

## ERIO ACTIVITIES

### **ERIO at the launch of the photo exhibition “In the Eyes of a Woman: Roma Portraits”**

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, ERIO participated in the reception of the launch of the World Bank’s photo exhibition – “In the Eyes of a Woman: Roma Portraits”. The exhibition was dedicated to the ‘2005 -2015 – Decade of Roma Inclusion’, a commitment by European governments to improve the socioeconomic status and social inclusion of Roma. As part of the founding organizations of the Decade, the World Bank has participated in projects supporting Roma in various areas. In the exhibition, the North American photographer Julie Denesha presents her reportage of various Roma communities in Slovakia with primary subjects being women and their children. The exhibition is dedicated to the more personal, intimate moments of the lives of Roma communities with the aim to show the reality and influence the viewers’ assumptions. Ms Livia Jaroka, Member of the European Parliament, delivered a speech in which she emphasised the importance of showing the reality of the Roma community and not fall into the use of common stereotypes. She also stressed the fact that in times of economic crises, the Roma are hit extremely hard, not only in terms of employment difficulties but also because tension between groups tends to increase when reality becomes difficult. “A focus on Roma issues and collaboration between agents is necessary in order to improve the incredibly difficult situation of the Roma across Europe.”

## EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

### **Czech EU commissioner Špidla: Roma to be affected by recession**

Prague, 24/04/09 - The current recession is increasing Romanies’ social exclusion, Vladimir Spidla, Czech European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, said at a meeting of the integrated platform for Romany integration Friday. As a result, EU countries should provide opportunities for integration to Romanies who constitute the biggest ethnic minorities in its member states, Spidla said. "We need constructive measures that will provide opportunities to Romanies, not repressive measure that will only deepen poverty and social exclusion," Spidla said.

Read more on <http://praguemonitor.com/2009/04/27/czech-eu-commissioner-roma-be-affected-recession>

### **Coe: Hammarberg, “Truth Commissions” regarding the Roma persecution**

Thomas Hammarberg, the European Council commissioner for human rights, asked last month for the set up of some “truth commissions” regarding Roma persecution in the European countries. In a document published in Strasbourg, he stated that the Roma population “is still confronted with high and durable levels of discrimination” in Europe. He suggest the setting up of some “truth commissions” regarding the sufferings endured by the Roma in the past, in order for the population to better understand this minority. The persistent negative attitudes of the population are a serious problem and until this problem will be solved, all the programs in favor of the Roma will fail, explained the commissioner. He underlined that “the exclusion is one of the main reasons of Roma migration in Europe”.

Source: DIVERS –[www.divers.ro](http://www.divers.ro)

**CoE: “Anti-Gypsyism a major human rights problem”, says Hammarberg**

Strasbourg, 27/04/09 – “In spite of pledges made to combat anti-Gypsyism, Roma rights continue to be violated all over Europe” said today Thomas Hammarberg in his latest Viewpoint, stressing that the Roma population faces long-lasting high levels of discrimination in the continent. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights therefore calls on European governments to take more effective and inclusive actions for the Roma. Furthermore, he reaffirms the importance for leading politicians and other opinion makers to avoid anti-Roma rhetoric and to stand up for principles of non-discrimination, tolerance and respect for people from different backgrounds.

Source: [www.commissioner.coe.int](http://www.commissioner.coe.int).

**OSCE meeting to discuss ways to combat hate crimes more effectively**

VIENNA, 30 April 2009 - A special OSCE meeting on how states can more effectively combat hate crimes starts in Vienna today. The two-day meeting, organized by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), will focus on effective implementation of hate crime laws, and will explore the different legal approaches available to states. Participants, including government representatives, civil society and international experts, will discuss obstacles facing police and prosecutors in bringing offenders to justice, and the challenges of combating violent hate groups. The OSCE participating States have committed themselves to stepping up their fight against hate crimes. ODIHR published a guide on hate crime laws for governments and civil society earlier this year ([http://www.osce.org/publications/odihr/2009/03/36671\\_1263\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/publications/odihr/2009/03/36671_1263_en.pdf)). The Office also assists states by reviewing draft legislation and training law enforcement personnel on hate crimes.

Source: OSCE Press Service

**External evaluation of the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (EYEO)**

This evaluation exercise was carried out by a consortium led by Rambøll Management, in partnership with Euréval-C3E and Focus Consultancy. The overall aim of this evaluation was to determine whether the EYEO was a success both at the European level and at the level of the 30 Participant Countries. As part of the final evaluation report, four thematic reports were produced, three of which to focus on three grounds of discrimination, namely racial and ethnic origin, age and sexual orientation. The fourth report addresses the way in which gender was mainstreamed across the actions and activities, carried out respectively at national and EU level. The final evaluation report and its four accompanying thematic reports are based on information from 10 country case studies undertaken in the following Participant Countries: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The final report on the EYEO and its 4 accompanying thematic reports are now available at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=483&furtherNews=yes>.

## ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

### **Italy: Milan introduces “Operation Repeller”**

Milan, 01/05/2009 - The European Union considers the integration of the Roma people and a respect of their dignity and fundamental rights a priority. Despite this the city of Milan is getting ready to spend the funds set aside by the Italian Government to solve the so-called “nomad emergency”. This emergency has already been solved through a persecution that has driven away 90% of the families originating from other Member States who had taken refuge in the city over the last twenty years. Ten million euros: enough money for solving once and for all the humanitarian tragedy the Roma people in Milan are subjected to. These funds would cover the costs of an urgent programme of health care, schooling, employment programmes and subsidized lodgings. Instead the money will be spent on “making secure” the few remaining ghetto-camps (in which racial laws known as “legality pacts” are in force) and installing gates and fences around all abandoned public and private areas (charging the costs of the operation to the owners in the case of private property). We are talking about an aberrant operation which has no precedent in civilised and democratic countries, because it implies that people living in conditions of extreme hardship and persecution cannot in any way seek shelter under the roof of a derelict building or under a bridge, not even if they are elderly, sick or accompanied by very small children. [...] “Repeller” is the name given to the poisons, the ultrasonic devices and metal spikes some pest control companies place in strategic points of buildings, yards and warehouses to keep mice, cockroaches, parasites and pigeons away from the area. [...] The fact is that the Roma people in Milan have become the “bogeyman”, the hysterical reflection of the ethnic hatred that the local institutions have fallen prey to. The few families that remain in Milan, hunted out by the police, subjected to episodes of racial violence and left without any assistance, are forced to do so because they cannot afford the renewal of valid documents (at a cost of 80-120 euros per person, plus the travel costs to the nearest consulate) and the return ticket to Romania (a further 80 euros). By Roberto Malini, Glenys Robinson, Matteo Pegoraro, Dario Picciau.

For further information and full statement: [www.everyonegroup.com](http://www.everyonegroup.com)

### **Spain: Secretariado Gitano awarded for campaign**

Malaga, 04/05/09 – Secretariado Gitano has been awarded for the TV adverts of its campaign “El empleo nos hace iguales” (employment make us equals) during the Malaga Cine Festival. Juan Reyes from the Andalusian Secretariado’s representation office collected the prize, that is one of the most important in the Spanish broadcasting industry.

Source (in Spanish): <http://www.deminorias.com/noticia.php?ID=20278>

### **Switzerland: Romanian Gypsies' passports with ‘beggar’ inscription to be refunded**

Geneva, 01/05/09 - Swiss authorities, after an investigation to find out which local official wrote the term “beggar” on the passports of several Romanian Roma ethnics, decided to pay for the replacement of the documents where the ‘beggar’ inscription was put. “It is a felony. These persons are already persecuted in their home countries. Imagine what they might suffer upon their return”, said the president of the Messemrom association, Monica Bonfanti. “We are currently running an investigation in order to find out whether it is the fault of our agents or not”, said Bonfanti, adding that agents that made such mistakes will suffer disciplinary consequences”. Swiss electors accepted in February, following a national referendum, to renew the right to free movement agreement with the European Union and to expand it to Romanians and Bulgarians. 59.6% of the electors were in favor of renewing the agreement. The referendum campaign was marked

by xenophobia accusations, after the UDC political formation used posters showing white (Swiss) and black (Roma) sheep, as well as posters in which foreign crows attack Switzerland.

Source: [http://english.hotnews.ro/stiri-regional\\_europe-5655377-beggar-swiss-inscription-romanian-gypsies-passports.htm](http://english.hotnews.ro/stiri-regional_europe-5655377-beggar-swiss-inscription-romanian-gypsies-passports.htm)

### **UK: Dale Farm, a UN safe zone?**

Basildon, 30/04/09 -: A United Nations committee is calling on the Basildon District Council to freeze its plans to bulldoze Britain's largest Traveller community, at Dale Farm in southeast England. Yves Cabannes, Chair of the UN Advisory Group on Forced Evictions, visited Dale Farm last week (April 23), and told residents that they should not have to negotiate with the Council while under the threat of eviction. "We have heard you say you want to stay where you are," said Mr Cabannes (shown below, with residents), who is also a professor at University College London. "We support you in that." Yves Cabannes at Dale Farm. About 90 families at Dale Farm stand to lose their homes following a January ruling by the British Court of Appeal that allows the eviction to proceed. The Court decision overturned an earlier May 2008 High Court ruling ordering the Council to find alternative land for the Travellers. A final appeal to the British House of Lords is being pursued. The UN intervention occurred as a result of the first face-to-face discussion between the Basildon Council Leader, Malcolm Buckley, and Dale Farm residents. Mr Buckley, who has since resigned his post, initially agreed to a closed meeting with seven residents. But members of the Essex Racial Equality Council, Essex Fire & Rescue Service and the UN group also insisted on attending. In total, 20 Dale Farm residents expressed fears for the safety of their children, the elderly and the sick in the event of an eviction. Afterward, Mr Cabannes assured them that his committee's report to the British government would recommend against an eviction. He said the UK has signed international legal agreements that strongly oppose forcible evictions. Mr Cabannes also commended the Dale Farm residents for their resistance, and praised them as an example to all Roma who are fighting anti-Gypsy racism in Europe. The Travellers are defined as a distinct ethnic group by British law and have long been targets of discrimination in the UK [...]. Lord Eric Avebury, a member of the British House of Lords, has also organized a May 14 meeting at the Houses of Parliament, to brief potential human rights monitors and the UN group on their roles in the event of an eviction.

*COME TO MEETING AT HOUSE OF LORDS, Committee Room 3, 2 pm, 14 May*

Full article on: <http://advocacynet.org/resource/1249>

### **Czech Republic: extremists attack peaceful Roma protesters**

Prague, 04/05/09 - A Czech news agency is reporting that dozens of extremists have attacked peaceful Roma protesters in the city of Chomutov, 100 kilometers (62 miles) northwest of the capital. CTK news agency says police have intervened, stopping neo-Nazis who shouted racist slogans and threw a flare into the crowd, and the protest rally has now ended. Thousands of activists have been gathering Sunday in 14 places around the country to protest anti-Roma racism. The protests were triggered by an arson attack against a Roma family last month that left a two-year old girl in critical condition.

Source: AP

### **Czech Republic: Gypsies seek pope's assistance**

Prague, 28/04/09 - Czech Gypsies have called on the pope to help them improve the status of their people, who have suffered discrimination across Europe. Roma Realia, a Czech Romany non-governmental organization, asked Pope Benedict XVI to assist in organizing a debate on the

social position of Gypsies in the Czech Republic and in other European countries, Prague Radio said Tuesday. The Romany activists, in a letter to Pope Benedict, warned of the alleged rising animosity between Czechs and Gypsies that they said might slip out of control. The Gypsy activists condemned Czech authorities for lacking knowledge how to cope with the issue. Last week, Vladimir Spidla, European Union's commissioner for employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, said the Romany's discrimination in Europe is unacceptable. Addressing reporters in Prague Friday, Spidla singled out Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic as countries where Gypsies were maltreated or killed on racial motivation, the Serbian news agency Beta reported.

Source: [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/2009/04/28/Czech-Gypsies-see-popes-assistance/UPI-26461240939157/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/04/28/Czech-Gypsies-see-popes-assistance/UPI-26461240939157/)

### **Czech Republic: Ministry maps school segregation**

Prague, 04/05/09 - Rigid system, parent apathy behind Roma placement in 'practical schools'. The kindergarten at the Ostrava-Kunčičky elementary school caters to children from socially disadvantaged families, comprising mostly local Roma. As teacher Jarmila Grossmannová goes through the attendance roster on a recent morning, she notes that 15 of the class' 18 students are absent. The three girls that did show up, Světlana, Kristýna and Natálka, seem shy but cheerful as they dance to a music video and sing along. "It is one of the few things I can do with them, because attendance is so erratic," Grossmannová explains.

Source: <http://www.praguepost.com/news/1162-ministry-maps-school-segregation.html>

### **Hungary: Roma take to streets in self-defence**

Budapest, 03/05/09 - Panicked Roma communities in Hungary are forming self-defence groups after a spate of attacks on their settlements claimed five lives in 10 months. The murders have led police to double the size of a task force investigating anti-Roma crimes and police sources believe the same group may be responsible for attacks using rifles and home-made explosives. Far-right groups have denied any links to the attacks, but emphasise the need to fight "Gypsy crime". "We're getting organised," says Gyula Borsi, a Roma leader in Tiszalök, north-east Hungary, where the latest victim was buried last week. "We have no other choice. We won't permit our members to carry weapons of any sort," he said, "no guns, no axes." The new Roma civil defence groups will patrol until dawn in groups of six in the streets of the cigány-telepek - the Gypsy ghettos - where the Roma of eastern Europe are usually found. Ninety per cent of Roma interviewed in Hungary in a recent EU survey said discrimination due to ethnic origin was widespread, followed by 83% in the Czech Republic and 81% in Slovakia. The report, by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, found "high levels of discrimination and victimisation among the Roma in the seven member states surveyed". The figures for Hungary are particularly alarming, because until now, the country had claimed to have one of the more enlightened pro-Roma policies in the region. There are elected local minority councils, a system of scholarships for secondary and higher education, and carefully calibrated funds for schools to try to ensure classes have no more than 25% minority pupils.

Full article on: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/03/roma-hungary-race-discrimination>

### **Hungary: Gypsies targeted in deadly attacks**

Tiszalok, 29/04/09 - Thousands of mourners headed Wednesday to the funeral of Jenő Koka, the fifth Hungarian Gypsy shot to death in a series of crimes police say may have been committed by the same group. There have been at least seven similar attacks since July 2008 against Roma — as Gypsies often preferred to be called. All involved shotguns and firebombs and were carried

out at the edge of small villages near a major highway that provides a quick escape route. Police are offering up to 50 million forints (\$225,000, euro170,000) for information about the crimes and have boosted the number of officers working to solve the attacks from 70 to 100. "These are professional killers," said Justice Minister Tibor Draskovics. "But neither I nor the police will rest until we catch them."

Read the full article on: [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gnuutAni\\_Pif0FViyQ3qFdBluQD97S0FO80](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gnuutAni_Pif0FViyQ3qFdBluQD97S0FO80)

### **Hungary: Fidesz opposition party says EU officials condemn anti-Roma violence**

Budapest, 01/05/09 - The main opposition Fidesz party calls for resolute action against anti-Roma violence and against incitement to hatred but also opposes branding Hungary as a whole as racist, a Fidesz parliamentary official told MTI after talks with European Commission Vice-President Jacques Barrot in Budapest on Friday. Zoltan Balog, head of the human rights committee, and Barrot, EU Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, agreed that incitement to hatred and murders are unacceptable and intolerable in a democracy, and that all political forces should join forces to prevent them. At the same time, they called it unfortunate if the whole population of the country is branded as racist before the perpetrators of certain anti-Roma crimes are arrested. Over the past half a year five Roma people were killed in three Hungarian localities by perpetrators believed to be belonging to the same circle. To date, however, none of the killers have been arrested.

Source: <http://english.mti.hu/default.asp?menu=1&theme=2&cat=25&newsid=261330>

### **Hungary: survey, majority have negative feelings about the Roma**

Budapest, 03/05/09 - Eighty-two percent of those asked in a recent survey expressed negative feelings concerning the Roma minority, the Progressive Institute told MTI on Sunday. Eighty-four percent of the respondents said that Roma people disliked working and that is why they were in a bad situation. Both percentages were slightly higher than the figures of a similar survey conducted last autumn. Seventy-four percent of respondents rejected the idea of affirmative action as a good method for improving the situation of the minority. Eighty percent said they personally could not do anything to improve the bad relationship between the Roma and the non-Roma. Asked about who could do something for this purpose, most of them mentioned first the Roma community, and then the government. The Roma community, Hungary's largest ethnic minority, is estimated at around 600,000. Only about 100,000 declared themselves to be ethnic Roma during the minority government elections in 2006. The survey was conducted on a representative sample of 2,500 adults between March 23 and April 7.

Source: <http://english.mti.hu/default.asp?menu=1&theme=2&cat=25&newsid=261366>

### **Hungary: the Time magazine, 'Murder mystery: who's killing Hungary's Gypsies?'**

Jeno Koka's killers shot him in the chest moments after he had bid good night to his wife Eva and stepped from his house on his way to a shift at the nearby pharmaceutical factory where he worked. The 54-year-old grandfather bled to death only a few paces from his doorstep. Although Koka's wife said she never heard the shot that felled her husband, hundreds of thousands of others across Hungary did. Koka's murder on April 22 was the fifth in recent months of a member of Hungary's 600,000-strong Roma community. Hungarian police believe that a small group of killers is targeting Roma, who are also known as Gypsies and remain one of the most marginalized and neglected groups in Europe.

Full article on: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1895255,00.html>

### **Belarus: 40 days commemoration of Gypsy girl suicide**

Tolochin, 01/05/09 - Today is 40 days when one 14 years Roma girl was suicide. According to Russian Orthodox Church tradition, 40 days its symbolic. It was in Tolochin, small town in Vitebsk region. According to Tolochin branch office of Party of Communists of Belarus, today, local library membership card is the only one document which certificated her existence in that life. There was no birthday certificate, no medical card, no school attendance certificate; nothing left...Nothing left, except just simple short piece of paper, librarian membership card. According to local leader of Tolochin branch office of Party of Communists of Belarus, officially there is no evidence about Natalia Tumarevich's existence in Tolochin!!! Natalia Tumarevich was typical Roma girl. Nice, bold, funny girl with whole life in front of her. How did she live? What dreams she had? What she liked? We don't know...

Full article: [http://www.dzeno.cz/?c\\_id=18196](http://www.dzeno.cz/?c_id=18196)

## EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### **Publication on new Roma identities in Central and Eastern Europe**

The latest issue of the scientific journal "Transitions" (Volume 48, n°2), published under the joint coordination of the Institute of Sociology at the Free University of Brussels (ULB) and of the European Institute at the University of Geneva, has been published and focuses on the theme "New Roma identities in Central and Eastern Europe".

Source: [http://www.cevipol.site.ulb.ac.be/fr/revue-transitions\\_transitions-vol-48-2-sous-presse-.html](http://www.cevipol.site.ulb.ac.be/fr/revue-transitions_transitions-vol-48-2-sous-presse-.html)

### **Eurovision: 'Supergypsy' ready to strike**

Prague, 03/05/09 - He's 25, Roma and proud of it — and the official contestant at this month's Eurovision Song Contest for the Czech Republic, a country plagued by rising extremism and attacks against its gypsy minority. "Can you imagine this? A Roma who represents the Czech Republic, a country where racism is so strong. That's huge!" the thin, restless, energetic Radoslav Banga wearing a white hip-hop hat exclaimed with a broad smile. He was chosen for the annual songfest that captivates much of the continent with his group Gipsy.cz, despite loud protests from home-grown neo-Nazis. "Aven Romale", or "Go Roma", is the title of the song he wrote specially for the event, held in Moscow this year where the winner will be named May 16. And with a passion for provocation and parody, Banga incarnates a kitsch "Supergypsy" in the music video that goes with it, clad in a red overcoat and inspired by one of his own heroes, Queen's lead singer the late Freddie Mercury. His Eurovision entry, belted out in broken English, a bit of Roma and some Czech, sums up Banga's ethos: "If you keep that energy/Gipsy sounds like symphony." He calls the gipsy-rap tune played at a breakneck tempo as a "mishmash" of genres, and refuses all labels except that of a "musician". "For me, there are only two styles of music: good and bad," he said, saying he draws inspiration from Roma folklore, pop, traditional Indian music, rap and hip hop. Banga's first CD, "Romano Hip-Hop", won a golden disc award for 10,000 copies sold. And his second, "Reprezent", caused a minor scandal last year with a song dedicated to then deputy prime minister Jiri Cunek, a Christian Democrat famous for his anti-Roma rhetoric.

Read the full article on: <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/client/pagesdetails.asp?nid=31955&ccid=13>

### **Turkey: Sulukule exhibition opens at Hidrellez**

After being announced officially as an Urban Transformation Project area in 2005, the inhabitants of Sulukule have been facing evictions and demolitions. The exhibition claims to be a documenta-

tion of the brutality of these evictions and demolitions Sulukule has undergone since 2005 with photographs, videos, objects and written documents. The exhibition will open on May 6, 2009, the day of Hidrellez at Hafriyat –Karaköy. As one of the demolished and evicted neighborhoods of Istanbul, Sulukule is a 1000 year-old Romani settlement. It is one of the most important urban spaces with its rich features, local identity and architecture as a neighbourhood. The collaboration of TOKİ and Istanbul Municipality together with local municipalities have started a set of evictions against disadvantaged neighborhoods, This process not only harms physical environment but also eradicates the socio-cultural structure and communal identity. During this problematic process, Sulukule Platform did pursue an oppositional fight and created resistance in order to raise public awareness about the related legal and human aspects. A lot of academics, researchers, press agencies and artists did support and still support Sulukule Platform. So, even though a major part of Sulukule is already evacuated and demolished, the neighborhood is still of interest to the public which thereby gives a chance to question the situation of unfair evictions. Documents that reveal the efforts of the Platform during the negotiation process with the municipality, the alternative urban plan prepared by the initiative called STOP, researches that have been done in the field together with press archives will be displayed in this exhibition in order to explain in detail, the eviction and demolition periods. The exhibition prepared by Sulukule Platform mainly aims to show that there are still a lot of things to do for Sulukule and other neighborhoods which suffer from state-led, forced urban transformation.



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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