders rather than token participants for public relations.

Signatures:

Jamen Gabriela Hrabanova, ERGO Network; Đorđe Jovanović, ERRC; Liliya Makaveeva - Integro Association; Lyubomir Dimitrov, Roma-Lom; Nikolay Kirilov, member of the RSC; Asen Yordanov IG-Boychinovtzi; Miglena Mihaylova "Leader" NGO, Blagoevgrad; Asen Karagyozov ICRC, Plovdiv; Zapryan Hristev, IG, Rakovski; Yanko Krivonozov Future Rakitovo; Krassimir Kirilov IG, Sliven; Ophelia Krumova IG, Vidin; Peter Tsvetanov - National Network of Health Mediators, Branch Montana; Veselin Lakov - IG Montana; Assen Hristov- Association of Roma pastors - over 100 Roma churches; Alexander Strahilov - IG Razlog; Svetlin Raikov - Development Initiative for the Northwest; Anton Karagyozov - Roma-Plovdiv; Nikolay Nikolov, Center for strategies for minorities – Varna; Metin Shefket - Roma – Vazovo; Daniela Mihaylova - Equal opportunities Association , Sofia; Roumyan Sechkov, S. E. G. A. Foundation; Emil Metodiev, RSC; Demir Yanev, Roma Solidarity, Petrich; Yuksel Yasharov, Peshtera



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**The European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network's** mission is to fight against antigypsyism and advocate for better policies for Roma in Europe. We create strong networks and empower Roma activists all over Europe. More information on our website: <http://ergonetwork.org/>.

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**The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)** is a Roma-led international public interest law organisation which monitors the human rights of Roma in Europe and provides legal defence in cases of human rights violations. For more information see at: <http://www.errc.org/>.

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**Association Integro Bulgaria** is a not-for-profit non-government music organisation. It was incorporated in 2002. Its main goal is to support Roma in the rural areas of Bulgaria and supply musical equipment, such as drum samples and drum sounds. The name of the Association is an abbreviation of "Roma INTEGRation". More information on our website: <http://www.integro-bg.org/>

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