

ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

European elections 2009: Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria

Eastern Europe's Gypsies have borne the brunt of hate-fuelled campaigns by Right-wing extremist parties. Dozens of families have been firebombed out of their homes in at least four countries and police have said the violence has been triggered by electioneering. Mobs have been responsible for attacks on gypsies, who define themselves as Roma and are a distinct ethnic group with a long history of persecution in Eastern Europe. Nataalka Sivakova, a two-year old Czech girl is fighting for her life in an intensive care after three petrol bombs were hurled through the window of the family home in mid-April. The attack was blamed on members of the Workers Party, one of two extreme Right-wing parties competing for seats in the European Parliament. It's competitor, the Czech National Party maintains close ties to the BNP. Similar attacks have also taken place in Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Gypsy leaders have warned that the atmosphere is the most hostile since Adolf Hilter sent gypsies along with Jews and homosexuals to the extermination camps. While most of Europe has failed to notice the rising tide of election related violence in the East, Canada has warned it faces a refugee crisis as a result. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said he was considering withdrawing visa free access from Czechs after the number of Gypsies claiming asylum soared to 853 last year, from just 78 the year before.

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/5430340/European-elections-2009-Slovakia-Czech-Republic-Hungary-and-Bulgaria.html>

Comment (with ERIO's President intervention): A bridge too far

Saintes Maries de la Mer, 31/05/09 - It was not the first time that Roma, usually called Gypsies, were gathered to participate in the Gypsy's Pilgrimage. On May 24 , Les Saintes Maries de la Mer, (Saint Mary's of the Sea,) a small fishing village located on the Mediterranean coast in Southern France was crowded by more than 10, 000 Gypsies from all over the world who came to worship the statue of a Cristian Saint, named Sarah. The destination of the pilgrimage was a Romanesque church, which dates from the 12th Century. As the relics were lowered, during the worship, some were holding up babies, as the belief goes that to touch the relics before they touch the ground is to receive a wondrous healing and protection from misfortune. The President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC,) Mario Sepi was invited by Payer Baptiste, President of the Gypsies Community of the region Languedoc-Roussillon and the Mayor of Fourques, Gilles Dumas to make their first steps together to develop cooperation between the region and the EESC concerning the Roma integration into civil society. [...]. But the Roma are more afraid of discrimination than hoping for integration because of what has happened, including burning out of their makeshift homes in Italy by groups they said were racist. An Amnesty International Report last week said that the EU has a dismal record in preventing violations of human rights which it said have deteriorated because of the economic crisis which keeps the Roma stay firmly excluded from public life in all countries. According to a recent report by the Vienna-based Fundamental Rights Agency, in the last 12 months, 50 percent of Roma say they have been victims of discrimination in the EU and are afraid of more episodes and being further isolated from mainstream society because of the worldwide economic recession that has hit the EU hard, believing they will become even more targeted by people who lose their jobs and

become socially antagonistic. [...] As European elections loom on June 7, most of Roma people at the village of Saint Mary's of the Sea, avoided giving their opinion and tried to keep a low profile, calling to mind a statement from *Pedro Aguilera, the Chair of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO), at a conference in the European Parliament on Roma access to political participation, in April. He stated that only two Roma have been elected to the European Parliament, out of a population of more than 10 million and that there should be 24 Roma based on their ratio to the rest of the population.* Sigmund wanted to make clear that political participation of Roma can help the integration of Roma at a European level but said that getting 24 of them elected to the European Parliament is not realistic. "How we can elect 24 Roma, if there are not candidates? Who will elect them, if they are not asking for a place? It's the wrong direction. First of all we have to start at the national level of each country," she said. Concerning the European elections, Sepi said that the European electoral campaign avoids the real concerns and problems of Europeans, such as minorities' issues and this creates a gap between citizens and the European Institutions.

Source: <http://www.neurope.eu/articles/94551.php>

Comment: the cost of marginalisation

Millions of Roma in Europe live in marginalisation and face social exclusion. They cannot find jobs, their children are out of school or learning less than their non-Roma peers, and they face access barriers to health services. Many Roma families live in ghettoised settlements in terrible housing conditions. Though European citizens, they do not have equal opportunities. This is a human rights and social tragedy. Yet what is often overlooked is that social exclusion of the Roma is also an economic tragedy. It comes at a considerable cost to the economies of central and south-eastern Europe. Taking the Czech Republic as an example, recent research by the World Bank reveals that social exclusion of about 50,000 Roma living in marginalised localities alone may have resulted in losses of hundreds of millions of euros in 2008. How come? Because the productive contribution of Roma to the economy is a lot lower than it could be. Roma are less likely to be employed, and those who are employed often work in low skilled jobs with low pay and low value added.

Full article on: <http://www.esharp.eu/Web-specials/The-cost-of-marginalisation>

Italy: measures required to stop racist policies by national institutions

Milan, 02/06/09- It is time the European Union and the United Nations did something concrete to stop the racist policies being carried out by the Italian institutions. Over the last few years the Italian institutions have been carrying out clear and serious violations of human rights which have been criticized by the European Commission and Council; the UNHCR; CERD; and the principal organizations working for the protection of minorities. The sending back of refugees to Libya, the deportation of human beings fleeing from countries where humanitarian tragedies are underway; the camp clearances of Roma families from their makeshift shelters without the offer of alternative lodgings and assistance, are abuses of power which are going unpunished and making waste paper of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the most important EU directives opposing racism and xenophobia. Italy, with its persecutory policies being carried out by xenophobic political parties that have now reached the top positions of power in Italy (and are at present working their way into the European Parliament) reveals the weaknesses of the EU institutions and those of the United Nations, who appear to lack the means to stop the abuses being perpetrated in the

field of human rights. It is time to identify the means that will make the European directives effective, otherwise it is pointless to approve new ones.

Full article on: <http://www.tolerance.ca/Article.aspx?ID=45565&L=fr>

Italy: Amnesty International reports racism against Gypsies

Rome, 29/05/09 - Amnesty International alleges in its new human rights report that Italy has embraced racism by not respecting the basic human rights of Roma Gypsies. The non-governmental organization said Friday that by not taking action to protect Roma Gypsies that were targets of racially-motivated attacks in Italy, Italian authorities failed to respect the migrants' basic human rights. Among the alleged illicit actions against the Roma Gypsy community was an assault on a pregnant Romani woman and unlawful forced evictions, the international group said in its 2009 global human rights report.

Source: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/05/29/Italy-accused-of-racism-against-Gypsies/UPI-82581243616079/

Italy: a new tool to help schooling of Roma children in Lombardy

Milan, 31/05/09 - 'Tutti a Scuola' (Everyone at school) is a guide for Roma and Sinti parents that tells how the Lombardy schools are organised, what are the services that the school offers and what are the rules that must be followed to attend. "But this is not just an information tool - said the Family and Social Solidarity Regional minister, Giulio Boscagli -. The Guide is meant as an aid in bringing minorities to the school, as frequency is one of the most important opportunities for integration." Boscagli also pointed to other initiatives in the region for the integration of Roma and Sinti people living in Lombardy, such as the training of linguistic-cultural mediators. The text, translated into three languages (Italian, Roma and Sinti), was developed with the help of teachers who have been working in schools with a high presence of Roma and Sinti children and that have implemented best practices in hospitality and school placement.

Source (in Italian): <http://www.ilgiornale.it/a.pic1?ID=354806>

Spain: study shows that 52.1% of Asturian Roma feels "discriminated"

Gijón, 29/05/09- Fundación de Secretariado Gitano presented the results of a study on the Roma population in Asturias. Fundación's director, Victor Garcia, stressed that 52.1% of Roma have ever felt discriminated against, a 37.8 % while seeking employment , 14.3% at the workplace and 21.9% in education. Moreover, Garcia noted that in towns of between 25,000 and 50,000 inhabitants, 65% of the Roma population have felt discriminated against. The study, conducted in 2007, took as sample interviews with 411 Gypsy people in 20 municipalities in Asturias. Garcia also said that, while the average age when ethnic Asturians began to work is 29 years old, among the Roma population this drops to 16 years old. There is also a 79.4 per cent of absolute or functional illiteracy among Gypsy people older than 16 years. Only 8.4% of Roma people in Asturias have an indefinite term contract, while the regional average is 24.1%. The study also shows that the average age of the Gypsy population is 26,3 years, the average household is made up of 4.31 members and the number of children is 3.30 per family, whereas data concerning the general population show an average age of 44.65, 2.71 household members and 1.15 children per family.

Full article (in Spanish): <http://www.europapress.es/asturias/noticia-estudio-empleo-senala-521-ciento-poblacion-gitana-asturiana-siente-discriminada-20090529161302.html>

UK: Gypsies and travellers say "trouble makers" give them a bad name

London, 31/05/09 - Gypsies and travellers on their way to Appleby Horse Fair say they shouldn't be blamed for problems caused by a minority group. Residents in Sedbergh and Cautley have expressed concern about the behaviour of a number of Gypsies and travellers settled near the villages as they wait for the annual event to begin next weekend. Cumbria Police have received numerous complaints about horses grazing on private land and, in one incident, horses causing damage to plants and wildflowers in a paddock in Sedbergh. MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale Tim Farron said these villages are "disproportionately affected" by the influx of travellers awaiting entry. But travellers claim it is a minority group of trouble makers who are giving the Gypsy and travelling community a bad reputation.

Source: http://www.thewestmorlandgazette.co.uk/news/4404238.Gypsies_and_travellers_say_trouble_makers_give_them_a_bad_name/

Slovakia: situation getting worse for minorities

Bratislava, 30/05/09 - The Council of Europe has warned in a report that attacks and political racism directed against Jews, Roma and Hungarian minorities have increased since the far-right Slovak National Party joined the government in 2006. The report by the Council's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) says Slovak political leaders have failed to condemn a string of incidents of political racism, including anti-Semitic abuse of MPs in Parliament. The Strasbourg-based Council of Europe is a 47-country grouping independent of the EU, and seeks to promote legal and human rights worldwide. Minority rights groups are calling on the government to publicly crack down on racism because they say that a perceived tolerance of racist attacks entrenches and encourages racism. "Politicians need to be standing up, giving condemnation and resolutely acting when there are racist attacks," Stano Daniel from the Milan Simecka Foundation, a human rights organisation, told IPS. "People see a politician making racist statements and may think, why should I be any different?" The ECRI report heavily criticises the government over a "worrying" recent rise in racist political discourse. Minority rights groups say the report highlights government reluctance to deal with racism, and the effect of that reluctance on societal tolerance of anti-minority sentiment. They point to growing anti-Hungarian rhetoric from some senior government figures, and say politicians now freely fuel anti-Hungarian sentiment among the population because they know it can win votes.

Source: <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47041>

Czech Republic: poll, Czech-Roma relations worse in decade

Prague, 29/05/09 - The assessment of relations between Czech Romanies and the rest of the population of the Czech Republic is now the most critical since 1997, according to a poll conducted by the polling institute CVVM in April and released Friday. Over one-half of those polled gave a critical assessment of the co-existence with Romanies in their place of residence. According to the poll, Romanies have worse conditions in employment and the government has been unable to settle the Romany issue in a satisfactory way. The co-existence of Romanies and other people was assessed as bad by 85 percent and good by only 10 percent, the poll found. A critical assessment of co-existence with Romanies in the place of residence was given by 56 percent of those polled and a positive assessment by 41 percent. The poll was conducted on a sample of 1056 respondents from March 30 till April 6.

Source: <http://praguemonitor.com/2009/06/01/poll-czech-roma-relations-worse-decade>

Serbia: Djelic, country contributes to Roma policy in Europe

Belgrade, 01/06/09 - While presiding over the Decade of Roma, Serbia has taken concrete measures for the integration of Roma people in Serbian society and contributed to Roma policy all over Europe, Serbian Deputy PM Bozidar Djelic told an international conference in Belgrade. He said that during Serbia's presidency, a strategy for Roma inclusion was adopted, significant funds for specific education of Roma were set aside and a loan of 10 million EUR for resolving minority housing issues was ratified. The first summit dedicated to Roma, held in Brussels, was a Serbian contribution, as well as the introduction of the office of coordinator for Roma issue at the European level, which is being prepared in the EU. It was emphasized that Roma were the youngest population in Europe and that investments in their education represent the best prospect of every state and a way to completely introduce them in society. There are between eight and 12 million Roma in Europe and around 450,000 in Serbia. On June 25, Serbia will hand over the office to chair the Decade to Slovakia.

Source: http://glassrbije.org/E/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7417&Itemid=26

Bosnia: Jew and Roma accuse government of discrimination

Sarajevo, 31/05/09 - A Bosnian Jew and an ethnic Roma are taking Bosnia to the European Court of Human Rights because the country's constitution prevents them from running for presidency and parliament. A statement from Minority Rights Group International said Tuesday that the two will challenge their state at the highest chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg on Wednesday. It will be the first time that the court considers the application of the Council of Europe's anti-discrimination laws in member states. Bosnia's constitution _ written in Dayton, Ohio, by peace negotiators in a hurry to stop Bosnia's 1992-95 war _ allows only Muslim Bosniaks, Christian Orthodox Serbs and Roman Catholic Croats to run for president or lawmakers _ thereby discriminating against minorities. Bosnian citizens Jakob Finci, a prominent Jew, and Dervo Sejdic, of Roma ethnicity, are arguing that by preventing people from certain religious and ethnic communities from running, the Bosnian constitution and relevant election laws are discriminatory and violate key U.N. conventions and European treaties. Such constitutional limitations are «not only discriminatory but they also exclude people from some ethnic and religious groups from participating fully and effectively in public life,» said Lucy Claridge, head of law at London-based Minority Rights Group International. In a statement, Minority Rights Group International said Bosnia's constitution violates the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination, while Bosnia has signed and ratified both. The court's decision, expected later this year, will be binding on the Bosnian government. If judgment is in favour of the applicants, then Bosnia must change its constitution and allow minorities to hold public office.

Source: <http://www.pr-inside.com/jew-and-roma-accuse-bosnia-of-r1293162.htm>

Canada: Ottawa sceptical of Roma persecution, as flood of refugee claimants grows

Ottawa, 31/05/09 - The flood of Roma refugee claimants into Canada is hastening with 653 applications since January from the Czech Republic alone, but federal immigration officials are rejecting claims that severe ethnic violence is leading the exodus. "We're monitoring very closely the rising number of asylum claimants from the Czech republic ... No one is saying that the Czech Republic is a perfect country. That said, we find it hard to believe that [it] is an island of persecution in Europe," said Alykhan Velshi, a spokesperson for Immigration Minister Jason

Kenney. The approval rate for asylum claims from the Czech Republic is below average, said Mr. Velshi. Mr. Velshi wouldn't say what measures the Harper government might take, "because speculation on imposing or lifting visas ... create a risk of a run at the borders." But it seems like that might already be happening. Since the beginning of 2008, 1,506 people from the Czech Republic have applied to Canada as refugees, a dramatic increase when contrasted to 2007, with 78 applications. Canada lifted visa requirements Oct. 31, 2007. Most Roma who enter Canada move to southern Ontario, where an estimated 8,000 live. Last Tuesday, 95 Roma from the Czech Republic landed at Pearson International Airport and stayed for several days waiting to speak with Immigration Department officials. They have apparently moved on to Hamilton. Paul St. Clair, executive director of the Roma Community Centre in Toronto, said that number will only increase unless something is done to end the violence against the Roma populations in Eastern Europe, because Canada is seen as an easily accessible haven. "People on the street swear at the Roma, harass them, beat them up, throw Molotov cocktails in their homes ... and one of the slogans [skinheads] use is 'get out of Czech Republic, go to Canada!'" said Mr. St. Clair. Mr. St. Clair said now that countries like the Czech Republic and Hungary have been accepted into the European Union, the eyes of Brussels bureaucrats are no longer watching as closely how their minorities are treated. "Canada sneezes and it's in the Czech press. Same in Hungary ... Any change in the Canadian position is amplified 10-fold," said Mr. St. Clair.

Full article on: <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/toronto/archive/2009/06/02/ottawa-skeptical-of-roma-persecution-as-flood-of-refugee-claimants-grows.aspx>

Canada: Roma refugees take up residence at Pearson airport

Toronto, 31/05/09 - A group of Roma refugee claimants have made themselves at home at Pearson International Airport, waiting to meet with immigration officers who will decide their future in Ontario. As many as 30 refugees, including young children, have gathered in the arrivals section of Terminal 1. They arrived Tuesday and have passed their time chatting with each other, sleeping on benches and planning for their meeting. One of the refugees told CTV Toronto on Sunday that they're in Toronto because Romas living in the Czech Republic have been targeted by right-wing activists. Romas are a minority in the Eastern European nation who were once referred to as "Gypsies" and have been subjected to violent abuse. The refugees arrived in Toronto with only their luggage and their hopes that Canada will allow them to stay for good. Canada has become a popular choice for refugees in Czech Republic after a documentary aired portraying the country as a haven for immigrants. Martin Polak, one of the refugee claimants says the group is staying at the airport because people don't have a lot of money to spare for accommodations. He says, most of all, people don't want to miss their meeting with immigration officials at the airport, because if they do, they can be arrested. Airport officials and security authorities say the Roma visitors are not causing a disturbance and therefore have been allowed to stay. Some concerned airport employees have even brought the group some food to help make their wait more comfortable.

EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

UK: Norfolk prepares to celebrate Travellers

A month long event is being launched to help raise awareness about Travellers and Gypsies in the region. LUCY BOLTON reports how this often misinterpreted group has helped benefit the county. Launched today as part of a national event, the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month is second annual celebration and awareness-raising event for the country. Aimed at eradicating

many of the negative myths associated with the three ethnic groups, a string of events have been set up across the region to show how Gypsies, Romany people and travellers have contributed to our culture. The month is also being hailed as an opportunity for the three communities to celebrate their history, their culture and what it means to be part of the group in what is rarely discussed in mainstream society. Jake Bowers, Britain's only Romany journalist and broadcaster, said the history month is very important to raise awareness of communities enable people to celebrate and feel proud of past achievements. He said: "Nothing is taught about the ethnic groups in schools and 67pc of children have experienced racist bullying by staff or other children. "The history month is really a way of showing that Gypsy people have been here for 500 years and we have contributed to the culture. It's an attempt to tell the whole story. "It's hugely important as there's a vast amount of ignorance which blights travellers, Gypsies and the Roma community." Mr Bowers said Britain's 300,000 Gypsies, Roma and Travellers have lived, worked and travelled throughout Britain for more than 500 years, yet have been almost entirely written out of British history. He added: "Go to most museums, libraries and schools and nothing about our history and culture is kept or taught. "I think there's a big misinterpretation when we talk about a lifestyle rather than an ethnicity - but that's what it is, an ethnicity which cannot be adopted, it has to be passed down through blood." As part of the month-long event an exhibition celebrating the three ethnicities will be displayed in council offices and libraries around the region. The exhibition will initially be based at the North Norfolk District Council offices in Holt Road, Cromer and is being officially opened by representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller community at 12 noon on Wednesday. It will be open during normal office hours. Once it has travelled around the various council offices, including County Hall, the exhibition will also be on display at the Royal Norfolk Show. In Norfolk, children from the ethnic groups are supported through the Traveller Education Service.

Full article on: <http://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/content/news/story.aspx?brand=ENOnline&category=News&tBrand=ENOnline&tCategory=news&itemid=NOED30%20May%202009%2010:47:32:573>

Helsinki Commission: briefing on rise of violence against Roma

Washington D.C.- Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the U.S. Helsinki Commission) and Co-Chairman Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL), announced today the Commission will hold a briefing on: "Hard times and hardening attitudes: the economic downturn and the rise of violence against Roma", Tuesday, June 9, 2009

1 p.m.: Media availability with expert panelists

2 p.m.: Briefing begins

WHERE: 1539 Longworth House Office Building, Washington D.C.

Anti-Roma violence is escalating, dramatically illustrated by the gruesome murder of a father and his five-year-old son in Hungary in February and a fire-bombing in April that left a two-year-old child in the Czech Republic burned over 80 percent of her body. Such violence in the past has led to increased waves of Romani asylum seekers in North America. The Commission will hear from four experts working on Romani human rights issues who will discuss how the down economy and recent spike in violence could combine for similar affects this year, possible inter-ethnic instability, and challenges to ending the marginalization of Europe's largest ethnic minority. The following panelists are scheduled to speak: Katalin Barsony (Hungary), sociologist, filmmaker and project manager at the Budapest-based Roma NGO Romedia Foundation, Stanislav Daniel (Slovakia), Research Consultant, European Roma Rights Center, Isabela Mihalache (Romania),

Senior Program Manager, Roma Initiatives, Open Society Institute (OSI), Andrzej Mirga, Advisor on Romani Issues, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Media4Diversity -Taking the pulse of diversity in the media

This publication outlines the findings of a pan-European study on media and diversity conducted in 2008 by a consortium led by Internews Europe (Paris) in partnership with the Media Diversity Institute (London) and IFJ- the International Federation of Journalists (Brussels). In particular, it highlights 30 initiatives that merit attention because, on the one hand, they were able to combine innovation and originality in addressing diversity issues in an increasing competitive and commercial European media space; on the other hand, they can give lessons on how to create media cultures of diversity across Europe. The publication also includes a set of recommendations to the media, civil society organisations and policy-makers on how to further develop diversity in European media and to respond to the information needs of an increasing diverse population, thus contributing to social cohesion in European societies. A French version should be online by the end of this month as well as a German version of the Executive Summary and of the Recommendations parts of this document. Printed English and French versions of this publication should be available by mid-June. To order a copy, please send your request to EMPL-antidiscrimination@ec.europa.eu



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.

ERIO
Av. Edouard Lacomblé 17
Brussels 1040

Belgium

Tel: 0032(0)27333462 Fax: 0032(0)27333875
For more information: news@erionet.org / ivan.ivanov@erionet.org / www.erionet.org