

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

EU Commissioner urges Member States to guarantee security of the Roma

Brussels, 27/02/09 - The European Commission urged Hungary and other EU states to guarantee the security of Roma people after the killing of a Roma boy and his father in Hungary this week. The man and his 5-year-old son were shot dead on Monday in the latest in a series of attacks on Roma in Hungary in the past year in which seven people have died. The EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Vladimir Spidla, said in a statement he was deeply concerned by the reported attacks in Hungary and other countries: "The European Commission...calls upon the authorities of all member states to guarantee the personal safety of all persons on their territory," he said, also urging countries to fight poverty and social exclusion among Roma. Hungary's Justice Minister Tibor Draskovics acknowledged on Tuesday police had failed to solve murder cases against Roma people and promised to boost police presence in rural areas. But he said police could not erase the country's rising ethnic tensions. It was not known if Monday's attack was racially motivated but Roma community leaders said it was similar to other attacks and was an indication of systemic aggression against Roma. The Roma community is Hungary's largest minority making up 5 to 7 percent of a population of 10 million. The Roma, also known as Gypsies, often remain on the margins, lacking jobs and proper education. Recession and job losses have stoked resentment against the community and led to a strengthening of the far-right which fights what it says is a rise in "Roma crime." "In some cases, Roma are being made scapegoats for wider societal problems," Spidla said in his statement. In November in the Czech Republic, 500 black-masked people shouting racist slogans tried to attack a Roma ghetto in Litvinov, a town in the northern rust belt where unemployment is double the national average. Italy was criticised by rights groups and European lawmakers last year for its attitude towards Roma and plans, later modified, to fingerprint Roma people, including children. Italian locals set fire to two Roma camps in Naples last year.

Antidiscrimination Top level web-pages available in all European Community languages

Brussels, 27/02/09 - Visit the recently revamped web pages of Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities to read about initiatives for tackling non-discrimination; top level web-pages dealing with policy and legal frameworks, awareness raising campaigns, research, support mechanisms and much more are now available in all European community languages. A web-page dealing with 'Your rights and obligations' has most recently been added to the site and translation into all European Community languages will be made available in the coming weeks.

Source: EU Commission press service

EU: reports on national non-discrimination and diversity management seminars

Between autumn 2007 and spring 2008, a series of national training seminars were financed by the European Commission and carried out in all EU Member States, Turkey, Norway and Iceland. 1100 participants from NGOs and nearly 300 participants from trade unions were trained in national non-discrimination seminars raising awareness and understanding of national legislation

and policy. More than 1000 companies and other interested groups attended the diversity management seminars raising awareness of the benefits companies can gain from managing diversity. The main tools used for the training seminars include training manuals for NGOs and training manuals on diversity management available in all languages. The national reports summarize the activities and their main findings in each country. This mailing is sent to subscribers to the contacts database of the Community Action program PROGRESS ("Non-discrimination and diversity" strand). It aims to keep you informed of important news, events and publications in the area of non-discrimination. Subscribe, update your contact details or unsubscribe via www.equalitynews.eu . For all communication regarding the program please mail to info@equalitynews.eu

Source: EU Commission press service

EU: the non-discrimination governmental expert group - sustaining a legacy

In order to uphold and advance the legacy of the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities, the European Commission has set up in July 2008 a governmental expert group in the field of non-discrimination and the promotion of equality. The group examines the impact of national and EU-level non-discrimination measures, validates good practice through peer learning and evaluates the effectiveness of non-discrimination policies. The group is composed of one representative of national authorities in charge of policies against discrimination. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights acts as a permanent observer to the group. External experts or observers with specific competences on a subject as well as civil society, social partners and equality bodies' representatives contribute on an ad hoc basis. The objective of the group is to foster the further development of policies at EU and national level aimed at combating discrimination and promoting equality. The governmental expert group allows cooperation between Member States' relevant authorities and the Commission on questions relating to the fight against discrimination based on the following grounds: racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The group aims also at bringing about an exchange of experience and good practice, validation through peer learning and the development of benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of non-discrimination policies. In 2009, the group will particularly focus on multiple-discrimination and non-discrimination mainstreaming, as set out in the European Commission Communication of July 2008 and confirmed in the conclusions of the Equality Summit held in September 2008 in Paris. The European Commission is also working with the governmental expert group to follow up the findings of a comparative study on homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the EU, carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Twice a year, the group meets for its regular meetings in Brussels. In addition, a seminar on exchange of good practice in the field on non-discrimination mainstreaming will be organized this autumn in one of the Member States. The creation of this governmental expert group marks another step along the path of equal opportunities for all.

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89#wslId=458>

Expert preparatory meeting for defining EU Integrated Platform on Roma Inclusion

Prague, 27/02/09 - This preparatory meeting was organized within the framework of the Czech presidency to EU Council and built upon conclusions of the First EU Roma Summit from September 2008 as well as European Council's conclusions from December 2008. Its aim was to discuss and prepare the first meeting of EU Integrated Platform on Roma Inclusion, which will take place in April 2009 in Prague. Context and Aim of the meeting: in April 2009 the Czech Republic together with European Commission, will organize the first meeting of Integrated Platform on Roma

Inclusion. The conference aimed at defining and structuring key elements and mechanisms of operation of the platform. Aim of the preparatory meeting was also s to prepare and discuss among experts agenda for the conference as well as alternatives for operation of the platform. During the meeting discussion focused on expectations of various stakeholders from such platform as well as possible alternatives of platform's work as an effective EU mechanism. Further experts debated on concrete elements and mechanisms of operations of this platform, such as unified data collection, unified standards for national policies, exchange of best practices etc. (see page 14 of this e-news)

Read more on: <http://www.vlada.cz/en/clenove-vlady/ministri-pri-uradu-vlady/michael-kocab/news/expert-preparatory-meeting-for-defining-eu-integrated-platform-on-roma-inclusion-53185/>

Council of Europe body slams Hungary for lack of hate speech controls

Hungary's broad freedom of speech laws guaranteed by the Constitution render protection against racism almost impossible, a Council of Europe committee said in a report published on Tuesday. Hungarian legislation penalises only the most extreme manifestations of racism -- such as incitement to direct violence -- and the relevant regulations are hardly ever applied, The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) said in a report. "The very high level of constitutional protection afforded to the freedom of expression has to date made it impossible for the authorities to legislate effectively against racist expression [...] While it is true that legislation alone cannot turn racist attitudes around, the almost total absence of limits on free speech in Hungary complicates the task of promoting a society that is more open and tolerant towards its own members," said the ECRI. Addressing the situation of the Roma minority in Hungary requires sustained and multi-layered policies over a long period, said the report. The Roma are affected by exceptionally high unemployment and job discrimination, and Roma children are often segregated at school, noted the report. "Roma continue to face both a disproportionately high rate of unemployment and discrimination in access to employment," it said. Local authorities tend to deprive Roma families of centrally provided housing benefits, it added. Expressions of racism in Hungary have risen markedly in recent years, the report said. Racist articles often appear in Hungary's print media and on the internet, said the report. "A particularly alarming development has occurred in Hungary [...] in the form of a sharp rise in racism in public discourse. Anti-Semitic articles regularly appear in the press and on the internet, and anti-Roma discourse appears to be becoming increasingly virulent and wide-spread," it said. The racial nationalist Jobbik party and the Hungarian Guard, a paramilitary movement associated with it, are a cause for serious concern with their "open anti-Roma and anti-Semitic manifestations," said the Commission. "The creation and increasing visibility of one radical right-wing group in particular has led to grave concerns amongst members of civil society and the government, due not only to the group's openly anti-Roma and anti-Semitic discourse but also to its paramilitary-style uniforms and insignia that are strongly reminiscent of a right-wing party that briefly held power in Hungary during the second World War [...] At least one act of racist violence appears to have been linked to the racist discourse of this group," the ECRI said. The ECRI, established by the Council of Europe, is an independent human rights monitoring body specialised in questions relating to racism and intolerance. Its report covers the situation up to June 20 last year and any development subsequent to this date was not covered.

US State Department releases 2008 Human Rights Reports

Washington, 25/02/09. Secretary Clinton stated: "Human progress depends on the human spirit, and this inescapable truth has never been more apparent than it is today. The challenges of this

new century require us to summon the full range of human talents to move our nation and the world forward. Guaranteeing the right of every man, woman and child to participate fully in society and to live up to his or her God-given potential is an ideal that has animated our nation since its founding."

Read more on: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/index.htm>

Countries of Roma Decade:

Albania - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119064.htm>

Bosnia and Herzegovina - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119071.htm>

Bulgaria - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119072.htm>

Croatia - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119073.htm>

Czech Republic - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119075.htm>

Hungary - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119083.htm>

Macedonia - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119091.htm>

Montenegro - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119095.htm>

Romania - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119100.htm>

Serbia - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119103.htm>

Slovak Republic - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119104.htm>

Other European countries with the concern on Roma issues:

Italy – <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119086.htm>

Kosovo - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119462.htm>

Moldova - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119093.htm>

Slovenia - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119105.htm>

Spain – <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119106.htm>

US report assesses human rights violations against the Roma

Brussels, 25/02/09 - Ethnic discrimination on the Belgian labour market, neo-Nazi extremism in Austria and abuses against Roma in nine EU countries are some of the findings of the 2008 US government report on human rights. The report, issued on Wednesday (25 February) by the State Department for each country of the world, says that the Belgian government "generally respected the human rights of its citizens," but found several problems, such as overcrowded prisons, lengthy pre-trial detention, poor detention conditions prior to expulsion and "ethnic discrimination in the job market." Labour discrimination was directed particularly against young men from the Muslim community, estimated at 450,000 people, principally of Moroccan and Turkish origin. Discrimination regarding housing, restaurant access and an increase of racism on the internet were also noted. "On July 10, the European Court of Justice ruled that a manufacturer of automatic garage doors had discriminated when he refused to hire a Moroccan applicant under the pretext that his clients would object to having a Moroccan worker in their homes. The case was referred to a labour court for sentencing under the antidiscrimination law," the report states. Neo-Nazi incidents and "rightwing extremism and xenophobia directed against ethnic minorities" were

a cause of concern in Austria. "In 2007 the Ministry of the Interior recorded 240 neo-Nazi, right-wing extremist, and xenophobic incidents directed against members of minority groups. The government continued to express concern over the activities of extreme right-wing skinhead and neo-Nazi groups, many with links to organizations in other countries," the US report notes. Despite being discriminated against in employment and housing, the situation of Roma people in Austria had "significantly improved in recent years," with children being moved out of "special needs" into mainstream classes. The government also initiated programmes in recent years to document the Romani Holocaust and compensate its victims. This was however not the case in nine other EU countries: Italy, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria, where discrimination and even violence against Roma is on the rise. On Monday, a Roma man and his son were shot to death in a village in Hungary as they were fleeing their home, which had been set on fire. The Hungarian ministry of Interior promised to step up policing in rural areas, but admitted that it could not prevent all racist incidents, which had increased in the recent months. EU commissioner for social affairs Vladimir Spidla reacted to the incident, as well as other measures, such as Italy's controversial crackdown on Roma camps. "The European Commission strongly condemns all forms of violence against Roma and calls upon the authorities of all Member States to guarantee the personal safety of all persons on their territory," he said in a statement. Mr Spidla was "deeply concerned" that in some member states, "Roma have become the target of organised racist violence - fed by political populism, hate speech and media hype." "In some cases, Roma are being made scapegoats for wider societal problems."

Source: <http://euobserver.com/851/27689>

ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

Italy: Extremist group calls for expulsion of Gypsies from Italy

Rome, 22/02/2009: An extreme right-wing organisation has taken to the streets of Rome calling for the expulsion from Italy of the entire Romani or Gypsy population of the country. While there seems to have been little public support for the Forza Nuova group which is pressing for the end of the Schengen agreement which allows passport – free travel in much of the EU – the situation for the Gypsy population, indigenous and immigrant, in Italy is becoming more and more precarious. Protest organizer Roberto Fiore said: "This is a situation that requires political will. We want to suspend the Schengen agreement, which is one of the main reasons for the disaster and we want to start all the expulsions of the Gypsies and at the same time we think that all the people who have committed crimes in Italy. They should be sent back to their own countries." A series of sex attacks in Italy is being blamed on foreigners living in the country and three rapes last weekend triggered a media frenzy and a diplomatic row with Romania. Italy's conservative government rushed through a law toughening penalties for sex offenders and permitting neighbourhood citizen patrols. No doubt we can imagine against who those patrols will be used and, having seen the pictures of the camps into which many Gypsies have been moved by the authorities and the special police units guarding them, I do not think we have to ask. In addition to this Hungary is ablaze with anti-Gypsyism right now with the right-wing also calling, basically, for the expulsion of all Gypsies from that country. And this all in countries that are members of the European Union. I mean not that it surprises me in the least. I have seen this coming for years now, only no one wanted to believe it. I hate to be the one to say "I told you so", but such it is. The writing was on the wall but everyone wanted to be blind to it. As far as we, the Gypsy, are concerned nothing will ever change and all the EU does is talk nice words but that is about it. When it comes down to it the Gypsy will remain their whipping boy and be held responsible for all ills of their society.

Source: <http://onevodrom.blogspot.com/2009/02/extremist-group-calls-for-expulsion-of.html>

Italy: report on Roma communities in Rome, Naples and Milan

In response to recent political developments and the most recent wave of racism against Roma people in Italy, a coalition of organizations, including UNIRSI, undertook a first – hand human rights documentation in Italy (between 23 and 30 may, 2008). That organizations conducted a surveying doing interviews to approximately 100 Romani persons who were living in formal and informal camps in Rome, Naples, Florence, Brescia, Milan and Turin. The organizations visited many formal and semi formal camps including: Secondigliano and Centro Lima (Naples); Salviati, River, Casilino 900 and Martora (Rome); Via Tribugnano (Milan); Nomads Camp of Brescia for Italian Sinti. The coalition also visited the following informal camps: Scampia, Ponticelli, Santa Maria, and Torre Annunziata Nord (Naples); Cave di Pietralata and an unnamed camp closed to Cave di Pietralata (Rome); Corsico and Bacula (Milan); Via Germagnano (Turin). Despite being the country of Europe with the lowest percentage of Roma / Sinti (Greece counts equal number to Italy but with a population of only 10 million of people) Italy is behind at least 25 years compared to all policies integration for the people of the Roma / Sinti. While there are no official Census, a census carried out from various organizations (including UNIRSI) on a national scale shows that the Roma and Sinti in Italy are about 170,000, of which 70,000 with Italian citizenship and 100,000 (in constant increase from Bulgaria and especially Romania) from the Balkans. 30% of those 100,000 comes from Yugoslavia, and the rest comes from Romania, with a few hundred presences coming from Bulgaria and Poland. The last two generations of Roma "Yugoslavs" were born in a country, Italy, which does not recognize the "jus soli" and then denies to children the basic requirements for a balanced education and integration: citizenship. The minority of Roma / Sinti is characterized by low life expectancy (the average age is about 40 to 50 years) and by the presence of a high percentage of children (60% of the Roma and Sinti population is less than 18 years old. The 47% of children is from 6 to 14 years old; 23% of children is between 15 and 18 years old; the remaining percentage of children (30%) is between 0 and 5 years old). The Roma and Sinti people with Italian citizenship are about 70,000. Today in Italy the Sinti and Roma communities (called "Gipsyes" and "nomads" in an ethnocentric way) are still object of discrimination, exclusion and segregation. Discrimination is extended to all fields, in both the public and private, so the exclusion and economic and social segregation of Sinti and Roma becomes ethnic discrimination (Recommendation n.1557/2002 Council of Europe). In Italy, the many Roma and Sinti communities are not recognized as National Linguistic Minorities and therefore do not enjoy the rights that this status provides. The social policies aimed at Roma and Sinti populations tend openly to social inclusion, and integration. Sinti and Roma communities are rarely considered protagonists of social thinking, of policies of integration, direct participation and cultural mediation. Italy denies to Sinti and Roma communities the application of the European directives on Linguistic Minorities protecting minority languages and also denies the Convention on National Minorities. In many cases Roma and Sinti see denied the basic rights like residence, health, education, work. In Italy we still build the "nomads camps" which are places of segregation that imprison individuals against their will. In Italy, most of Councils, in contrast with the constitutional provisions (Article 16), deny the right to reside and move freely within the national territory to so-called "nomads" or "Gypsies". In this tragic situation Roma from Slovenia, Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, Hungary are suffering all that extremely discriminatory policies. Entire families flee from their native lands due to ethnic conflicts and civil wars and Italy denies them the most basic rights.

Italy: Caccia agli zingari, documentary on Roma and Sinti in Italy

One of the Italian state-owned channels (RAI3) broadcasted a couple of days ago a very good documentary on the current situation of Roma and Sinti in Italy. The documentary investigates not only recent episodes of intolerance and racism, but also makes some more general points on the political use of the 'Gypsy issue' and on nomad camps and social marginalization of these communities.

To see the documentary: <http://www.rai.tv/mpplaymedia/0,,RaiTre-PresaDiretta%5E17%5E187119,00.html>

UK: Dale Farm petitions lords over eviction

London, 25/02/2009 - Travellers at Dale Farm are to petition the House of Lords asking that a further appeal be heard in their quest to stop the destruction of their homes and community centre. Residents have been granted public funding to cover the cost of this application to the UK supreme court. The Court of Appeal last month turned down a similar request. Last year the High Court ruled in favour of the ninety families living at Dale Farm, saying Basildon council could not evict them without providing alternate accommodation. While three Court of Appeal judges overturned that judgement and reinstated the council's eviction decision, a number of conditions regarding the welfare of the 400 residents, who include many children, were made. Basildon council voted by a slim majority in May 2006 to mount a two million pound direct action operation to clear Dale Farm. Labour opposition councillors at the time labelled this a racially tainted decision. Travellers successfully sought a judicial review of the policy, which they believe amounts to a form of ethnic-cleansing. After seeing video film of eviction work carried out by Constant & Co., agents of Basildon council, Judge Collins commented that their deployment against Gypsy families was inappropriate. It is to test the correctness of that initial policy decision taken under the leadership of Tory council head Malcolm Buckley that Dale Farm residents are now seeking a hearing by the Lords. "We're relieved to know that we have a a good chance of a hearing by the highest court in the land," commented Richard Sheridan, president of the Gypsy Council. Meanwhile, the Children's Commission has asked Basildon what steps would be taken in the event of an eventual eviction operation to safeguard the 150 children; and what is being done to see that they have alternative accommodation to which they can go. After what has been an eight year siege of the community, Dale Farm Housing Association hopes that common sense will finally prevail and families be allowed to stay permanently where they are. It points out that with thousands of housing being built on greenbelt, a small corner should be given up to need their special needs. The Government has told Basildon that it must provide at least 71 plots by 2011 to help accommodation Travellers in the region. The district is the largest in Essex, extending over 72 square kilometres.

Greece: EU to rule on Roma, again

Athens, 26/02/09 - Greece is to face the European Court of Human Rights once again, accused of violating the rights of hundreds of Roma who have been homeless since their eviction from a makeshift settlement in the central Athens district of Votanikos in June 2007. A complaint lodged with the court this week by the Greek Helsinki Monitor, a nongovernmental rights group, accuses authorities of turning a blind eye to the eviction of the Roma and subsequently ignoring requests for their rehousing. The group claims that its appeals to police and an Athens prosecutor to stop the eviction had been ignored. It maintains that authorities also ignored a similar appeal by a private company into whose building in Kolonos some of the Roma had moved after their eviction. The organization also condemns Greece for failing to make use of European Union funding to

improve housing for thousands of Roma living in Greece. The Strasbourg-based court is due to issue its judgment on the complaint this fall. Out of 440 cases involving Greece, the court has issued guilty verdicts in 431, or 98 percent.

Source: http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_politics_100010_26/02/2009_105063

Spain: over 1000 Roma employed thanks to the Acceder program

Madrid, 27/02/09 – Since year 2000, over 1000 Roma settled in the Basque Region got a job thanks to the Acceder program managed by Secretariado Gitano. One on three of those jobs was assigned to a woman. Most of the employed people is under 30 years old and had followed a training program among over 20 organised by Acceder. Those trainings were in automotive, hotel and catering, constructions, heavy industry and freight transport. A report about the Roma situation in the Basque Region found that schooling (except from high schools) is on the rise as well as employment rates. Also the access to the information technologies is improving.

Source: <http://www.noticiasdealava.com/ediciones/2009/02/25/sociedad/euskadi/d25eus14.1172341.php>

Slovenia court compensates first of many "erased"

Ljubljana - A Slovenian court has awarded compensation to the first of several thousand people who lost their official identity after Slovenia became independent from Yugoslavia in 1991, STA news agency reported on Friday. It said the district court in Ptuj, eastern Slovenia, awarded 17,000 euros (\$21,400) compensation to Aleksandar Todorovic because he had not been allowed to work after his identity records were destroyed. The Interior Ministry said last month that 25,671 people who had come to Slovenia from other states of the former Yugoslavia were erased from the official record in 1992 because they had failed to apply for Slovenian citizenship. The new centre-left government, which won an election in September, said it would give residency status to the "erased," as they are popularly known, in line with the demands of local and international human rights groups, but did not promise any compensation. Since 1992 some 8,000 of the "erased" have acquired Slovenian citizenship, and many others have moved to other states of the former Yugoslavia. Rights groups say about 4,000 people still have no passport or residence status and are struggling to gain access to schools, housing and health services.

Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/lifestyleMolt/idUSTRE51J3U220090220>

Czech republic: anti-Roma activity on the rise

A political party best known for targeting the Roma community with frequent violent rhetoric and occasional physical violence faces possible abolition at the hands of the government, but vows to march on regardless. The Czech Supreme Administrative Court is expected to rule on a potential ban for the right-wing Workers' Party (DS) March 4, but the party leadership says the ruling is virtually irrelevant. "The verdict will hopefully confirm that we have the same rights as everyone else in this democracy," said party Chairman Tomáš Vandas. Should it not, "Very simply, we will form a new party. I do not want to pre-empt the ruling or give any details, but we are prepared for all outcomes." During the 2004 regional elections, the Workers' Party garnered about 3,000 votes. By 2008, that number had climbed to more than 29,000, according to the NGO Tolerance and Civil Society, which monitors extremist groups. "In several regions, they were more successful than the Green Party," said Klára Kalibová, a lawyer with Tolerance. "They are getting some of the so-called 'real' Czech people." Gwendolyn Albert, a long-time Roma rights activist and director of the Women's Initiatives Network of the Peacework Development Fund, noted a similar

trend. "Times are bad, and people need a punching bag," she said. Activists point to increased cooperation between the DS and radical groups in neighbouring countries. Kalibová says the party has also recently allied itself with the National Resistance - a right-wing group with overt neo-Nazi ties - adding that violence has since markedly increased. Vandas says the DS is increasing cooperation with the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NDP), a successor to the German Reich Party, as well as the right-wing Slovenská pospolitost' in Slovakia. "As we grow, we will be able to focus on this more," he said. The Interior Ministry requested this fall that the government ban the DS, which it says violates the constitution in four major ways. Presently, the Interior Ministry is looking into a similar ban for the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM). "The basis for a democracy is free competition for its political parties. On the other hand, it is also required of a democracy to have the power to protect itself from those who, under the screen of a political party, lobby for ideologies that are against the law and violate the rights and freedom of individuals," said ministry spokeswoman Hana Malá. In November 2008, a DS rally involving 600-700 radicals in Litvínov led to a violent clash with police. Vandas denied that the group advocates violence, and, when asked where this perception comes from, said, "We are often portrayed as having close relations to right-wing workers' groups and neo-Nazis, which is not correct." On Feb. 21, about 40 DP members distributed party pamphlets in Postoloprty, north Bohemia. The event was peaceful, and also saw Roma activists distributing literature. Albert warned that local politicians are increasingly allying themselves with the DP. She points to recent events in Chomutov, where city officials teamed with a private collection agency to confront Roma as they came to pick up social benefits, all the while broadcasting the embarrassing scene on television. While in support of banning the DP, Kalibová is not optimistic. "The government presents no serious legal argument," she said, adding that legal grounds for banning the party do exist. Confronted with the possibility of a ban spawning a new party of the same ideology under a different name, Kalibová responded, "What can you say? It is a battle between right and wrong."

Source: <http://www.praguepost.com/news/642-anti-roma-activity-on-the-rise.html>

Czech Republic: Minister Kocáb targets Roma issue

When he was named human rights and minorities minister Jan. 23, Michael Kocáb, of the junior ruling Green Party, was at first considered an odd choice for the position, having run unsuccessfully for a Senate seat last fall. Yet, in those eight weeks, the 54-year-old former rock musician has established himself as one of the country's rising political stars. Known as one of the main protagonists of the Velvet Revolution, Kocáb has an extensive political history, having served as a deputy in the Czechoslovak federal parliament as well as being a principal adviser to former President Václav Havel. Since his appointment, Kocáb has been vigorously active in the political limelight, acting as an advocate for unemployed immigrants, easing a potential Roma-based conflict in Kolín and speaking out against the decision to expel Vietnamese immigrant Le Kim Trinh. With race-related conflict on the rise, Kocáb speaks to The Prague Post about his ambitions to change the country's climate for minority groups. The Prague Post: The European media often compare the Czech Republic unfavourably to its West European neighbours, such as Germany and Austria, with regard to its approach to minority affairs. Do you find these comparisons justified? Michael Kocáb: I welcome this criticism. I'm listening to it, and I will do my best to change it. I don't just want to improve the Czech Republic's image. I also want to bring about real change in the treatment of minorities.

Read the full interview on: <http://www.praguepost.com/news/641-kocab-targets-roma-issues.html>

Hungary: Roma father and son murdered near Budapest

A Roma man and his five-year old son were shot dead in a village southeast of Budapest during a fire which engulfed their home on Monday, the criminal department head of Pest County police said, quoting the result of an autopsy. The national police headquarters offered 10 million forints (EUR 33,300) in reward for any information on the murder. Hungarian MEP of Roma origin Viktoria Mohacsi, referring to eyewitness accounts, said that the man and the child were shot when attempting to escape from the burning house. The house in Tatárszentgyörgy was set alight by a petrol bomb, said Orban Kolompar, head of the National Gypsy Authority (OCO). Mohacsi, of the opposition liberal Free Democrats party, said that she had been alerted by family members because they felt the police had been reluctant to treat the case as a murder. A police spokeswoman earlier told MTI that spent cartridges had been found in the courtyard of the house. The man's two other children suffered serious burns. Florian Farkas, chair of the Roma organisation Lungo Drom which has struck an alliance with the main opposition Fidesz party, said that the incident in Tatárszentgyörgy demonstrated a lack of public safety in Hungary and the inability of police and the government to act. "Unless a solution is found for the integration of the Roma, there will be a civil war situation in Hungary," he added. Kolompar said inciting hatred against the Roma by certain media and politicians were responsible for the incident. He called on the 800,000 Roma living in Hungary to join forces in order to recover peace and warned that violence must not be allowed to escalate. Kolompar said the circumstances of the double murder in Tatárszentgyörgy showed many similarities to an attack that took place in Nagycséc in northeast Hungary in November last year which claimed the lives of two Roma. Ombudsman in charge of minority affairs Erno Kallai called for resolute political steps without delay to "rescue peace in society." He said that there were more than a dozen attacks with Molotov cocktails and weapons against Roma over the past 12 months but none of the perpetrators have been found. Anti-Roma sentiments aggravated in recent weeks after a much-publicized stabbing attack, allegedly committed by Roma at a nightclub in Veszprem in western Hungary, in which a Romanian handball player was killed and his Croatian and Serb team members were seriously injured.

Hungary: Hindus & Jews ask the EU to protect the Roma minority

In view of reportedly alarming violence against Roma in Hungary, Hindus and Jews have asked for urgent intervention of European Union in Hungary. Rajan Zed, acclaimed Hindu statesman; and Rabbi Jonathan B. Freirich, prominent Jewish leader in Nevada and California in USA; in a statement in Nevada today, said that already marginalized, deprived, and discriminated against Roma should not be blamed for all the misfortune of Hungary. Hungary and European Union should make sure that racism and hatred did not grow in Hungary and all crimes against Roma people should be immediately solved, Zed and Rabbi Jonathan stressed. Hindu and Jewish leaders further said that in Hungary, despite various government initiatives, Roma reportedly continued to face blatant discrimination, shanty town living, an atmosphere of hostility, huge unemployment rate, lower life expectancy, prejudice, significantly higher school dropout rate, racism, bias and stereotyping, school segregation, social exclusion, mistrust, human rights violations, etc. According to an estimate, less than 1% of Roma obtained higher education degrees. Rajan Zed and Rabbi Jonathan Freirich pointed out that instead of reportedly continuing to marginalise Roma socially, this country of Lake Balaton, romantic Danube River, Franz Liszt and Bela Bartok, should be more embracing of Roma brothers and sisters who had been reportedly living with them since 14th century. Hungarian government should be more proactive in protecting Roma and other minorities. Zed and Rabbi Freirich urged all religious leaders, religions and denominations of Hungary to work for the uplift of Roma, because religion told us to help the help-

less. Roma in Hungary, whose estimated numbers sometimes reach around one million, form about ten percent of total Hungary populace, which makes it largest Roma minority as percentage of total population in the world. Current demographic trends indicate that in 2050, about 21 percentage of Hungary population will be Roma. Rajan Zed, who is president of Universal Society of Hinduism, said that it was moral obligation of Europe to take care of its largest minority Roma population and stop human rights violations suffered by them, who numbered around ten million and were the most disadvantaged. There seemed to be no coherent and effective policy to assimilate them into the society. Their alarming condition is a social blight for Europe and the rest of the world.

Source: http://www.juedische.at/TCgi/ v2/TCgi.cgi?target=home&Param_Kat=3&Param_RB=27&Param_Red=11308

Hungary: report, crimes against Gypsies: 2008-2009

Népszabadság published a list of crimes committed against Gypsies in the last year or so. They mentioned 12 incidents but according to Viktória Mohácsi, Roma activist and SZDSZ member of the European parliament, the number is higher--16 or 17. In defense of the paper, it was not trying to come up with a definitive number; rather, it was summarizing those cases the paper had previously reported on. And I will summarize even more briefly. The first incident occurred on January 22, 2008, in Szigetvár when five punks from Barcs attacked a Gypsy woman and her daughter late in the evening in the center of town. I wrote about the court's decision in this case: it was not a hate crime, it was not racially motivated. After all, said the judge, these fellows were not from Szigetvár and therefore they couldn't have known that this particular area was frequented by Gypsies. And second, it was dark so how could they tell that the mother and daughter were Gypsies? On March 1 in Tiszaroff someone set fire to the house of a local Gypsy leader and scribbled ugly epithets on the wall of his house. This case was never solved. On March 15 in Tapolca two 17-year-olds out of the blue beat a 32-year-old Roma man. He was seriously hurt and had a long hospital stay. On June 3 in Pátka Molotov cocktails were thrown into three houses. No one was injured but in the room where the children were asleep fire broke out. This time the police managed to find the perpetrators: the civilians who are helping the police keep order in the village! They are in custody but have not yet been brought to trial. On June 15 in Fényeslitke after a loud verbal exchange in a pub a 40-year-old local killed a 14-year-old Roma boy and seriously wounded his 16-year-old companion. On July 21 in Galgagyörk shortly after midnight someone fired through the windows of three houses owned by Gypsies. Luckily no one was hurt. The perpetrator remains at large. On August 8 in Pirics someone threw Molotov cocktails into two houses inhabited by Gypsies and wounded a woman who tried to flee. On August 19 in Székesfehérvár a bunch of youngsters hurled stones through the windows of an apartment house inhabited primarily by Gypsies. A 12-year-old girl was seriously wounded. On September 5 In Nyíradony-Tamásipuszta shots were fired at a house owned by Gypsies. Luckily, no one was hurt. On November 3 in Nagycsécs unknown assailants threw Molotov cocktails into two houses facing each other. When the inhabitants tried to escape two were shot dead. On November 18 in Pécs a grenade was thrown into a Gypsy family's house. The parents died but three of their children miraculously survived. On December 15 in the Alsózsolca Gypsy ghetto a 19-year-old man, cutting wood in the yard, was seriously injured when someone fired two shots at him.

Read the full article on: <http://esbalogh.typepad.com/hungarianspectrum/2009/02/crimes-against-gypsies-2008.html>

Hungary: Socialists propose increasing number of Roma in public administration

Hungary's governing Socialist party (MSZP) will present a bill to parliament to raise the number of Roma in public administration to 7-8 percent within ten years, government officials said on

Wednesday. The plan aims to strengthen the Roma middle class. Measures will be put in place to ensure that Roma representation in government jobs is proportionate to their percentage of the population, said Laszlo Teleki, ministerial commissioner in charge of Roma affairs. A database of people belonging to the Roma minority will be compiled on a voluntary basis. This should enable employment for Roma diploma holders, Teleki said, noting that some 10,000 Roma have completed higher education since 2000, he said. Government commissioner for Roma affairs Ferenc Kondorosi said employment was an important issue, but training and housing would also be in the government's sightline. Methods to reduce social tension in connection with the Roma population include providing adequate representation to the Roma in the distribution of public funds, encouraging Roma taxation, transparency in welfare programmes and the efficient use of the labour market, Kondorosi said. He added that a government proposal for a bank of the poor, as well as humanitarian services should be supported to help encourage self-sustenance among the Roma.

Source: <http://www.politics.hu/20090226/socialists-propose-increasing-number-of-roma-in-public-administration>

Romania: European program for improving Roma situation

Ethnic Roma from 16 localities in Constanta county (South-East of Romania) will benefit from an European program for improving the quality of health services, the project being financed by the European Union and co-financed by the Constanta County Council, its total value being 60.000 de euro. The initiators appreciate that "For a healthy life" project will have a great impact on Roma communities from the 16 localities and will identify the issues people here confront with and will offer concrete solutions for solving them. At the level of each local community included in the program will be organized working mixed teams composed by representatives of local administration, sanitary tutors, policemen, doctors, who will go from house to house to identify the issues each Roma family confronts with. Then, where will be possible, people will be helped to solve those issues. People will be helped to register to a GP and obtain ID and birth certificates for their children and will be guided to doctors. The project wants to improve the Roma situation and to promote the social inclusion and increasing the life quality.

Source: www.divers.ro

Romania: President Basescu, "we are lacking concrete measures to help Roma"

Bucharest, 21/02/2009 - Beyond the formal adhesion to general principles, we are lacking such concrete measures to help the Roma community overcome difficulties it is in, Romanian President Traian Basescu appreciated in a message on Friday, on the occasion of the Roma's Emancipation Day. 'Unfortunately, the event we celebrate today does not represent at the same time the finalization of a process of emancipation of the ethnic Roma. The formal abolition of slavery didn't automatically generate the adoption of a decision meant to lead to the integration of this minority, to the adoption of such measures to prevent social exclusion. Roma's integration is far from being a reality, although we celebrate today the 153rd anniversary of the Emancipation,' the head of the Romanian state said. Traian Basescu appreciated that 'the social stigma, the severe social problems and prejudices' related to the Roma people, both at home and abroad, resulted in the Roma being often regarded as 'second-class citizens.' He also stressed that, beyond the formal embracement of the general principles allowing the recognition of these communities' rights, there lack the concrete measures to help Roma people overcome difficulties they meet with every day. 'Solutions exist, but implementing them depends mostly on the active involvement of the state institutions. The effective assuming of the national development plan for the Roma community, by each relevant ministry, by the local authorities and the social partners, the involve-

ment of the structures of the state in protecting the rights of all its citizens, in the country and abroad, the definition of such active measures related to the maintaining, development and expression of the ethnical identity represent a necessity of our times,' the President showed. The president said that the document from back in 1856, marking the release of the Roma people, was one of those events at the foundation of the Romanian modernity, proving a political will engaged in changing the mentality of its leaders at the time. 'In fact, the event we celebrate today shows how, by means of a law, when the will exists to fundamentally change the state of things, there can be created the prerequisites for the individual development of generations,' the head of the Romanian state said. He also stressed that, in this context, it is highly important for one to highlight the role the Roma's civil society needs to play in making the integration happen, both by working within the community and in cooperation with the authorities of the state. The president specified that he would keep an eye on the state authorities so that such constitutional provisions related the equality between citizens be observed. 'Today, the same as more than a one and a half century ago, we have the chance to make a new step into a real emancipation of the Roma people in Romania. Today, we can make such options that, in time, to make our successors speak about the integration of the Roma communities in Romania as a success of the Romanian society,' reads the abovementioned message. The Roma people in Romania celebrate every year, on February 20, 'The Emancipation Day.'

Source: <http://www.financiarul.ro/2009/02/21/president-basescu-we-are-lacking-concrete-measures-to-help-roma-people-overcome-difficulties/>

Turkey: Sulukule residents get little help

Istanbul, 25/02/09- The residents of Sulukule who have either been pushed out or left behind by the Fatih Municipality in Istanbul have been given an audience with municipality officials to voice their concerns. More than 20 Sulukule residents reiterated their concerns that they were being treated unfairly in the move by the Faith Municipality to redevelop the area into high premium real estate. The Sulukule urban renewal project is aimed at clearing out one of the poorest neighborhoods in Istanbul from what is a significant historic area. Sulukule residents are mostly poor Roma people who live in rented apartments. Most of the residents have been given government subsidized public housing in Taşoluk that costs a one time 750 Turkish lira membership fee and monthly payments of 320 liras not including gas, electricity and water bills. Fifty percent of the residents have monthly incomes less than 500 liras, according to Neşe Ozan, a spokesperson for an aid organization called the Sulukule Platform. "In order to live in these homes you need an income level of at least 1,000 liras, which these people do not have," said Ozan. Because most residents cannot make payments on the Taşoluk homes they are defaulting and repossessions loom large. And those are the lucky ones. About 100 families remain in the bureaucratic limbo of not having been granted the right to move out to Taşoluk, while the uncertainty of when their homes in Sulukule will be demolished remains. These families are demanding that their status for public housing be clarified. Mustafa Ustaoglu, the head of the Study Projects department of the Fatih Municipality, said he listened to the concerns of the Sulukule residents and will pass on the report to the head of the Fatih Municipality. Ustaoglu also promised the 100 or so families who are waiting to find out if they qualify for government assistance will be notified within the week's end.

Source: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/domestic/11068263.asp?scr=1>

EVENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

EU Presidency: First meeting of the integrated platform on Roma inclusion

24 April 2009, Prague, the Czech Republic. This conference is co-organized by the Czech Republic and European Commission within the framework of the Czech presidency to EU Council. An ambition of this conference is to set basic outline for EU Integrated platform on Roma inclusion. The December 2008 European Council adopted conclusions on Roma inclusion which call on the Commission and Member States to (i) draw up concrete actions for 2009 and 2010 to ensure access to education, housing, health, employment, justice and culture and (ii) to make better use of EU financial instruments for Roma inclusion, while calling on the Commission to (iii) organize another EU Roma Summit in 2010, and (iv) report on progress by 2010. In addition, it called on the Commission to organize an exchange of good practice and experience between the Member States as well as to provide analytical support and stimulate cooperation between all parties concerned by Roma issues in the context of an integrated European platform. The term integrated Roma platform was first used during EU Roma summit, however without defining its content. The aim of the conference is to follow conclusions of the Summit and December 2008 EU Council and define content for Integrated Platform on Roma Inclusion as EU mechanism. The agenda for the conference will be discussed during preparatory meeting in February 2009 in Prague.



The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) is an international advocacy organization, which promotes political and public discussion on Roma issues by providing factual and in-dept information on a range of policy issues to the European Union institutions, Roma civil organizations, governmental authorities and intergovernmental bodies. ERIO cooperates with a network of a large number of organizations and acts to combat racial discrimination and social exclusion through awareness raising, lobbying and policy development.

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