



**Permanent Mission of the Republic of Bulgaria  
to the United Nations, the OSCE and other International Organisations**

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR SVETOSLAV SPASSOV  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA  
AT THE 1061<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

Vienna, 2 July 2015

**In response to the US statement  
on anti-Roma protests in Bulgaria**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman!

I would like to thank the Delegation of the United States for raising important issues related to the efforts of the participating States to implement their commitments to improve the situation of Roma population in the OSCE area and to ensure its wider social inclusion.

Bulgaria has also been part of those efforts by devising and implementing a National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012-2020 which provides a road-map with emphasis on six priority areas of integration policies: education, healthcare, housing, employment, rule of law and non-discrimination, and culture and media. A large array of governmental and non-governmental actors is engaged in the implementation of the Strategy at national, regional and local level.

The strategy uses an integrated territorial approach, allowing the simultaneous undertaking of measures across the territory of the country and unifying the resources under different priorities, taking account of the specific local needs, particularly the needs of the most disadvantaged people, in order to bring about visible changes in the individual settlements/neighbourhoods. In 2012, regional and local strategies for the integration of Roma and Action Plans to them were also elaborated. Currently, there are 28 regional strategies and 220 municipal Action Plans in place, developed on the basis of analysis of the needs and specifics of local communities.

The involvement of Roma representatives in the process has been essential for ensuring that Roma themselves have a say in policies and programmes concerning them. In 1997 a structure was created to the Council of Ministers, which coordinated the Government's policy in this area. The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues as a coordinating and consultative body, assisting the Government in formulating the policy on the integration of minority groups, ethnic and minority issues, and encourages the cooperation between the state bodies and the NGOs.

There has been certain progress but challenges remain. Hardly an overall success story could be reported in any country addressing the Roma inclusion, as problems and the search for their solution are a long-term process. However, efforts should persist and my country is committed to pursue a better perspective for its Roma population based on the rule of law, democracy and human rights. At the same time, we would like to note that the situation of Roma is not an issue that could be solved in the framework of bilateral or even intra-European relations. It is a matter of enhancing social inclusion and the fair distribution of the burden of responsibilities.

We regard the recent events in Garmen and Orlandovtzi, a reference to which was made in the statement of the US Delegation, as resulting from certain social problems on local level exacerbated by the worsening economic situation rather than as a general negative trend of anti-Roma attitudes and action rising within the society. Steps have been taken to address them within the existing institutional framework. The anti-Roma rhetoric used by some of the participants in the protests is only one of the many different interpretations of the events and their origin in the course of the on-going intense public debate on the issue. On numerous occasions, including in public statements related to the afore-mentioned events, Bulgarian authorities have condemned such rhetoric and have continuously warned against the use of hate and discriminatory speech of any kind in public discourse. Moreover, offences against national and racial equality are criminalised under the Bulgarian Penal Code and qualified with high degree of social danger. Recently, amendments have been introduced to the Penal Code by adding new grounds of discrimination and specifically criminalizing public incitement to violence or hate on ethnic grounds.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman!