

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

**Appeal from Livia Jaroka MEP for the protection of the Kosovar Roma refugees**

Brussels, 04/02/10 - Thomas Hammarberg (High Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe) held a working lunch with the representatives of the EU's main institutions. Representing the European Parliament's largest political group, the European People's Party (EPP), MEP Livia Járóka discussed the issue of Kosovar Roma repatriated from EU Member States with the High Commissioner. Thomas Hammarberg came to Brussels to present his issue paper on "Criminalisation of Migration in Europe" and to meet with representatives of the European Union's three main institutions in order to discuss the human rights implications of immigration. During the working lunch, Livia Járóka (Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Union, EPP) asked the High Commissioner about the implementation of the bilateral readmission agreement between Kosovo and Germany. During the war in 1999 and the following years, over 14 000 Roma fled from Kosovo to Germany, who due to the process, have lost their status of "toleration" providing the right to stay in the country and since staying in Kosovo at least officially "does not represent a direct threat to life and limb" they must leave Germany. Járóka reminded that 25 % of Roma threatened by the forced deportation had been born in Germany having no ties to Kosovo at all and Kosovar authorities had proven to be unable to resettle not more than 480 internally displaced persons from the scandalous lead contaminated camps of Cesmin Lug and Leposavi'c. "The security situation is also unsatisfactory and ethnically motivated violence is still wide-spread - she added. Hammarberg replied that regarding the serious malfunctions of Kosovar economy and the contradictory will of the refugees, he was also concerned about repatriation and that he wrote an open letter to Chancellor Angela Merkel in which he asked to consider suspending the repatriations, prolong the status of toleration and implement the readmission agreement only on voluntary basis. Regarding NGOs, Hammarberg said that most civil organizations left a great deal to be desired both in terms of their professional capacity and their independence from politics. However, the contribution of strong, professional and independent NGOs would be essential in bringing up and discussing most issues related to human rights - added the High Commissioner. Hammarberg agreed with Járóka upon the necessity of empowering stakeholder NGOs in terms of both financial and human resources. Further participants of the negotiation included Hans Nilsson, Head of Unit of the Secretariat General of the EU, Thierry Bechet, Adviser of the European Commission's Directorate General for External Relations, as well as members of the European Parliament Ulrika Lunacek and Cecilia Wikström.

**Comment: 'An undeclared Apartheid'**

In 2004, Romanian municipal authorities evicted more than one hundred "Gypsies" from their homes in the central region of Harghita County and relocated them to isolated, squalid land on the outskirts of nearby towns. Resettled in a series of small metal cabins, Roma families and young children were cramped together in close proximity to the hazardous waste from a sewage plant. As far as lobbyists at the time were concerned, this was just one of a series of human rights violations that had taken place across Europe in recent years, specifically targeting the Roma population in acts of so-called "anti-Gypsyism". One year later, on 2 February 2005, eight European governments—including Romania—gathered in Bulgaria's capital, Sofia, to sign the Declaration

of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Responding to realities of Roma poverty and segregation—particularly in the Eastern states of Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary—prime ministers pledged that the next ten years would be characterised by visible improvements to the social and economic welfare of Europe's largest and most marginalised ethnic minority. The rhetoric that surrounded the initiative at its launch was of integration and the promise of opportunity that had so far been withheld from the continent's seven to nine million Roma. Priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing were flagged as the focus for change and 'Nothing About Us Without Us' splashed as the mantra for an empowered Roma voice. The politicians had an agenda - and a convincing sound bite. In part, what the promisingly-titled initiative was supposedly trying to change, through international collaboration, was the stigma attached to a largely enigmatic ethnic minority. Yet, for some, the programme could only ever be a boon to events organisers and political think tanks faced with the task of reversing a history of persecution and transforming the profile of a group still pejoratively labelled "Gypsies" both popularly and politically. Undoubtedly, the "Gypsy" figure continues to produce paradoxical stereotypes in the popular imagination. On the one hand, we tend to indulge in the notion of exotic and romantic travellers - women dressed in bright colours and gold jewellery, telling fortunes in archaic painted caravans. On the other, however, it has become the universal brand of threatening "tramps and thieves" who wander Europe begging and stealing. Both have tended to attach themselves to Roma communities and their culture. The image of the rootless vagrant has endured despite the historical fact that for centuries they have been citizens of their countries of nationality.

Full article: <http://www.journal-online.co.uk/article/6378-an-undeclared-apartheid>

### **Comment on the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Launching the Decade of Roma Inclusion**

The official ceremony of the International Launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion took place on February 2, 2005 in Sofia, Bulgaria. The international launch was preceded by thorough preparation executed in a rather tight time frame. This had been the very first time when based on the enforcement of international organizations such an initiation was set off that could actually stimulate governments to make measurable quantitative and qualitative steps in order to accelerate the social and economic inclusion of Roma people. Delegations were formed and National Decade Action Plans were prepared, and the same day 5 years ago high rank governmental officials declared the years 2005–2015 to be the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Five years have passed since then and it is a great opportunity to stop for a few minutes and think over what this period has been like, what we have been able to achieve and can be proud of, and which are the areas we need to concentrate on in the second half of the programme. We are over a great number of International Steering Committee meetings and workshops. Since the beginning officially three additional countries joined the Decade so the full list of countries participating are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia (that has an observer status) and Spain. Besides the above member countries several significant international organizations joined the objectives of the Decade and actively participated in the development and implementation of the programme. A certain flow of communication and the exchange of best practices have been established among member countries, so by utilizing and learning from each other's successes or mistakes, they have had the opportunity to launch and implement programmes which are based on the cooperation of governmental and civil organizations to help Roma's integration.

Full article: [http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007\\_1468](http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_1468)

## ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

**UK: London Mayor to double number of Gypsy sites in London**

London, 01/02/10 - Boris Johnson is planning to double the number of Gypsy and Traveller sites in London, risking a backlash from his support base. Leaders of local authorities described the plans as "complete madness" because more than two-thirds of those likely to benefit are already housed. Under government guidelines, anyone with a "psychological aversion to housing" is entitled to a caravan site. The Mayor of London's proposal acknowledges that 72 per cent of its beneficiaries are already living in housing, but nonetheless sets out targets for some local authorities to provide as much as four times their current accommodation for Travellers. Councils have warned that they will be forced to spend millions of pounds on new land, and even develop greenbelt space, to meet the new targets. The targets were developed during the mayoralty of Ken Livingstone, Mr Johnson's predecessor. Under the London Plan, a planning document which is currently under consideration by Mr Johnson, the capital's overall accommodation for Travellers will be almost doubled by provision of an extra 538 pitches. A report by the Conservative Group on the London Assembly warns that the plans will have a "significant negative impact" on the capital's finances and result in "repercussions on other areas of delivery". Council leaders, responding to a survey by the Conservative Group, said that the needs assessment was flawed. They warned that they would be forced to "compromise wider housing targets" and buy additional land to provide accommodation that might not be used. Under the 2004 Housing Act, local authorities must assess the accommodation needs of Travellers in the same way that they do for other forms of accommodation. They must then identify land to meet the number of required pitches. Tony Arbour, the Conservative Assembly Member for South West London, told *The Times* that the methodology was flawed and the outcome "preposterous". He said that the use of Travellers sites had "significantly declined" and the data used in the London Plan had been collected by the Traveller community itself. Mr Arbour said: "It's clearly a desire rather than a need. You can imagine other groups of people would prefer to live in a big house because they have an aversion to a small house. Are we going to have people saying they should live next to a river because they like running water?" Several councils warned that social housing would be affected because there was a limited amount of land available, as well as limited budgets. Stephen Carr, leader of Bromley Council in southeast London, said that the proposal was "complete madness" which would have an impact on other areas such as social housing. "We will simply not conform to this ridiculous idea of psychological aversion to housing. We're talking about second and third generation Travellers that have responded to a wants rather than a needs survey." A spokesman for Mr Johnson said that providing pitches was a national government requirement. He added: "The methodology used to assess the need was approved by London councils, including those boroughs mentioned in Tony Arbour's survey, in partnership with the Mayor and carried out by an independent consultant. It has not been imposed by the Mayor on the boroughs. "Whilst the number of pitches, at 538, identified in the Plan is an increase on current provision, they are much lower than the 771 required by the Government's own guidance." Jill Brown, a spokesperson for the London Gypsy Travel Unit, said that the London Plan would not provide enough sites for Travellers. She said that asking Travellers to live in housing was like "asking a leopard to change its spots". "It is their culture and their history. They are victimised, prejudiced and bullied when they live on housing estates."

Source: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article7011115.ece>

## Sweden: health report sparks criticism

A newly released report by the Swedish National Institute of Public Health has sparked criticism for its lacking scientific methods. The report on the state of the health of Sweden's five official minorities comes to the conclusion that "Jews eat a lot of fruit and vegetable and are less vulnerable to poverty". Time and again Sweden has been criticised both by the United Nations and by the Council of Europe for doing too little to improve the living conditions of its minority populations. The international organizations have explicitly condemned Sweden's inadequate efforts to help its indigenous Sami people to maintain a lifestyle in accordance with their traditions. And time and again the Samis have filed complaints with the UN or other international bodies for what they consider to be discrimination. But the United Nations has also pointed to inadequate efforts by the Swedish authorities concerning the living conditions of other groups. Sweden's Finnish-speaking minority is believed to have a higher tendency for alcoholism and suicide than ethnic Swedes, while the Roma have simply suffered from general discrimination in their everyday lives. So, after years of complaints, the Swedish government finally assigned the National Institute of Public Health with mapping out the state of health among the five official minorities in this country: Sami, Finns, Tornedal-Finns, Roma and Jews. But just the government approach has already sparked criticism. Some Roma believe the health survey to be an indirect way for the authorities to register their ethnicity. And representatives of the Jewish community say there is no such thing as "Jewish health" - not in Sweden, nor anywhere else. Nevertheless, the survey carried out by Saman Rashid of the National Institute of Public Health was published a couple of days ago. But the quality of the science has been strongly criticised for such conclusions as: "Tornedal-Finns have a tendency of worse physical health than other groups living in Sweden". Or "Jews eat more fruit and vegetables than the rest of the Swedish population". And "they are less vulnerable to poverty". Researcher Saman Rashid concedes that his survey might be a little problematic in some ways. Only 400 of Sweden's approximately 20,000 Jews answered his questionnaire. The vast majority - of all minority groups - refrained from answering questions concerning their health and social situation. But Saman Rashid also maintains that there is no clear scientific definition as to when exactly a survey meets scientific standards. The coming months will show if the minority health report has actually helped Sweden to improve its somewhat battered reputation when it comes to dealing with its minorities.

Source: <http://www.sr.se/cgi-bin/International/nyhetssidor/artikel.asp?ProgramID=2054&format=1&artikel=3414164>

## Serbia: Belgrade Mayor says EBRD loan conditions unacceptable

Belgrade, 03/02/10 - Belgrade Mayor Dragan Đilas said that the Belgrade might not take a loan from the EBRD for the reconstruction of the Gazela Bridge. He said that the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) must change its condition related to the dislocation of a makeshift Roma community from under the bridge, in order for Belgrade to agree to the loan conditions. Đilas told B92 that a clause in on the dislocation of the settlement, that calls for apartments for the Roma to be built, was accepted without much consideration, and added that the construction of those apartments would cost EUR 5mn. "This is not a donation, but an economic loan, and if these are the conditions, we will not take it," Đilas said, adding that this was not acceptable for the city, since the EUR 33mn loan would have an interest rate of 25 percent, rather than five, attached to it. He said that the Roma that were moved out of the unhygienic communities under the bridge are now living under significantly better conditions and will be able to compete for getting new apartments through social services. Đilas said that it was suggested to the EBRD that conditions of the loan be considered by March 15, and that a meeting should be held next week with officials of this financial institution, adding that a decision on the loan "could come

earlier than expected". "If no agreement is reached, we will take out the loan from commercial banks," Đilas said, adding that the city of Belgrade wants to be the main carrier of the Gazela project if it ends up co-financing it, so that there would be no delays in the restoration of the bridge.

Source: [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2010&mm=02&dd=02&nav\\_id=64936](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2010&mm=02&dd=02&nav_id=64936)

### **Bosnia: minorities to force constitution change**

Sarajevo, 02/02/10 - Dervo Sejdic has served his country as a policeman but the Bosnian citizen does not have the right to stand for president because he is an ethnic Roma, an exclusion that also applies to Jews. Bosnia's constitution, drafted to end Europe's worst fighting since World War Two, allows only Muslims, Serbs and Croats -- former Yugoslavs who had fought each other in a 1992-95 war -- to run for the country's highest office. Sejdic complained to the European Court of Human Rights and won, a decision that could force the still divided Balkan state to look beyond its ethnic matrix in a year when important national elections are scheduled. "This ruling is of decisive importance for the development of Bosnia's democracy," said Sarajevo University professor Enver Kazaz. "This is the first example of civic action that will force authorities to react." If and when constitutional changes are implemented, analysts say it extend full civil rights to close to 500,000 Bosnians known as 'others', citizens who have largely abstained from voting for nationalist Serb, Muslim and Croat leaders in the country of 3.85 million. In its December decision, sparked by a complaint from Sejdic and Bosnian Jewish community ex-leader Jakob Finci, the European Court of Human Rights ruled the constitution was discriminatory and must allow minorities to run for high office. "With this suit, I started an avalanche aimed at correcting the inequality of citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina," said Sejdic, who added he will never run for president himself. Failure to implement the ruling could set Bosnia back even further behind its neighbours in its bid to join the European Union. But if Bosnian leaders do comply, they could open the door to constitutional change long sought by Western officials.

Full story: <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE61125120100202>

### **Turkey: Erdoğan to meet with Roma representatives in March**

Istanbul, 02/02/10 - State Minister Faruk Çelik announced yesterday that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will meet with representatives of the Roma community living in Turkey on March 14 to announce new measures vis-à-vis this community in the hopes of improving their living standards in addition to countering the discrimination they face. According to the Anatolia news agency, Çelik said the aim of the meeting is to discuss proposals for solutions to problems faced by the Roma. He noted that Erdoğan will declare what steps will be taken to help the Roma community. Çelik said the government launched a Roma workshop in December to listen to the Roma with the purpose of learning what they expect from the government. A number of proposals were made after the workshop, with Çelik pledging that the first step will be to construct new housing for the Roma community in Turkey with the cooperation of the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ). A report prepared by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government on the demands of the Roma people in Turkey, including the establishment of Roma institutes at universities, has been submitted to the opposition parties in Parliament. The government is working to expand the rights of previously disadvantaged groups and communities such as Kurds, Alevis and Roma. A government-sponsored workshop was held on Dec. 9, 2009 to address issues facing the Roma community. Representatives of Turkey's Roma community in Istanbul, Edirne, Kırşehir, Artvin, Van and several other cities, 120 people in all, attended the

event. Çelik, the state minister in charge of the Religious Affairs Directorate, sent a report on the Roma workshop to the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), asking for their views on and contributions to the issue. The report includes Roma requests to be mentioned in the Friday sermons, the inclusion of information about Roma in textbooks and the elimination of insulting expressions against Roma from course books as well as the provision of identity cards to all Roma and social programs to keep Roma children from abusing drugs, along with the prevention of early marriages. Since many Roma people live as nomads, they often do not have identity cards. Among other things, the Roma people want to receive an education and be respected in society. According to the workshop report there are 500,000 Roma living in Turkey, while other sources estimate as many as 2 million. Some 20,000 Turkish Roma are nomads. The most significant problem of the Roma is insult and discrimination. They are generally referred to as "çingene," a pejorative term which means Gypsy, but there are 20 other expressions commonly used in Turkish to refer to them.

Source: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-200355-101-erdogan-to-meet-with-roma-representatives-in-march.html>

## EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### UK: Catholic Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Support Network annual gathering

The 2010 National Gathering of the Catholic Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Support Network will take place at Wistaston Hall in Crewe, from Tuesday 9 March until Wednesday 10 March. The National Gathering will bring together priests, religious and lay people involved in this ministry, as well as Gypsies, Roma and Travellers themselves and others who are sympathetic to their concerns. It will provide an opportunity for informal sharing and for exploring issues of common interest in an atmosphere of prayerful reflection. To book a place, or for further information, please contact: Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Support Network, Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ), 9 Henry Road, London N4. The cost is £60 for the full event or £25 for Wednesday only. Cheques should be made payable to CARJ. Those who are unable to reclaim the cost from their parish, diocese, agency or religious order may apply for a discount, and in some cases we may be able to help with travel expenses.

More info on: <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=15570>

### Roma conference web-site now open for registration

The Roma conference web-site is now available in English at <http://roma-conference.eu/web/roma/home> and is open to the public for on-line registration. It will soon become available in other languages too.



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-depth 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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