



## 17.35–17.45 Conclusions

Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen,

Before presenting the conclusions, I would like to say a few words about the Roma platform mechanism itself.

It has been described as a process. A process is something that develops. What has the Swedish Presidency done to promote its development?

- We have focused on one item: education.
- We have invited all Member States. This has not been done before. There are 13 Member States represented here today, from west to east, south to north.
- We have encouraged all Member States to participate by sending two representatives: one with responsibility for Roma issues and one with responsibility for education. This is necessary to ensure genuine mainstreaming.

I would now like to turn to my conclusions of today's meeting.

The right to education is a basic human right.

Access to and the quality of education are crucial elements in promoting the inclusion of Roma as equal members of society. Access to high quality education can help break the vicious circle of

exclusion from the labour market, poverty, poor housing, poor health and segregation. Education helps empower individuals.

The inclusion of Roma is not only a moral, legal and political obligation. It also lies in the economic and social interest of the European Union and its Member States. As the World Bank has stressed here today, the exclusion of Roma entails costs in terms of lost productivity, lost state revenues and direct transfers. Moreover, it means a waste of talent and of a potential workforce in an ageing society.

Today, we have discussed the causes of exclusion from quality education that many Roma girls and boys are facing and possible ways to address these causes.

The discussion has highlighted many of the core challenges we face.

A serious trend is the persistent over-representation of Roma in special schools and the tendency to over-identify special educational needs among Roma pupils. And I agree with all of you here who have stressed the issue of mainstreaming also in education. In my opinion, using special schools as a general solution for Roma children should not be an option in any EU Member State.

A wide range of policies have shown promising results in improving educational outcomes for Roma. But progress has been uneven and the challenge remains considerable.

Our future efforts for the education of Roma are supported by the newly adopted strategic framework, Education and Training 2020. The work programme for European cooperation includes among its four strategic objectives the promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.

The short-term priority areas of the ET 2020 programme provide an opportunity for Member States to exchange best practices and to bring forward the Roma inclusion agenda.

The educational success of Roma children crucially depends on the support of their parents. Parents have to take responsibility for keeping both their daughters and sons in school. Special efforts are also needed to establish trust between the parents of Roma children, schools and social authorities.

A general orientation of the national school systems towards equality and towards ensuring quality education for all can strongly benefit the most marginalised groups. Inclusive school systems, with strong anti-discrimination mechanisms, promoting intercultural approaches and respect for diversity can more successfully prevent socio-economic and educational disadvantages.

The anti-discrimination directive prohibits discrimination on grounds of race and ethnic origin also in the area of education.

The Lifelong Learning Programme should be further used for supporting projects targeting Roma education, intercultural education and inclusion of disadvantaged youth.

In conclusion, I hope that all of us will make a stronger commitment to education for Roma, to ensure that Roma children and young people are given the same chances in life as other European children.

All actors are important: not only at EU-level but at national, regional and local level; governments as well as the private sector, NGOs and, of course, the Roma themselves.

I would like to thank the Commission once again for its positive cooperation, the Swedish representation for excellent hosting, and all of you for your participation and your valuable input on this important issue.