EUROPEAN ROMA INFORMATION OFFICE
E-NEWS 12/02/2010

ERIO ACTIVITIES

ERIO is recruiting a policy officer

Responsibilities:

- The policy officer will be responsible for developing policy statements and position papers as well as recommendations to EU and other intergovernmental and governmental institutions. The policy officer will participate in the implementation of ERIO's strategy, activities and events.
- Have responsibilities for the coordination of specific project .This activity will involve communication with project partners, review their reports and assist them in their work at national level.
- Participate together with the Executive Director in advocacy initiatives related to different policy fields with EU institutions, governmental representatives and NGOs
- Work closely with the Executive Director and other ERIO officers on fundraising schemes, seek for funding and develop project proposals.
- Liaise closely with ERIO network members.
- Draft activity reports as well as assist in drafting ERIO's work program.

Expected qualifications:

- Degree in relevant subject such as International relations, human rights, political science, social science, law or public administration
-At least three years experience in European level NGO
- Knowledge of Roma issues and minority rights
- Knowledge of functioning and structure of the EU institutions
- Knowledge in EU anti-discrimination law and related policies will be advantage
- Fluent written and spoken English. Working knowledge of French and Romanes will be advantage
- Ability to work in a multi-cultural team in various contexts.
- Ability to take multiple tasks
- Commitment and passion to ERIO's mission

Apply sending your CV and motivation letter to: ivan.ivanov@erionet.org

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

European Parliament: Roma housing debate

Strasbourg, 10/02/10 - A law to allow financial assistance for housing for the EU's "marginalised communities" - primarily the Roma community - has been backed by MEPs. The proposal by the European Commission was supported by MEPs on the European Parliament's Regional Development Committee , although they called for a number of amendments to be made. The MEP's lead speaker on the law, Dutch MEP Lambert Van Nistelrooij urged the European Commission to expand the law to affect Roma people in all parts of the EU. The original proposal would only apply to countries who have joined the EU after 2004. If passed, the law would allow EU funding to renovate or replace poor quality housing used by the Roma community. During the debate, UKIP MEP David Campbell Bannerman raised concerns that expanding the law to cover the whole of the EU could lead to increased mass migration from the Roma community. However Hungarian

MEP Kinga Göncz said that an improvement in housing standards in eastern Europe would make it less likely for Roma migration. At the vote on 10 February 2010, MEPs passed the measure by 588 votes to 57.

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/europe/newsid_8499000/8499336.stm

CoE, Hammarberg welcomes Greece initial steps to minority rights, urging implementation

Strasbourg, 11.02.2010 – The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, concluded yesterday a three-day visit to Greece during which he held discussions with a number of authorities including the Vice-President of the Government, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Citizen Protection. He also met with national, international and non-governmental organisations. The Commissioner welcomed the willingness of the Greek government to tackle long-standing, structural problems in the field of asylum and police misconduct. "If implemented rigorously, systematically and in conformity with international standards, the planned changes have the potential of coping successfully with serious human rights challenges in Greece", Commissioner Hammarberg said. The Commissioner noted with deep concern that asylum seekers in Greece continue to face enormous difficulties trying to gain access to the asylum procedure, and do not always enjoy basic safeguards such as interpretation and legal aid. He welcomed the current plans to proceed with an overhaul of the system and move towards a fair, accessible and swift asylum procedure. This includes in particular the establishment of an independent asylum agency and screening centres at entry points. During the visit, the Commissioner stressed that asylum and immigration are issues that can only be tackled effectively by a concerted effort at European level and that solidarity by other EU countries must therefore be increased. The Commissioner was pleased to note the ongoing reform of nationality legislation, which aims to facilitate acquisition of Greek citizenship, *inter alia,* by children born in Greece to non-Greek parents. The reform will also grant long term residents the right to vote in local elections. "In this way, Greece will move towards greater compliance with European standards, and benefit from enhanced participation of people of migrant background to society", Commissioner Hammarberg stated. As regards police misconduct, the Commissioner welcomed current plans to establish an office to deal with police complaints. He appreciated the openness of the Minister of Citizen Protection to draw on the expertise of other European countries and the guidance of the Commissioner himself, reflected notably in his Opinion concerning determination of complaints against the police. Finally, as concerns the protection of the human rights of minorities, Commissioner Hammarberg stressed that the Greek authorities need "to show greater receptiveness to diversity in their society and to take further measures that would allow minority groups to express their identity on the basis of self identification". To this end, full and effective implementation of the relevant judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities are particularly important measures.

Hammarberg visits Kosovo to assess the situation of forced Roma returnees

Strasbourg, 10/02/10 - Several European governments are forcibly returning to Kosovo persons who have found shelter in their countries. To assess the situation, Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, visits Kosovo from 11 to 13 February. According to UN statistics more than 2 500 persons have been returned from European countries during 2009, mainly from Austria, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. Among them are some Roma, who have ended up in the lead-contaminated camps of Češmin Lug and Osterode in northern Mitrovica, where inhabitants have already suffered serious illnesses. The Commis-

sioner will visit these two camps that he already in his report of July 2009 recommended to be closed. He also urged that adequate housing be offered to all families affected, together with courses of decontamination treatment.

CoE, Hammarberg: "Bulgaria must better protected minorities and children"

Strasbourg, 09/02/10 – "More efforts are needed to better protect minorities and children and to ensure that their needs are embedded in the decision making process," said Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. He publishes today a report on his visit to Bulgaria carried out in November 2009 to assess progress on the protection of the rights of minorities and disadvantaged children. "Protection of minorities against discrimination, racism and intolerance should be enhanced" he said, recommending a legislative amendment to make racist motivation an aggravated circumstance for all offences. "Adequate measures should be taken to prevent and punish cases of police misconduct". The Commissioner also calls upon the Bulgarian authorities to provide reparation and find speedily a solution for pending pension claims to victims of the 'Revival Process'. Commissioner Hammarberg recommends a simpler law concerning registration of religious denominations to fully protect their freedom of association. He also highlights the need for local authorities and law enforcement officers to be properly instructed to avoid unnecessary interference with the right to exercise one's freedom of religion and calls on the authorities to resolve outstanding property claims, including those of the Muslim community. In addition, the Commissioner recommends an amendment to the Constitution in order to better safeguard minorities' freedom of association and assembly and to fully align practice with the Council of Europe standards. "Educational efforts aimed at integrating children from minority groups and children with disabilities should be furthered" he added, urging the authorities to improve access to information and health services to members of socio-economically disadvantaged minority groups - particularly Roma, ethnic Turks and Pomaks. Serious concerns persist about the situation of Roma people, who continue to live in sub-standard conditions. The report is available, together with the Government comments, on the Commissioner's website.

Source: http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/default_en.asp

UN rights council hears Italy on migrants, Roma

Geneva, 09/02/10 - Italy came under criticism Tuesday at the United Nations' Human Rights Council in Geneva for its record on migration, minorities and the independence of the judiciary. The country was coming under scrutiny as part of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the council, which checks each UN member-state's rights record once every four years. A delegation from Rome, headed by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Vincenzo Scotti, said the government would present a bill to parliament to ratify the European convention against trafficking in people. Violent and racist incidents against migrants and minorities, including the Roma and Sinti peoples, also known as 'Gypsies,' were being investigated, the delegation of 25 people said. Italy's refusal to accept certain migrants and asylum seekers, including those already on vessels at sea, and the forced eviction of other non-citizens were criticized by some states. Questions regarding the media's independence as well as that of the judiciary too were raised in the review process.

Read more: http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/europe/news/article_1532192.php/UN-rights-council-hears-Italy-on-migrants-Roma#ixzz0fKPPTw3P

ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

Expectations from the 2nd European Roma Summit in Cordoba, 8-9 April 2010

Brussels, 11/02/10 - The Second EU Roma Summit is an important and rare opportunity for EU institutions and governments, the enlargement countries, Roma representatives and civil society to jointly address the social exclusion and discrimination suffered by the Roma. The Summit will be organised by the Spanish Presidency on 8-9 April 2010 in Cordoba, Spain. The European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) hereby expresses its aims and expectations for a successful summit.

I.The European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) is seriously concerned about the discrimination suffered by the Roma in education (particularly segregation), housing (particularly forced evictions and sub-standard living conditions), employment (particularly low employment rate) and health care system (coercive sterilization and lack of adequate coverage). The recent rise of anti-Gypsyism (Romaphobia) across several EU member-states through regular hate speech, anti-Romani attacks and killings should be condemned by all European societies, and the perpetrators brought to justice. Therefore, the ERPC calls on the Spanish Presidency, EU member states, enlargement countries and the European Commission to show strong political commitment to make full use of available Community and legal instruments to end all forms of discrimination against the Roma.

II. The Summit should avoid a declarative character and focus on strategic policy commitments, which show political will to close the gap between the Roma and the majority societies. Welcoming the approach taken by the Spanish Presidency, the ERPC encourages the organizer of the Summit and the EU to define a clear political follow-up to the Summit conclusions, in order to avoid the mistakes of the First European Roma Summit where neither political conclusions nor concrete proposals were adopted. The ERPC calls on the Spanish Presidency to incorporate the conclusions of the Second Roma Summit in consequent Council Conclusions, giving clear guidance for Community action.

Read more on: http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_1489

Italy: Amnesty laments 'erosion' of minority rights in Italy

Rome, 09/02/10 - Amnesty International on Tuesday slammed what it called a "steady erosion" of minority rights in Italy as the country's record came under review by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. "There is a steady erosion of human rights, especially regarding migrants, minorities and possible asylum seekers," said the rights watchdog's Italian spokesman Riccardo Noury. "There are worrisome laws and practices," he said on Italian radio. Noury criticized security and anti-terrorism measures, in particular an accord between Italy and Libya that allows the Italian navy to intercept migrants at sea and return them to Libya with no possibility of applying for asylum. Noury also mentioned "norms that are not there but should have been in place long ago, such as a law that establishes torture as a crime." The Italian government came under criticism last month for its handling of a wave of violence against migrant farm workers in the southern town of Rosarno. The clashes left dozens injured and prompted more than 1,000 immigrants to leave the area, most on special buses arranged by the Italian authorities. In Geneva, Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Vincenzo Scotti told the Human Rights Council that Rome was committed to fighting racism and xenophobia.

Read more: http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/Amnesty+laments+erosion+minority+rights+Italy/2541749/story.html#ixzz0fKPcSkCT

Italy : comment, "Integration agreement, a further breach of human dignity

After the xenophobic security law and the special ethnic regulations in Roma settlements, the Italian government is about to introduce the "residence permit by point-system". This is a serious violation of human rights that must be immediately stigmatized and corrected by the international political and legal institutions. Rome (Italy) - The alchemy which allows the centre-right to remain in power in Italy lies at the root of a political, civil and legal aberration. In order to survive, the present majority needs the support and backing of the Northern League - the anti-immigration, anti-minority, anti-southern Italy and anti-European party. In this sick climate, in which democratic laws are continually ignored and human and civil rights trampled on, the Northern League is free to dictate laws and measures against immigration which are automatically approved (despite criticism from civil society) without them being validated by the Constitution. For years the Northern League has been the protagonist of xenophobic and anti-ziganist campaigns. It is no coincidence that a total of thirty-six of its exponents (including the Mayor of Treviso) have been committed for trial by the Preliminary Hearing Judge of Verona and accused of "forming an armed band". The defendants include the top Northern League politicians: Umberto Bossi, Roberto Maroni, and Roberto Calderoli. We must also remember that several Lega Nord leaders (like the deputy mayor of Treviso, Giancarlo Gentilini) have been charged and found guilty of racism or assault. Not to mention Mario Borghezio, who was found guilty of "aggravated arson for reasons of discrimination". Racist and violent gangs who make use of the Legal Nord name and proclamations are rife in Italy: our human rights activists themselves have been targeted by these groups and have also received death threats. In October 2008, Senator Bodega, the spokesman for the Northern League, announced through the press that his party was about to put to the government for its approval, a "residence permit by point system" reserved for foreign citizens. The permit foresees a series of objectives - starting with a home and employment – which will allow the immigrants to remain in Italy.

Full article: http://www.tolerance.ca/Article.aspx?ID=73530&L=en

UK: HCA makes £32 million available for new Gypsy and Traveller sites

Local authorities, ALMOs and RSLs who wish to provide social rented sites for Gypsies and Travellers, New Age Travellers and Travelling Show People can now bid for a share of £32million funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The national housing and regeneration agency has opened the bidding round for the Gypsy and Traveller Site Grant 2010/2011 and will publish new guidance at www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/gypsies_travellers to help bidders apply for funding. This document and the relevant application forms have been updated to reflect experience gained in the bidding round for 2009/2010. Robert Napier, chairman of the Homes and Communities Agency, said: "Helping to ensure that more people have a roof over their heads is a commitment the agency takes very seriously. "This bidding round will see more of the Gypsy and Traveller population housed in decent accommodation on authorised sites with access to amenities and facilities, leading to an enhanced quality of life." Details of the programme and bidding timetable, plus instructions for completing bids and next steps in the process are set out in the guidance. The provision of sites and their delivery is part of the agency's Single Conversation – its model for working with public and private partners to deliver local priorities. The 2009/2010 allocations have now been made and details can be found on the HCA website at www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/gypsies_travellers. The closing date for the 2010/2011 bidding round is 4pm on April 30 2010.

Source: http://www.24dash.com/news/Housing/2010-02-11-HCA-makes-32-million-available-for-new-Gypsy-and-Traveller-Sites

UK: Conservatives to unveil plans to stop illegal Gypsy encampments

London, 12/02/10 - Launching a package of new “fair play” measures designed to stop Travellers abusing the planning system, the party will promise to strengthen the rights of land owners. There has been growing concern that gipsies have been taking advantage of planning and human rights laws to avoid eviction from land which they do not have permission to camp on. The Tories say that if elected they will take action against the “small minority” of Travellers abusing the system. The package includes a proposal to create a new criminal offence of “intentional trespass,” similar to laws in place in the Republic of Ireland, which would give the police the power to arrest trespassers who refused to move on after being asked to do so by a uniformed officer. At present, unless an act criminal damage takes place, trespass is treated as a civil offence, meaning landowners are forced to go to court to remove unwelcome gipsy encampments. The new law would also be open to home owners seeking to evict squatters. In addition, the Conservatives will pledge to close a loophole which allows planning permission to be applied for retrospectively. Under current rules, gipsies cannot be evicted from land if planning permission has been requested, meaning Travellers can move in and begin to lay down concrete on green spaces on weekends and bank holidays, and then avoid expulsion by submitting a planning application before council officials can be sent to the site to shut it down. The party will also promise to scrap what shadow ministers describe as “unfair Whitehall planning rules” introduced by John Prescott, the former deputy prime minister, which they say are forcing councils to build legal Traveller camps on the Green Belt and compulsory purchase land to find sites. Bob Neill, the shadow local government and planning minister, said: "The British public want to see fair play for all, rather than special treatment being given to some. “Labour's changes have undermined community cohesion by creating a legitimate sense of injustice in the planning system. “Law-abiding citizens understandably have to jump through many hoops to build in rural areas. “Yet it's wrong that certain groups have been given a green light to bypass those rules and concrete over the Green Belt when no one's looking." In addition, the party will promise to fund more authorised sites from central government budgets, rather than laying the burden on local taxpayers. This is likely to lead to confusion, however, as the party has repeatedly promised to slash Whitehall budgets in order to tackle the deficit. In addition, the Conservatives will say that they will stop gipsies using human rights laws by scrapping the Human Rights Act and replacing it with a “British Bill of Rights”. However, Dominic Grieve, the shadow justice spokesman, recently admitted that the Conservatives may not be in a position to repeal the Act in their first term in office.

Source: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/7215591/Conservatives-to-unveil-plans-to-stop-illegal-gypsy-encampments.html

EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Conference: Promoting an Entrepreneurial Culture among Young People from Roma Communities

Brussels, 10/02/10 – A youth enterprise initiative has made considerable progress engaging Roma communities through a range of interventions to introduce young Roma people to the world of enterprise. The encouraging outcomes of these measures prompted an invitation to Enterprise Development Worldwide to present at an international conference in Brussels on "EU projects in favour of the Roma community" due to take place in spring 2010. The initiative, known as the youngbusiness.net 3 project (YBN3), led by Enterprise Development Worldwide, received funding from the European Union's Leonardo Da Vinci Lifelong Learning Programme for a two year project to transfer innovation and promote enterprise among young people in disadvantaged communities in Central Europe. An important element of the programme was to develop approaches to engaging and supporting young people from Roma communities to help them consider self-employment as a career option and, if appropriate, develop their own businesses. A young Roma student supported by YBN3 says: "The YBN.3 project has taught me that anyone may have hidden abilities which can help in planning a future career. An innovative, unusual idea can be the source of a flourishing enterprise." The project targeted areas of high youth unemployment with substantial Roma communities in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. Full report: http://www.prlog.org/10527264-promoting-an-entrepreneurial-culture-among-young-people-from-roma-communities.html

CoE: Conference, "Future of the European Court of Human Rights in Interlaken"

The future of the European Court of Human Rights will take centre-stage when human rights ministers from the 47 member states of the Council of Europe gather on 18 and 19 February at the Casino Kursaal in Interlaken. The aim of the conference, which is being organised by the Swiss Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, is to reaffirm member states' commitment to protecting human rights in Europe, and their determination to enable the European Court of Human Rights, which is a vital cog in the protection mechanism, to cope with the growing volume of applications. The ministers will discuss reforms to ensure the long-term effectiveness of the Court, as well as ways of better monitoring the execution of its judgments and improving human rights protection at national level.

Link to the special file, Link to the site of the Swiss Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

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