



# HELSINKI COMMISSION BRIEFING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

## Testimony :: Ronald McNamara

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We welcome you to this morning's briefing, which is part of the ongoing work of the commission focused on the questions relating to the Roma minority in the OSCE region.

Today's briefing, which will be fully transcribed, will be conducted under the title "The Human Rights Situation of Roma:

Europe's Largest Ethnic Minority." At the end of the formal presentations, we will try to allow some period for questions and answers from the audience. My colleague Erika Schlager, who is our analyst covering the developments relating to the Roma, will moderate that aspect of the program.

We will call you forward to pose a brief question, either to one or a number of the panelists today. The one thing that we do ask is that you give your name and any affiliation that you have so that we have that for the record as well.

An informal transcription of today's proceedings will be posted on the commission's Web site, which is [www.csce.gov](http://www.csce.gov).

Conservatively, they are estimated at 8 million to 12 million. Roma are not only

Europe's largest ethnic minority, they are also one of its most marginalized. Certainly, I have had the opportunity in my own travels and work with the commission to visit Roma populations throughout the OSCE region from Greece to

Belarus, and just about everywhere in between. As the United Nations Development Program report in 2003 noted, "by measures ranging from literacy to infant mortality to basic nutrition, most of the region's Roma endure living conditions closer to those of sub-Saharan Africa than to Europe."

In a classic downward spiral, each of these conditions exacerbates the other in a self-perpetuating cycle. Sadly, efforts to improve the situation of Roma have often been stunted by pervasive discrimination, opportunistic political anti-Romanism, and government neglect. But the situation is not entirely bleak. Roma are taking control of their destiny as never before, winning seats in the European Union Parliament and winning cases before the European Court on Human Rights.