



Stocktaking visit
Getting closer – EU strategy for Roma and local realities
Report on the event

Cluj, 14 June 2011

On the 10th of June 2011, the Working Group of Civil Society Organizations **gLOC** organized the stocktaking visit **Getting closer – EU strategy for Roma and local realities**, opening a face-to-face dialog between European, national and local stakeholders, and marginalized Roma communities from Cluj, Romania. The event took place at a notable moment, when European institutions are adopting the EU Framework for National Strategies for the Inclusion of the Roma up to 2020, and are strongly recommending public authorities to implement integrated housing projects. Its imperative stems from the recurrent forced evictions, substandard housing conditions and multiple deprivation that co-citizen ethnic Roma are facing in Cluj. The stocktaking visit is one of the most significant actions undertaken by gLOC in the past six months. It brought together numerous active supporters of Roma rights, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, social inclusion and cohesion amidst the 2,000 persons living in severe poverty in the segregated area of Pata-Rât.

The stocktaking visit was attended by high level representatives of European and international organizations, such as the *European Commission*, the *United Nations Development Programme*, the *European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)*, *Amnesty International – International Secretariat*, and the *Open Society Institute – Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion*. Through their active presence, members of non-governmental organizations, such as *Romani Criss*, the *Civic Alliance of Roma from Romania* and its Romanian member organizations, *European Alternatives*, *PAKIV* organization, the *Foundation Pro Roma* and the *Foundation for Supporting Families*, the *Agency for Press Monitoring/ Active Watch*, the *Center of Juridical Resources – members of European Network Against Racism*, *PATRIR* and the *Association of Press Professionals*, reiterated their support towards the cause sustained by gLOC. The event was honored by representatives of governmental institutions, such as the *National Agency for Roma*, the *National Council for Combatting Discrimination*, the *North-West Regional Development Agency*, and by Cluj deputies and senators of the Social Democrat Party and of the National Liberal Party. It was also attended by the Counselor on National Minorities of the Romanian Presidency. The Cluj Mayor's Office was represented only by its *Direction of Social and Medical Assistance*.

Despite of the rain, more than 100 persons from various academic and civic institutions joined the stocktaking visit at Pata Rât, that started with a two-hours tour through the three ghettoized settlements: the newly created district of “social houses”, which hosts more than 250 people

evicted from Coastei street in December 2010; the colony from Cantonului street formed during the last ten years with the tacit approval of the Cluj Mayor's Office, whose tenants (circa 400 persons) are sued in these very days by the National Railway Company and are threatened with immediate eviction; and the old colony "Dallas", next to the waste dump, inhabited for decades by approximately 1,500 persons, mostly ethnic Roma, living in undignified conditions and barely making ends meet by informal, exploitative labour in the recycling and garbage business. The latter families have been actively helped by the *Foundation for Supporting Families* and the *Foundation Pro Roma*.

The follow up press conference and a social forum were hosted by the *Foundation for Supporting Families* from Pata Rât. The initiators of **gLOC**, Mr. Pavel Doghi, president of the *Association Amare Prhala* and Dr. Enikő Vincze, president of *Foundation Desire*, presented the aims of the event and expressed their gratitude for the positive input of the guests in the finding solutions for the human tragedies ongoing in Pata Rât. The local communities' concerns and demands were voiced by Ernest Creta, Cristian Czuli and Bert Loij. Mr. Creta described the humiliating procedures of the eviction from Coastei street in the middle of the winter, the anxiety of the people crowded in the "social housing" with damp walls and leaking roofs, and the perplexing situation of the 26 families who were verbally permitted to build new houses on 20sm of the "agricultural land" (the classification of local authorities) surrounding the buildings. "So that we will grow as tomatoes, cucumbers or other vegetables on this agricultural land, and at a certain point we will simply rotten away, and they can throw us right to the trash dump, which is next to us anyway..." concluded Mr. Creta on a low voice. Mr. Czuli reminded the recurrent promise of local authorities to find housing solutions for the families moved on Cantonului street ten years ago, and expressed the worries of families facing the threat of eviction. Mr. Loij recalled how the families from Pata Rât put together their pennies and sent material aid for the families affected by the Tsunami – their solidarity was spontaneous, as they knew very well how it feels to be destitute. Mr. Alexandros Tsolakis, from the *European Commission* and Ms. Yesim Oruc, resident representative a.i., *UNDP*, expressed their commitment towards the immediate implementation in Cluj of integrated pilot programs to ensure the improvement of housing conditions, community development, access to jobs and quality inclusive education on the basis of effective partnerships between local authorities, civic organizations and academics. Mr. Fotis Filippou from *Amnesty International* ensured the organizers that "thousands of Amnesty International activists from across the world are campaigning together with the people from Coastei and Cantonului Streets and local organizations to remind Cluj and Romanian authorities that housing is a human rights and everyone, without discrimination, must enjoy it and be allowed to live in dignity". Ms. Isabela Mihalache discussed the *ERRC*'s efforts of protecting Roma rights in the context of the disastrous impact of the local administrative measures on people's housing conditions, school education and job opportunities. Mr. Vasile Gîlbea from *Romani Criss Association* pointed on the environmental racism manifested in the placement of poor ethnic Roma in toxic surroundings and presented the legal actions sustained by *Romani Criss* on the behalf of victims of forced evictions. Mr. Kálmán Mizsei expressed the concerns and commitment of *Open Society Foundations – Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion*: "What we saw here today in the three camps is appallingly inhumane and does not belong to the European Union in the 21st century. However, the authorities of Cluj have all the chances to turn this embarrassing situation to an integrated housing pilot with EU funds as the simplified EU regulations allow. My organization, the Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma

Inclusion, in line with its mandate, is ready to assist the local authorities so that this pilot project can happen." Mr. István Hallér, Member of the National Council for Combatting Discrimination reminded local inhabitants of their rights to oppose living in a segregated environment in Pata Rât, which, as Delia Nița from the Center for Juridical Resources stated, not only violates social rights, but endangers people's fundamental right to life. Mr. Alexandru Cordoș, social-democrat senator of Cluj stated his support towards the efforts of civil society organizations to create a partnership with local authorities and pointed out that these were wrongly detained by the Mayor's office, while Ms. Laura Pop, state subsecretary at the Department for European Affairs and vice-president of the Romanian Red Cross – Cluj, echoed the message of solidarity from the social-democrat MEP Daciana Sârbu. Ms. Maria Roth, professor at *Babeș-Bolyai University* stressed the shared responsibility of all political parties in the ongoing forced evictions of ethnic Roma. Mr. Ilie Dincă, President of the *National Agency for Roma* reassured the local communities of his support and the Agency's role in the development of the new national Roma integration strategy. At the end of the social forum, on behalf of the *Civic Alliance of Roma from Romania*, Mr. Marian Daragiu reaffirmed the further involvement of the Alliance in local actions of gLOC. The broad trans-ethnic solidarity built around the cause was visible throughout the social forum, despite the critiques received from local representatives of Partida Romilor and gray-economy entrepreneurs running business in the garbage dump.

Two other events marked the day of the stocktaking visit. First, in the morning, the lawyer hired by Romani Criss to represent the tenants of Cantonului street in the trial against them sewed by the Romanian Railway Company (CFR) succeeded to delay the judgment on the requested presidential ordinance and their immediate eviction. Second, in the early afternoon, building on prior discussions, Mr. Sorin Apostu, mayor of Cluj, commenced with a signature ceremony at the Municipal offices of a Memorandum of Understanding with the UNDP for joint activities for the improvement of social inclusion in the context of urban development. At her departure from the social forum in Pata Rât towards the townhall, Ms. Oruc was asked to hand a gift to the mayor, which was produced by Proiect Protokoll and symbolized the over-crowdedness of the "social houses" built by the local authorities in Pata Rât.

In the second part of the stocktaking visit, representatives of the participant organizations and of the local communities took part in a workshop at the headquarters of the *North-West Center for Social Inclusion of Ethnic Roma*. The meeting identified medium term strategies and immediate actions aimed at: developing and implementing European funded integrated housing projects in Cluj; following up the legal action against persons subjected to forced evictions; and carrying on further national and international campaigns against discrimination and racism, and the respect and promotion of fundamental rights of the Roma. At the end of the workshop, the organizers restated the aim of working closely with people from local communities and emphasized the commitment of gLOC to support the complex process of improving the living conditions of marginalized Roma.

On behalf of gLOC, the organizing team from Cluj:

Pavel Doghi, president Association Amare Prhala

Adrian Dohotaru, secretary Group for Social Action

Cristina Raț, lecturer, Babes-Bolyai University

Eniko Vincze, professor, Babes-Bolyai University, president of Foundation Desire

Contact: gloc.cluj@gmail.com; www.gloc.ro