

## **Workshop: Exploring standards and measures addressing Roma institutional visibility, Tuesday 16th June 2009**

The Eunomia project of the Greek Ombudsman organized a capacity building seminar in Athens entitled Exploring standards and measures addressing Roma institutional visibility on Tuesday 16th June 2009 at the Conference Hall of the Greek Ombudsman. The term “institutional visibility” was used for the first time by the Greek Ombudsman in the European workshop “Lifting the barriers of social participation: Roma population cases before the Ombudsman” organized in Nafplion (Greece) in 7-8 December 2007.

- The aim of the seminar was to contribute to the definition of the main human rights priorities on Roma issues in Europe and identify specific institutional solutions in this regard resulting from:
  - practices and/or strategies of National Specialized Bodies on Equality;
  - administrative practices;
  - specific initiatives of the Council of Europe and the case-law of the ECHR, the OSCE (High Commissioner for National Minorities, ODIHR) and the E.U. (E.C., FRA and E.P.)
- The concept of the workshop was to promote an interactive relationship between specialized national equality bodies belonging to the EQUINET (European Network of equality bodies) and working on Roma issues - Ombudsman Institutions or not - with international organizations dealing with Roma issues with a view to formulating specific recommendations for relevant institutional solutions.
- The seminar’s second session was a round table entitled *Addressing recommendations and standard setting for Roma institutional visibility*. Prof. Ralph SANDLAND presented a comprehensive report on the first session and delegates from the present EQUINET bodies discussed their own problems in tackling the Roma issue through their own institutional perspective. Participants in the round table discussion: Ms A. NILSSON from the *Equality Ombudsman of Sweden*, Ms Esen FIKRI, *Commission for Protection against Discrimination, Bulgaria*, Ms Nepheli YATROPOULOS, *Haute Autorite de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l’Egalite, France*, Ms Kalliopi LYKOVARDI, *The Greek Ombudsman*, Ms Antoinette MCKEOWN, *Equality Commission for Northern Ireland* and Mr Krzysztof SMISZEK, *Equinet Secretariat*. Main topics of the discussion between EQUINET participants and representatives of international organizations were the civil status, education and housing of Roma. The Greek deputy Ombudsman for Human Rights, Mr Andreas TAKIS, concluded the seminar.
- The ‘Roma issue’ presents incomparable difficulties compared to other minority issues in Europe. These difficulties are due to the rather unique - in terms of political complexity – combination of problems related to ethnicity, social class and cultural values of the Roma population that very often European States appear incapable of dealing with, even one by one. Next to a holistic perspective based on comprehensive proposals on the issue of civic registration, accommodation and education, a ‘step by step’ approach appears a suitable realistic solution to each of the issues at stake. The Ombudsman, as systematic watch dog of national administrations and their structural deficits, can contribute considerably to such a perspective. Additionally to that,

institutions armed with the mandate of the implementation of the anti-discrimination EU legislation appear as appropriate instruments for exercising pressure on the political authorities with a long term strategy of redefining the whole Roma agenda in Europe.