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Misuse of EU funding to construct new ethnically segregated public housing in Italy

Brussels, 23rd October 2024

Dear Commissioners, Dear Commissioners-designate,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), supported by the undersigned Members of the European Parliament from five political groups, and on behalf of Lav Romanò, Un Mondo di Mondì, and the activist Gabriella De Luca draws the attention of the European Commission and calls for the investigation into the alleged misuse of EU funds by the regional government of Calabria, who intend to demolish and evict hundreds of Roma from an existing segregated camp and rehouse them in newly constructed dwelling units in the exact same segregated location. Local organisations have denounced this action as the creation of a new ghetto with European funds.

The Scordovillo camp, located in the city of Lamezia Terme in the province of Catanzaro in the southern region of Calabria, has existed for about 40 years. Approximately 440 Italian Roma, including more than 280 minors live there. The camp is located near the Giovanni Paolo II hospital and adjacent to a large illegal landfill. Sanitary conditions in the camp are appalling. For its inhabitants, it is a site of social exclusion and environmental degradation.

On 25th March 2024, the Calabria Region adopted resolution No. 109, a set of initiatives to address the privations faced by the Roma residing in the Scordovillo camp. The resolution proposed to tackle the housing conditions, the environmental hazards, and related social problems experienced by the residents, through an integrated and innovative approach that combines environmental and housing infrastructure interventions, as well as measures to promote education and social inclusion.

The financial allocation – drawn from European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) for 2021-2027 – amounts to €36 million in total. Of these resources, €8 million will be used to close the camp, reclaim the area, and move the families to temporary alternative accommodation; the remaining €28 million referred to in DD nr 5585 of April 2024 will be used to construct approximately 120 new housing units on the site of the old camp where the Roma families will be transferred, creating a new ghetto in Scordovillo.

The use of EU funds to create a ‘new and improved’ segregated settlement on the exact location of the Scordovillo camp runs completely counter to the 2023 Council of the European Union Conclusions on measures to ensure equal access for Roma to adequate and desegregated housing, and to address segregated settlements.

European Parliament resolution and Council conclusions on spatial segregation

In its October 2022 resolution, the European Parliament (EP) described the situation in spatially segregated Romani settlements as alarming, where conditions violate human and fundamental rights as enshrined in the EU Treaties, the European Convention on Human Rights, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and UN conventions. The ERRC asserts that the interventions proposed by the authorities in Calabria constitute a breach of EU treaty provisions prohibiting racial discrimination, and the Race Equality Directive with regards to discrimination in provision of services, which includes housing.

As the EP resolution stated, spatial segregation has deleterious social and economic consequences, reproduces and exacerbates inequality and disadvantage, with serious ramifications for Romani people’s physical and mental health and well-being, life opportunities and enjoyment of their fundamental human rights.

The resolution called for priority “to be given to desegregation approaches, utilising or investing in integrated social housing.” In light of previous failures to take effective action, the Parliament called on the Commission to act more robustly as guardian of the Treaties to prevent further violations of human rights “starting with effective prevention of the use of EU funds for supporting discriminatory practices in the Member States.” The resolution also called on the Commission to establish an early

warning mechanism for reporting risks of abuse or misuse of ESIF and other EU funds earmarked for addressing the situation of Roma people in marginalised settlements.

In 2023, the Council of the European Union Conclusions recalled headline objective 7 of the Commission's communication on the EU Roma strategic framework to "Increase effective equal access to adequate desegregated housing and essential services"; and that EU financial instruments and national sources of funding should "support the eradication of housing segregation stemming from discrimination or poverty and social exclusion in the European Union."

The Council Conclusions invited the European Commission to foster concrete actions to guarantee effective and real access for Roma to non-segregated housing, and to ensure, "in accordance with the applicable rules, the effective monitoring of spending programmes and instruments that aim to foster the desegregation of Roma communities."

Call for action to prevent the use of EU funds for discriminatory practices

Considering the above, and cognizant of the Commission's prior reticence to take issue with Italy over issues concerning the rule of law and abuses of fundamental rights, the ERRC is extremely perturbed that, in this case, the use of EU funds for the proposed interventions at the Scordovillo camp might proceed without prior scrutiny.

As stated earlier, the use of EU funds to build housing units on the site of a former segregated camp runs completely counter to fundamental European values and treaties. Under the guise of 'an integrated and innovative approach' the authorities intend to create a 'sustainable' and segregated Romani ghetto. This approach is diametrically opposed to that of the EU Roma strategic framework, and the Council conclusions, which call for funds to be used for the "eradication of housing segregation that stems from discrimination."

There is precedent for the Commission to take such preventative action against the use of EU funds for supporting discriminatory practices in Italy. In 2014, in response to concerns raised by the ERRC, OsservAzione and Associazione 21 Luglio concerning the use of ERDF funding to establish a Roma 'village' in the Scampia area of Naples, the office of Commissioner Hahn in DG for Regional and Urban Policy, found that upon preliminary examination that the project did not seem in line with ERDF objectives, and duly contacted the authorities to further investigate issues of compliance.

We are fully aware that by virtue of the shared management principle that regulates the management of structural funds, projects selection and implementation is the responsibility of the Italian authorities. However, the above precedent would suggest

that it is well within the competences of the European Commission to investigate this case, and to ensure that EU funds are not used to construct a segregated Romani ghetto on the site of a demolished camp.

The ERRC calls on the Commission to take appropriate action in line with the Council Conclusions which called for such spending to be monitored, and stipulated that funding should “support the eradication of housing segregation”. The ERRC echoes the call from the European Parliament for the Commission to act more robustly as guardian of the Treaties to prevent further violations of human rights, “starting with effective prevention of the use of EU funds for supporting discriminatory practices.”

We strongly urge the Commission to start with this particular case, and a matter of urgency, to investigate and ultimately to block the project as approved by the regional government of Calabria, which we maintain will not deliver an ‘integrated and innovative approach to social inclusion’, but rather serve only to entrench the spatial segregation and exclusion of Roma.

We look forward to your response by email to jonathan.lee@errc.org or by post to the European Roma Rights Centre, Avenue de Cortenbergh 71, 4th floor, Brussels 1000, Belgium.

Yours sincerely,



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