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Report from the Roundtable on the draft Law on Social Housing

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Podgorica, Montenegro

The Roundtable brought together representatives of the Government of Montenegro (Ministry of Tourism and Sustainable Development and Ministry of Interior), civil society, Roma National Minority Council, the City of Podgorica, EU Delegation and other international organizations to discuss the draft Law on Social Housing.

Adoption of this Law is expected in September and will represent the basis for a 2 million Euro social housing project for 90 Roma families from the Konik settlement in Podgorica. Days before the roundtable, the Konik settlement suffered a major fire which burned most of the shacks so its population is now living in tents.

The EU Delegation to Montenegro is interested in the criteria and target groups introduced in the draft Law because these factors are crucial for the success of future social housing projects funded through IPA and other budgets. The EU Delegation is committed to supporting social housing as a means of social and economic integration of Roma and other marginalized groups.

Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism initiated the development of the draft Law on Social Housing in order to institutionalize a variety of measures in this field. The draft text was developed by a working group of relevant ministries, civil society representatives and other experts. At the roundtable, the Ministry announced that a public discussion of the draft Law will be held during late August and early September. At the request of key stakeholders, the Ministry included in the draft Law several key criteria for selection of beneficiaries. The Ministry also expressed their interest in including a list of target groups in the next draft, as a means for prioritization of resources. Following the adoption of the Law, it is foreseen that the national and local governments develop more detailed programmes for social housing. However, civil society organizations are concerned about the transparency of these types of programmes. A Roma representative pointed out that this minority faces specific challenges in accessing public programmes due to the lack of awareness and poverty.

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Mr. Alonso Ayala from the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) in Rotterdam presented the definitions of social housing from the EU, as well as key criteria used for prioritization of beneficiaries. Examples from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and the Netherlands were used to illustrate different approaches and lessons learned. From universal access to more targeted policies, a variety of programmes have been developed by countries with larger or more limited resources. In this context, it is also important to consider the long-term sustainability and maintenance of social housing schemes, including the upkeep of infrastructure and re-investment of resources.

In addition, Ms. Milena Isakovic, BPRI Regional Co-ordinator, presented the progress of social housing in Serbia – from the Law adopted in 2009 to the Strategy and Action Plan in 2012. The Government of Serbia started by identifying marginalized target groups in the Law on Social Housing and recently upgraded this approach by focusing on income-oriented criteria. In May 2012, construction of 1,200 social apartments for sale and another 500 for rent started, thanks to funding from the Council of Europe Development Bank.

During the discussion period, roundtable participants pointed out that a more in-depth analysis of economic and demographic data collected through the census may benefit the finalization of the draft Law and subsequent programmes. Determination of low income groups and other marginalized population would enable better targeting of social housing measures at the national and local levels.