

ERIO ACTIVITIES

ERIO at event on violence prevention

On February 5th and 6th, Guillermo Ruiz, ERIO's Policy Officer, attended the final conference of the "PeerThink" project which aims to develop tools and resources for an intersectional prevention of peer violence for teachers, trainers, educator and peers in Berlin, Germany. The conference was organised by the Berlin based association "Dissens" and gathered academics, practitioners and experts. The joint statement of project partners was that for an effective anti-violence work, the relations between multiple social dimensions have to be included systematically: violence prevention will become "intersectional". Mr. Ruiz who was invited as ERIO representative and member of the Steering Group of the Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, stated that large parts of Roma are facing structured violence, e.g. in the education system, attending segregated schools and being confronted with racism at school. Social exclusion and discrimination faced by Roma should be tackled through effective policy in all intervention fields (employment, education, housing, etc).

ERIO at the Steering Group of the Platform for Intercultural Dialogue

On February 11th, Guillermo Ruiz, ERIO's Policy Officer, participated in a meeting of the Steering Group of the Platform for Intercultural Dialogue. The meeting was devoted to discuss the Platform's activities during 2009 and the advocacy priorities. The Platform for Intercultural Dialogue has been asked by the European Commission to contribute to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the field of Culture. Mr. Ruiz stated that a Working Group on Intercultural Dialogue within the OMC – Culture should be set up and that the participation of Civil Society Organisations is of main importance for ensuring effective policy design and implementation.

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

ODIHR to assist States in access of Roma children to early education

The OSCE's Ministerial Council has decided to enhance efforts to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area. The decision reaffirms OSCE commitments regarding Roma and Sinti and calls upon participating States to enhance their efforts to ensure that Roma and Sinti people are able to participate fully in society and to take measures to eradicate discrimination against them, as called for by the 2003 OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Rom and Sinti. The Ministerial Council has tasked ODIHR to assist participating States in promoting access to early education for Roma and Sinti children. Andrzej Mirga, head of the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues welcomed the decision: "The dramatic gap in education between Roma and Sinti and majority populations can be best overcome by providing equal and non-discriminatory access to early education."

Source: ODIHR e-newsletter - December-January 2009

ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

UK: Plymouth leaders accused of 'bulldozing through' plans for Gypsy site

Plymouth, 11/02/2009 - City leaders have been accused of trying to "bulldoze" plans for Gypsy and traveller sites through Plymouth City Council. Plympton St Mary Conservative councillor Patrick Nicholson argues there has been no proper debate. He said Barry Keel, Plymouth City Council's chief executive, was trying to shut down debate. Labour councillor Andy Kerswell has asked solicitors to investigate whether Mr Keel has the authority to ban special area committees to discuss the controversial subject of Gypsy camps. Mr Keel wrote to councillors last week telling them that they could not call the special meetings, and that council officers would not be sent to any meetings to discuss Gypsies and travellers. "I'm flabbergasted that Barry Keel believes he can take such an action," Mr Kerswell, the councillor for Efford and Lipson, said yesterday. "It stifles debate. I have contacted my party's solicitors and asked them to investigate." I am an elected representative and I'm being denied the chance to have a debate." The council's Cabinet has approved work to prepare a bid for Government money to build a site at Efford Warren. Cabinet members also agreed to start consultation on using land at Coypool and at Coombe Farm, St Budeaux for Gypsy sites. Both decisions have been challenged and will be scrutinised at a special meeting in the council chamber on Thursday.

Read more on: <http://www.thisisplymouth.co.uk/news/DEBATE-GYPSY-SITES-STIFLED/article-685773-detail/article.html>

UK: upgrade for Gypsy travellers site

A site for Gypsies and other travellers visiting Stirling is to be upgraded with security doors and improved CCTV, Stirling Council has said. About 19 chalets will be upgraded at the site in the western outskirts of the city at Bridgend. Cladding will also be added to the chalets to improve heat and fuel efficiency. The work will be done after the council received £93,000 from the Scottish Government. The site, which also contains a meeting room, can accommodate up to 18 families at any one time. Councillor Alasdair MacPherson said: "These site improvements will go some way towards improving the health, wellbeing and security of who choose to live in Stirling. "Gypsy travellers remain marginalised and misunderstood, and prejudice against them is rife. "As with most racism and bigotry, it can be reflected in official attitudes that continue to this day. "The government grant will help us to address these issues and improve the services that we provide at Bridgend."

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/tayside_and_central/7879604.stm

UK: children to learn traveller songs in 'Gypsy' village

Cottenham, 11/02/2009 - Youngsters in Cottenham, Cambs., will be taught Romany music by professional folk singers during a month of workshops - before performing in a concert in November. The workshops are being funded by a £8,000 National Lottery 'Awards for All' grant, applied for by Cottenham's Fen Edge Community Association. Cottenham became synonymous with conflict between travellers and villagers after the nearby Smithy Fen site mushroomed into one of the biggest camps in Britain in 2004. Local residents have branded the idea for the concert insensitive, and said the money would be better spent elsewhere. Jacqueline Smith, 49, a member of the settled community at Smithy Fen, who has campaigned against illegal traveller sites, said: "I find it strange there is going to be a concert in the village college when there are hardly any traveller students there at all. [...] Secondary school pupils from Cottenham Village College, and younger children from Cottenham, Waterbeach and Willingham Primary Schools will be taught for four half days each by two musicians from the East Anglian Music Trust. The songs, which have not yet been selected, will contain heavy influence from Irish and Romany travelling communities who have both settled extensively

across the Fens. Amy Wornald, arts development manager for Fen Edge Community Association, said the folk songs were first brought to the area in 1915 by travellers seeking work in the fields. She said: "The traveller community has been based in Cottenham for generations when they moved here to work. "We are really keen to revive the songs that arrived here with travellers so they can be shared by the whole community. "There has been a lot of tension over the years between the settled and travelling communities and I think it's really important that people share their heritage." A spokesman for the National Lottery Awards for All fund said the Fen Edge Community Association has been awarded a grant of £8,010. He said: "Groups can apply for grants between £300 and £10,000. "If they meet the criteria and it is a good positive project they stand a very good chance of getting funding."

Read the full article on: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/4596727/Children-to-learn-traveller-songs-in-gypsy-village.html>

Slovenia: government to establish group for work with Roma

Ljubljana, 06/02/2009 - The government will appoint a commission for collaboration with Roma communities, Education and Sport Minister Igor Luksic said on Friday, as he met representatives of the Roma. The minister said he would chair the commission.

Read more on <http://www.sta.si/en/vest.php?s=a&id=1361593>

Kosovo: EU official stresses need for reforms

Brussels, 11/02/2009 - The EU's representative in Kosovo said Wednesday the former Serb province must do more to fight organized crime and corruption, and to promote democracy. [...] He also encouraged Kosovo's political leaders to "step up" efforts to improve ties with the Serb minority and the Gypsy population. The Gypsies, also known as Roma, have lived in camps since their homes were burned after Kosovo's 1998-99 war with Serb troops. Feith said the government already is working to relocate Roma from the camps but that the effort was being hindered by lack of communication with the regional Serb authorities in northern Kosovo. The U.N.'s World Health Organization has urged Kosovo to close lead-contaminated camps in the Balkan country's industrial north where around 100 Gypsy families live. The European Union's 3,000-strong mission of police, judges and advisers was deployed last summer in Kosovo to help train and guide the tiny Balkan country to eventual EU membership.

Read the full article on: <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2009/02/11/europe/EU-EU-Kosovo.php>

Kosovo: no conditions for refugee returns, Romano Them says

Pristina, 09/02/2009 – On the occasion of the second international round-table on the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo, organised by the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER), in co-operation with the OSCE/ODHIR CPRSI, *Romano Them* called on the governments of the host countries to refrain from forced repatriations of Roma to Kosovo. "In ten years, the international community has done hardly anything to protect the rights of Roma in Kosovo," the organisation said. "Those who have remained there live under miserable conditions and are afraid to leave their immediate surrounding. Forcibly returning Roma to Kosovo will just create further misery and human suffering." The organisation, which recently visited Kosovo in the context of a health assessment conducted by the WHO in order to assess the condition of the inhabitants of the IDP camps in Kosovoska Mitrovica, received several reports about cases of violence and intimidation against Roma which seem to go unreported. Cases included harassment, destruction of property and rape. Read more on <http://kosovoroma.wordpress.com/2009/02/09/no-conditions-for-refugee-returns-to-kosovo-romano-them-says/>

Hungary: Orbán says rejects "Gypsy crime" label

Budapest, 11/02/2009 - There is no "Gypsy crime" but there are criminals that belong to the Roma minority, leader of the main opposition Fidesz party Viktor Orban said on Wednesday, following a meeting with President Laszlo Solyom. "It must be made clear that the ratio of perpetrators of serious crimes of Gypsy origin is increasing day by day, considerably and tangibly. Those that keep that fact silent... will but aggravate the problem," Orban said. Faster court procedures, more serious punishment, more effective legislation and more jobs for the Roma are needed, the opposition leader added. The government will finalise in the next two weeks a crime prevention programme including measures that have been in the pipeline as well as organisational changes, Justice Minister Tibor Draskovics told reporters on Wednesday.

Source: <http://www.politics.hu/20090212/orban-says-crime-committed-by-roma-on-rise-but-rejects-gypsy-crime-label>

Hungary: Roma fear retaliation after attack on athletes

Budapest; 12/02/2009 - The Roma community in Sarbogard town, W Hungary, is concerned about possible retaliation in the wake of Sunday's stabbing of handball players in Veszprem (W), according to participants of a meeting between local Roma leaders, municipal and police officials on Wednesday. Sandor Raffael, who is accused mortally wounding Romanian player Marian Cozma, and who was arrested in Austria soon after the stabbing, is a resident of Sarbogard. Several participants of the forum said the Roma community as a whole should not be blamed for the stabbing, in which two other players also suffered serious injuries. "Raffael and his accomplices have brought shame upon the Roma," said Peter Lakatos, head of the local Roma authority.

Source: [http://www.caboodle.hu/nc/news/news_archive/single_page/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=6313](http://www.caboodle.hu/nc/news/news_archive/single_page/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=6313)

Hungary: comment, 'Time Bomb' ticks in Hungary as Roma tension rises

Budapest, 11/02/2009 - Hungary is contending with rising resentment toward its Roma, or Gypsy, population as the economy sinks and unrest grows. A police chief who last month blamed Roma for crime in his city was fired by the government, then reinstated after more than 1,000 people protested. Anti-Roma demonstrations also erupted in western Hungary last weekend after media reports that Roma men were responsible for the murder of a local athlete. A court in December banned a two-year-old uniformed nationalist group sworn to tackle what it called "Roma crime." As in other European countries, Hungary's Roma live in the poorest areas and endure the highest rates of unemployment, said Janos Ladanyi, director for the Center of Social, Regional and Ethnic Conflicts in Budapest. Clashes will become more frequent as the economic crisis engulfs the region, unless the rule of law can be enforced, he said. "This is a time bomb," said Ladanyi. "I hope the alarming events of the past few weeks will make the sensible majority and especially the political elite recognize that we can't go down this road. This road is a dead end. It leads to the Balkans." The government is trying to balance public resentment and the need for order. Justice Minister Tibor Draskovics on Feb. 8 ordered police to increase patrols and the cabinet the same day decided to direct extra funds to security forces. "We have to act while we can, not wait until the prejudices and the urge to vigilantism distil into unmanageable social phenomena," Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany, 47, wrote on his Web site. "We have to act against violence most decisively." The opposition Fidesz party, which is leading the governing Socialist Party in opinion polls ahead of elections next year, said the government should focus more on catching criminals than on worrying about prejudice. [...]

Read the full article on: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601100&sid=ar2VMwqgcjV4&refer=germany>

Hungary, comment; the Cozma murder, a new form of ethnic tension

A tragic act of crime, the killing of Marian Cozma, a great Romanian handball player, has sparked ethnic tension in the region to an all-high point. The scene is Hungary, the victims are Romanian and Serbian sportsmen, and the public accuses the 'Gypsy'. A little bit of contextualization: The citizens of Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Serbia did not get on very well with each other. [...] When the otherwise marginalized Hungarian far-right has set up a uniformed group under the name of 'Hungarian Guard' Slovakia cried fool and even accused Hungary for not fulfilling her obligations under the Paris Peace Treaty to wipe out fascist paramilitary groups. But these were just provocations. The Hungarian Guard, now banned by Hungarian law after a proper process in court, was not a paramilitary group, and certainly it had no intention to harass Slovaks or Romanians. It is a new manifestation of racism. The Hungarian Guard has one single activity: to threaten Roma communities within Hungary. The violent provocations, also some violent Molotov-cocktail attacks made some Gypsy leaders think that it is high time to set up a Gypsy Guard in Hungary. Earlier I noticed that things have changed a lot with the EU accession of the group. Romanian-Hungarian relations are on a historical all-time high. Hungary with Austria are the most firm supporters of Serbia's and Croatia's European integration. Slovakia has some extremists in the government coalitions, whose provocations are sometimes verbally met by Hungarian politicians out of mere pride, but I think the people are getting well with each other. Unfortunately, all these nations have found a common enemy: their shared Gypsy minorities, which belong to a number of groups, mostly including the Roma. The killing of the late Marion Cozma has shown this new fact. Mr. Cozma, who played professional handball in the club of Veszprém, had been a Romanian citizen without Hungarian roots, a favorite of the town sportsclub, and also considering to apply for Hungarian citizenship because of professional reasons. He played in the national team of Romania, and fascinatingly, with two different teams, he has become a Romanian than a Hungarian champion in 2005 and 2007 respectively. He had a fan base across Central Europe. In fact, he was one of the first Central European stars after a poisonous 20th century when the nations of the region had a strong dislike for each other. After his stabbing Saturday night, thousands stood in vigil, and the town declared the Romanian player an honorary citizen. His team-mates, who tried to help him in the group violence that broke out in the discotheque were Serbs. Many Serbs living in Hungary joined the Veszprém Hungarians in their grief. According to Serbia Insjed, many Serb nationalist tried to enter Hungary across the border to take revenge on... the Gypsies. The comments in the YouTube page (and similar pages) are in Hungarian, Romanian, English, Croatians and Serb. They show grief, solidarity and every second calls for revenge on Gypsies. The different Gypsy groups in all these countries are segregated, discriminated in schools and on the workplace and mainly live on the black market, social benefits and crime. As a visibly different native minority, their chances of assimilation is minimal. It is very ironic, that 20 years ago it could have been impossible that a Romanian sportsman is making a successful career in Hungary and becomes a favorite of his township, or a leading Hungarian professional sports club is a mix of Hungarian, Serb and Romanian players. It is a very sad irony that part of this new-found friendliness lies on a commonly shared racist attitude towards to Roma.

Source: <http://central.blogactiv.eu/2009/02/11/the-cozma-murder-case-a-new-form-of-ethnic-tension-in-central-europe/>

Bulgaria: PM: People are our greatest asset, not "human material"

Sofia, 11/02/2009 - The Bulgarian Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev said Wednesday that the nation's greatest asset and advantage were its people, and that they could not be referred to as "human material". Stanishev said this regarding the controversial statements of the Sofia

Mayor Boyko Borisov in Chicago last week, in which Borisov claimed Bulgaria's main problem was its "bad human material" consisting of the Roma and Turkish minorities, and of some 2,5 million retirees. "It is inconceivable to categorize people in this way especially if one claims to be a national political leader. This way of thinking is dumb and dangerous", Stanishev declared regarding the statements of Mayor Borisov, who is also the leader of the center-right GERB party. The Prime Minister visited Wednesday the western Bulgarian city of Pernik where he inspected the recent repair works at a local lung disease hospital, and was later welcomed by retirees in a local pensioners' club. During his meeting with the retirees, Stanishev pointed out their state budget pensions had been increased by 75% after his government took over in 2005. He also pointed out his cabinet had allocated the largest share of budget funding - over BGN 500 M - for the health care sector. According to the Prime Minister, Bulgaria is financially stable despite the global financial crisis. and has sufficient reserves for social spending. He stressed the government's plan was to work with the businesses and the trade unions in order to preserve as many jobs as possible.

Source: www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=101173

Bulgaria: Stanishev and Borisov about the "material"

Sofia, 11/02/2009 - Bulgarian Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev said in the Bulgarian town of Pernik Borisov's way of thinking is "stupid" and "dangerous". FOCUS News Agency collected their opinions about the "material" problem in short roundup. Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev said in the Bulgarian town of Pernik Borisov's way of thinking is "stupid" and "dangerous" as an answer to the question whether Boyko Borisov's statement about the human material was manipulated by BSB and MRF. "Boyko Borisov has always fined someone guilty or someone to blame. There is always someone who did not understand him and stand on his way to do his job. No matter if it is about the traffic jams or the garbage. You know the government had helped and is still helping for the solving of the problems. And it will continue to help," Sergey Styanishev said. He pointed that Boyko Borisov's statement is embarrassing because he pretends to be national leader. According to the Prime Minister the statement is offending elderly people due to the fact that they deserve respect at least. "I am proud with the fact this government made the most to increase pensions. The middle pension will be increase with 85% in reference to 2005 but it is not enough," Stanishev said. The leader of Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria accused Bulgarian Socialist Party /BSP/ and Movement for Rights and Freedom that they had presented his statement before the Bulgarians in Chicago in manipulative way, Bulgarian National Television informs. According to him the government wants to deprive public attention from the corruption in the country this way. It wants also to deprive people's attention from the irrevocably lost billions from European funds. In Borisov's opinion he does not have to apologize or excuse for his words. Reporter: Many people are offended because you called them "material". Boyko Borisov: Which people? I did not call them like that. Reporter: "Material" is the word that you use...Boyko Borisov: Yes, I called the people who...we work at elections, people who vote for a certain party, who are even used and then thrown away after the elections. This is the pensioners, Roma people and Muslims electorate. That's it. This subject is closed for me. Reporter: Do not you think you made a mistake? Boyko Borisov: Not at all.

Source: www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=101173

EVENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Call for submissions - Roma Rights 1/09: EU Roma Policy

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is seeking articles and other submissions (book reviews, interview with key figures and conference reports) from a broad range of disciplines addressing the adoption and implementation of a framework policy on Roma at the EU level. Articles offering critical insight to lessons learned in similar processes in other fields, as well as submissions reflecting the perspective of the grassroots Roma movement, are particularly welcome

Read more on: http://www.dzeno.cz/?c_id=17713

OSCE/ODIHR office in Warsaw hiring intern for Roma and Sinti Issues

Deadline for submitting applications: 22 February 2009

The Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI) is tasked with providing advice and assistance to participating States with regard to the implementation of their commitments regarding Roma and Sinti, namely of the provisions contained in the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti and the recently adopted MC Decision 6/08, in Helsinki. The intern can benefit from both the daily office work of the CPRSI, including processing Roma related information and working on reports, as well other activities, such as contributing to organization of Human Dimension meetings or implementation of projects realized in co-operation with States and other actors. If you wish to apply for this position, please use the application form for internships found under <http://www.osce.org/employment/13111.html> and send it via e-mail to recruit@odhr.pl, mentioning in the subject line "CPRSI Internship Programme". Please read carefully the requirements mentioned on this page before applying. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

Call for Applications: Council of Europe Internships for Young Roma

With financial support from Roma Initiatives, the Council of Europe offers three-month internships to young Roma students and professionals at the Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg, France. The program is open to young Roma from the following Council of Europe member states: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Applicants must have completed secondary education, preferably at the university level, and have a good command (written, read, and spoken) of French and/or English. For more information, please see the program guidelines and application on <http://www.soros.org/initiatives/roma/focus/europe>



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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