

ERIO at the equality summit in Paris

Ivan Ivanov, ERIO's Executive Director, participated in the Equality Summit organised in Paris by the French EU Presidency on September 29th and 30th. It was the second European summit on this thematic, the next one being organised by the Swedish EU Presidency in the second half of 2009. This summit brought together 400 high-ranking delegates and representatives from the field of equal opportunities around a single aim: effectively applying the principles of non-discrimination in the European Union. The delegations present included institutional partners, local community representatives, social and civil society partners. ERIO welcomes such initiatives, because they help building a Europe-wide antidiscrimination movement. Mr Ivanov stated: "Roma should get the most benefits from the anti-discrimination legislation, because they are the more discriminated and excluded ethnic group in Europe. For this same reason, Roma activists and organisations could and should be the driving force in the EU Equality Agenda". On the other hand, ERIO invites antidiscrimination and equality NGOs to do not go blind in front of the efforts of EU governments to show their engagement for the equality of all Europeans: last Thursday, the Council of the EU approved the Immigration Pact, that will tighten up the access of a huge number of poor, desperate and endangered people to the EU countries. This will be particularly harming for Roma from the Western Balkans, who already suffer difficult life conditions in countries like Italy, where they took shelter from the wars in the '90s in the former Yugoslavian block.

ERIO at the Steering Committee of the Platform for Intercultural Dialogue

ERIO participated in the meeting of the Steering Committee of Platform for Intercultural Dialogue which is composed by European networks of NGOs dealing with social inclusion and cultural issues. The meeting was devoted to discuss the Work Plan 2009. Guillermo Ruiz, ERIO's Policy Officer, stated that the Platform should lobby national agencies in charge for the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) of Culture, advocating for the strong involvement of the Civil Society in the design and implementation of the OMC. It was agreed that the Platform will develop capacities of non-governmental organisations in intercultural skills and advocacy work for interculturality. The Platform aims at bringing together civil society actors in order to ensure that their voice will be heard in the design and implementation of the EC policies promoting intercultural dialogue. The Platform has become the main interlocutor of the European Commission for discussing the implementation of the 2008 – European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

Read more about the Platform on: <http://www.efah.org/index.php?id=153&pagelang>

ERIO in North-Eastern Italy

ERIO's Executive Director, Ivan Ivanov, travelled to North-Eastern Italy to gather information about the situation of Roma there. He met not only the Roma community but also local authorities and other personalities: among them, the Consuls from Bulgaria and Serbia to the Veneto Region. With local authorities (such as representatives of the municipality of Treviso and the mayor of the seaside resort Jesolo) Mr Ivanov discussed which are their programs to solve the problem faced by Roma in their area and which the solution to prevent further obstacles to their integration. Mr Ivanov also met with Roma leaders from the local community and newcomers as well and with representatives of two non-Roma NGOs, active in anti-discrimination and racism prevention, fields of action directly linked to the Roma rights promotion. They agreed for cooperation and discussed the possibility of joining the European antidiscrimination networks. ERIO also proposed to work together on joint actions and project concerning the Roma community.

Strasbourg Court: Travellers' children face bias in Romania and Ireland

Strasbourg, 01/10/2008 - As a result of a recent petition from Roma in Romania, the Strasbourg Court concluded that a separate education system was ultimately detrimental to the wellbeing of its Gypsy population. That country is retraining all teachers to disabuse them of perceptions that the poor in the community are of an inferior race. The Equality Commission here was ignorant of this ruling, which essentially makes it illegal to pursue separate education. Besides the European Ruling, the Ireland Act gave a privileged position in law to Travellers. There would also appear to have been recent incidents where Traveller children were rejected by the 'Irish' schools, a situation which is totally illegal. It is obvious that the massive funding which is directed at these schools, giving a comfortable existence to well paid teachers, whose pupils are not tested, could be more appropriately directed into the general education system.

Source: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk>

European Commission: New EU web portal on social affairs

Brussels, 29/09/2008 - A new website on employment, social affairs and equal opportunities has been launched by the European Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/social>). The site aims to explain how European Union policies benefit citizens. It also provides more detailed and technical information for specialised audiences including policy-makers, stakeholder organisations, the media and experts. The features offered by the new website include regularly updated news and features, improved navigation, a dedicated search engine, an e-library gathering together important documents and publications, and a multimedia section. The website was launched in English, French and German on 2 July 2008 to coincide with the Commission's adoption of a renewed social agenda for the EU. It will be available in all official EU languages (except Gaelic) from mid-October 2008. The Commission welcomes comments and suggestions from users of the website. (empl-webmaster@ec.europa.eu).

OSCE: 'Bleak picture' of Roma discrimination, hate crimes in report

Warsaw, 29/09/2008 - An OSCE report launched Monday paints a "bleak picture" and shows "considerable gaps" in improving the situation of the Roma and Sinti people across Europe, officials said at an annual conference in Warsaw. "The situation has not improved as much as hoped and expected" after the 56-member states adopted an action plan in 2003, said Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. "There are still major steps to be taken to reach an acceptable level of implementation in our region." The report - which focuses on areas such as racism, living conditions and health care - finds "substantial shortcomings" in bringing strategies into effect at the local level.

Read more on <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/234632/osce-bleak-picture-of-roma-discrimination-hate-crimes-in-report.html>

Italy : MEP's visit to the Roma camps: questions yet to be answered

Brussels, 29/09/2008 - A delegation of the European Parliament visited several camps of the Roma in Italy to see their living conditions. Thus, they evaluated the measures regarding the census of the people living in the "nomad camps" and their actual situation. The delegation, made of 19 MPs, all of them members of the LIBE Parliamentary Commission (Civil Freedoms, Justice and Internal Affairs) of the European Parliament visited several Roma camps from Italy between 18th and 19th of September 2008. The MEPs also met with the Roberto Maroni, Minister of Interior, and discussed about the census and fingerprinting of the Roma with the mayors from Rome, Naples and Milan. Renate Weber, MEP, was also part of the European Parliament delegation, and she presented her viewpoint following this documentation visit. In the opinion of the PNL MEP (ALDE), "the way of implementing the emergency measures, especially in Naples, was regrettable – we actually think it was unacceptable, because the data collected from those people had nothing to do with an identity card: finger prints, data on their ethnic origin and religion.

Read more on http://www.divers.ro/opinii_en?wid=37649&func=viewSubmission&sid=9192

Italy: Gentilini from the Northern League inquired for racism

Venice, 02/10/2008 - The Venice attorney opened a file for insitgation to racist hatred against Northern League's Giancarlo Gentilini, former major of Treviso. On September 14th , Gentilini pronounced several sentences against Roma and Muslims. In particular, he accused Roma children of stealing elderly people and invited the audience to kick off a revolution against them. Anyway, Gentilini does not seem very worried about the accusations. He said that he pronounced those sentences because he doesn't want "Roma to beg or Muslims to commit illicit acts". He believes Roma and Muslims to be a national problem. He claims to have just reported the fears of his fellow citizens and promises "to keep on fighting for discipline, order and the rule of law".

Italy: Thousands of people lead invisible life

Rome, 21/09/2008 - They speak Italian, eat Italian and cheer for Italy's soccer stars, but they are not Italian. In fact, it's hard to say what they are. Thousands of people are living in Italy without citizenship or identity documents from any country. Most were citizens of countries that no longer exist, such as Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union. But they never received citizenship from the countries that replaced their broken-up nations, and they also fail to meet the requirements to become citizens of Italy. It's hard to know how many there are because they survive on the margins of society, but the Sant'Egidio Community, a Rome-based Catholic organization, puts the number at about 10,000 to 15,000. They are often hunted by authorities, who try to deport them as illegal immigrants even though they have nowhere to go.

Read more on <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/09/14/europe/EU-FEA-Invisible-In-Italy.php>

UK: Council seeks destruction of Dale Farm Youth Centre

Basildon, 26/09/2008 - A local authority is threatening to demolish a community centre built by the Dale Farm Travellers, creating new tensions as the long-running eviction battle over Dale Farm heads back to court. The Saint Christopher's Centre, which opened in May, has become the latest target of the Basildon Council as it seeks to remove about 90 Traveller families from their homes in Southeastern England. "They're turning up the terror to make us leave," said Richard Sheridan, president of the Dale Farm Housing Association.

Read more on <http://euyouthspeak.org/roma/?p=7693>

UK: the Homes and Communities Agency will take on responsibility for the Gypsy site grant

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Baroness Andrews): My honourable friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Iain Wright) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement. The Homes and Communities Agency as established in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 will for the first time bring together in one agency housing and regeneration funding, public land and expertise to deliver decent, affordable housing and regenerate our communities by creating places where people choose to live. It will play a key role in turning our ambition to deliver 3 million new homes by 2020 into a reality. As part of that role, I am today announcing that from 1 December 2008 the Homes and Communities Agency will take on responsibility for the Gypsy and Traveller site grant, which provides funding for the provision and refurbishment of Gypsy and Traveller sites. This approach will bring delivery of homes for Gypsies and Travellers into line with the arrangements for housing and accommodation delivery for the rest of the community. It reflects our determination to address the existing shortfall in accommodation for all in society, tackling the problems that can be caused by unauthorised camping and the poor life chances of Gypsies and Travellers themselves.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldhansrd/text/80929-wms0001.htm#0809153000011>

Czech Republic: Roma plan gets mixed reviews

Prague, 24/09/2008 - Regional Development Minister Jiří Čunek's multifaceted proposal to address problems within the Roma community is being met with mixed reviews among Roma officials and local humanitarian groups. Published earlier this month, the 30-page proposal, which ministry officials call "a motivational effort for Czech municipalities," has drawn staunch criticism from some authorities mainly for suggesting that Roma citizens be divided into three groups based on origin and income level.

Read more on <http://www.praguepost.com/articles/2008/09/24/roma-plan-gets-mixed-reviews.php>

Czech Republic: Romani ghetto may emerge in mountain village

Prague, 29/9/2008 - A Romany ghetto might emerge in the Czech mountain village Ostravice as a company plans to build housing for Romanies from Ostrava there but the residents strongly disagree with the plan, Mayor Jaromir Dobrozemsky told journalists Monday. The Ostrava-based REALIS-INVEST company that owns the area of the former local social care institution intends to build housing for about 40 to 50 Romany families from Ostrava on the premises. The municipal authorities met representatives of the company and the local Romany community on Monday, but the talks produced no concrete results, Dobrozemsky said. The company spokeswoman declined to comment on the matter asking journalists to send their questions in writing. According to Dobrozemsky, the company has proposed two variants of the use of the abandoned premises. According to the first one, the abandoned buildings will be reconstructed to be used as tenant houses. According to the second one, housing for Romanies will be built there. "No decision has been made and the talks will continue. The decision will take a long time to be made," Dobrozemsky said. He said the Romany representatives asked about the ways of solving their social situation on Monday.

Read more on http://www.praguemonitor.com/en/433/czech_national_news/28608/

Romania: Over 300 projects for the Roma

Bucharest, 29/09/2008 - 318 projects were submitted by September 17th in order to access the 18 million euros made available through a PHARE project intended to improve the situation of the Roma, according to a press release of the General Secretariat of the Government. Most projects – namely 206 – focus on small community and dwelling infrastructure, 62 projects focus on healthcare, 42 – on vocational training and income-generating activities, and the other five projects mention no specific area. The PHARE 2006 project, implemented by the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG), is part of the Multi-annual PHARE 2004-2006 Program and represents a tool for achieving the National Strategy for improving the Situation of the Roma. Out of the 18 million euros intended for the improving the situation of the Roma, six millions represent co-financing from the Government.

Source: www.divers.ro

Serbia: Romanian minority will not accept Roma as neighbours

Belgrade, 29/09/2008 - Ethnic Romanians in a Belgrade municipality say they will organize to stop a planned settling of Roma in their community. The Romanians of Ovca say they have formed a "crisis headquarters for defence", ahead of the planned arrival of Roma - or Gypsies - who currently live in a slum, known also as "the Cardboard City", under the Gazela bridge, in central Belgrade. The city of Belgrade will first build housing units for the Roma and once this is completed remove them from the squalor without basic infrastructure they currently live in, but Ovca residents, members of the only ethnic Romanian community in the territory of the capital, say this would "assimilate them".

Read more on <http://kosovoroma.wordpress.com/2008/09/29/romanians-wont-accept-roma-as-neighbors/>

Bulgaria: Annual Report on Youth for 2007

Sofia, 29/09/2008 - The Council of Ministers approved the Annual Report on Youth for 2007, the Government Information Service said. The report is compiled for the sixth year in a row. It was written by an interdepartmental expert council including representatives of government ministries, agencies and other entities concerned with youth policy, and representatives of the academic and youth communities. Currently, Bulgaria is below the average European indices of youth unemployment; if the "Roma factor" is isolated (these are, above all, young Roma without education and qualifications, functionally illiterate, who cannot find their place on the labour market - 14 per cent of the youth community, according to the survey) the country is at one of the lowest places in the EU in terms of unemployment. The share of unemployed young people with higher education has exclusively members of the Roma community.

Read more on <http://www.socialnoprava.info/article1931.html>

Bulgaria: country below average European index for unemployment in youths, says State Agency

30/09/2008 - Sofia. Bulgaria stands below the average European index for youth unemployment according to the annual report of the State Agency for Youth and Sports, a reporter of FOCUS News Agency informed. According to the report, in case the Roma minority factor (14% of youths) is excluded, Bulgaria stands on one of the last places in the EU in terms of unemployment levels.

Source: FOCUS News Agency

Roma musician Spinelli presents his Cds in Rome, 3 october

Friday October 3 in Rome at the Feltrinelli Books and Music, Piazza Colonna 31/35, beginning at 18.00, will be presented in absolute preview the collection of musical scores for the symphonic orchestra of the musician and composer Alexian Santino Spinelli entitled "Romano Drom" (Romany Caravan). The book, containing 11 songs, is published and distributed internationally by Ut Orpheus editions of Bologna, the prestigious publishing house of classical music, in collaboration with CNI Music. Will be presented to the version Ensemble and Accordion alone. Each volume will have a different color: blue, green and red that are the colors of the Romany flag acknowledged to the UN. The work is unique because it is the first collection of works for symphony orchestra composed and published by a Roma. On will also present the new Alexian group music CD entitled "Me pase ko Murdevèlë - me next to God" (Compagnia Nuove Indie CNI). Participants at the event, major international publishers Roberto De Caro (Ut Orpheus Editions), and Paolo Dossena (CNI Music), set course for representatives of national and foreign press. The event will be taken up by RAI - Italian Radio and Television.



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, lobby-

ing and policy development.

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