



EUROPEAN ROMA INFORMATION OFFICE E-NEWS 18/05/2009

ERIO ACTIVITIES

ERIO conference on Roma and migration on 27 May

Dear all, ERIO organises a conference on Roma and Migration. Please find invitation, program and registration form on: <http://erionet.org/site/basic100145.html>

ROMA MIGRATION: A European Challenge

27 May 2009 - 9.30 / 17.30, European Economic and Social Committee

Room VMA 3, 2 rue Van Maerlant, 1040 Brussels

Heightened attention paid by policymakers, the media and the public at large to issues concerning Roma migration has brought these matters to the European level. Policy and lawmakers have often been unable to respond appropriately to the wide range of apparent challenges in this area. The aim of this International conference is to share good practices, to raise awareness on EU citizenship and mobility rights both among Roma and politicians and to encourage law enforcement authorities to guarantee full respect of the human dignity of migrants.

ERIO partakes in the Fundamental Rights and Non-Discrimination Working Group of the Social Platform

On May 14th, ERIO participated in the Fundamental Rights and Non-Discrimination Working Group organized by the Social Platform. In the opening session the "European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey" carried out by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) was presented. One of the main findings of the survey was that the Roma reported the highest overall levels of discrimination of all groups surveyed. The next session covered expectations on the Swedish presidency and ways of creating a more structured dialogue with the Council. Thereafter, the Fundamental Rights Platform of the FRA was discussed. ERIO's Policy Officer Guillermo Ruiz reviewed the last meeting of the FRA's Fundamental Rights Platform and pointed out that there was a lack of awareness among the participants regarding the procedure of the elections for the Advisory Panel of the FRA's Fundamental Rights Platform. He also stated that these procedures as well as mechanisms to set up the abovementioned Panel were not transparent and democratic enough. In the afternoon, the first session focused on the collaboration between trade unions and NGOs. Participants reflected on the role of NGOs and trade unions as well as approaches to an enhanced cooperation between the actors. Thereafter, the post-Hague process was presented and ways of strengthening its programme were discussed. The meeting was brought to an end by a presentation and discussion about data collection and its possible risks for vulnerable groups.

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

EESC President Sepi to attend Roma pilgrimage in Camargue

On the occasion of the Saintes Maries de la Mer Pilgrimage and the Roma festival, EESC President, Mario Sepi, has been invited to Fourques, in the heart of the French Camargue, to participate in a conference on Roma integration and their contribution to civil society on 24-25 May 2009. This conference is being held in the context of his presidential programme on the promo-

tion of the rights and the integration of minorities and intercultural dialogue in Europe. This event is the first meeting to be held between civil society representatives from Languedoc-Roussillon and EESC representatives on the contribution of Roma culture and positive integration experiences. The conference on "The economic and social integration of the Roma" will take place at the Fourques Town Hall between 4 and 6 p.m. on 25 May (programme appended). It will be an opportunity to present regional as well as European Roma integration experiences. It will be followed by a concert bringing together musicians from the Roma, Corsican and Languedoc cultures. This event marks a fundamental turning point with respect to work that the Committee is about to begin on a new contribution to the EU strategy for countering obstacles to the social and labour market integration of Roma in Europe. It is important to remember that the Roma have been in Europe for over 7 centuries. Records of the presence of various Roma communities in most European countries date back to the late 15th Century, as do records of the discrimination, exclusion and persecution to which they have been subjected since that time. Other participants in this conference will include, Ms Anne-Marie Sigmund, EESC member, and rapporteur for the opinion on "Intercultural dialogue and the Roma: the key role of women and the education of children"; Mr Marc Bordigoni, research and development engineer at the *Institut d'ethnologie méditerranéenne, européenne et comparative* at Aix-en-Provence; Mr Serge Desseigne, head of the CEMEA project, Training centre for social workers in Hungary; Mr Guy Berge, a teacher, who will speak on successful integration; Ms Madi Sharma, EESC member and co-rapporteur for the additional opinion on the Roma; and Mr Gilles Dumas, Mayor of Fourques. In his capacity as EESC President, Mr Mario Sepi will join the pilgrimage for the first time at the invitation of the official bearers of the Saintes Maries de la Mer boat, which will establish ties between local civil society and the European institution. In the context of intercultural dialogue, the EESC will hold an exhibition and debate on the same subject during at opening of its plenary session on 10 June 2009.

Source: EESC Press office

Amnesty Int.: EU should condemn discrimination against Roma in Italy

Brussels, 15/05/09) -The EU should urgently take steps to ensure that Italy's new 'security package' draft law does not discriminate against minorities living in Italy, in particular the Roma and Sinti communities, says Amnesty International. In a letter addressed to the European Commission (available here) Amnesty International expressed its concern that certain provisions in the draft law may not be compatible with European law and could disproportionately affect Roma communities. "The EU needs to condemn any discriminatory provision that not only violates EU law but puts the most vulnerable in society at risk" said Nicolas Beger, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office. "Roma communities, homeless people and migrants could be prevented from accessing basic healthcare and education" he explained. According to the new law, persons without a fixed abode would have to register at the Ministry of Interior and no longer in the municipality where they live. As residency in the territory of a municipality is a precondition for obtaining access to basic services, those who live in mobile homes or who are homeless risk being denied their economic and social rights and may be prevented from voting. "The EU cannot disregard the creation of racially-based policies in any of its member states and must keep a close eye on the legislation process" said Beger. "The principle of non-discrimination as enshrined in international and European law must be respected" he added.

Source: AI Press service

ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

Illiteracy rising in parts of Europe, especially among Roma

Bucharest 12/05/09 - A global event to promote literacy has drawn attention to the fact that an increasing number of Romanian and Bulgarian children are not getting minimal education. The trend was explored by Romanian and Bulgarian participants at the 'World's Biggest Lesson' organised Apr. 26 by the Global Campaign for Education. During this event, schoolchildren all over the world took the role of teachers in classrooms, and spoke to decision-makers and journalists about the difficulties many of them face in access to education. The Global Campaign points out that 75 million children worldwide are still waiting to learn to read and write. And this in spite of the fact that world leaders have committed to ensuring that, by 2015, every child will have the chance to complete primary education (one of the eight Millennium Development Goals). In Romania and Bulgaria an increasing number of poor children are seeing chances of getting access to education reduced rather than enhanced. The trend is unexpected, given that the two countries are believed to have developed significantly since 1989 (when communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed), and joined the European Union in 2007. According to the ministries of education in these countries, school dropout rates have tripled since the late 1990s among some vulnerable social categories, such as children from rural areas, from poor families in the cities, and Roma kids. The Roma, numbering an estimated 10 million, are believed to have migrated to Europe from India since the 14th century.

Read the full article on: <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=46805>

Italy: Rom and Sinti Federation congress outcomes

The 22 and 23 April, the 1st National Congress of the "Roma and Sinti together Federation", took place hosted by the Unicef at the Unicef Auditorium of via Palestro n.68 in Rome. The congress registered the large participation of Roma and Sinti from all over Italy who have discussed with MP of different political affiliation and with the representatives of the civil society, on the issues of their socio economic conditions and future aspirations. The congress proposed two main catch-phrases: from mediation to active participation, yesterday our culture for a politic, today and tomorrow a politic for our culture. The congress has approved a motion that identifies six strategic targets: Acknowledgement of the status of historical and linguistic minority, Access to citizenship according to the principles of the ius soli, Overcoming of the Nomad Encampments and identification of housing solutions, Report and contrast to the growing Anti Roma feelings, Implementation of policies of professional training and steady occupations, Commitment for the diffusion of the knowledge on Roma and Sinti cultures to fight prejudices and discriminations.

Source. Federazione Rom e Sinti Insieme

Spain: Gypsies and the police fight hostility with football

Roma and security forces, which have a history of rivalry, have come together during a football match. It was played in the town of Granada Pinos Puente. The town is a growing boiling pot of cultures and the Roma, civil guards, and local police have tried to mend the situation with goals, shots, and faults which have also occurred in the past. The sponsor was the pastor of the Catholic Church in Pinos Puente, Antonio Hernandez. Instead of an explosive behaviour, the nearly 300 fans loudly enjoyed the game and encouraged their team. Members of the Roma community were the majority.

Full article on: <http://www.adn.es/deportes/20090518/NWS-2148-Granada-Gitanos-estereotipos-policias-amistoso.html>

UK: Dale Farm Travellers lose eviction battle

Gypsies and travellers living on one of the UK's largest unauthorised sites, near Wickford in Essex, have lost their latest battle against eviction. The group was initially given a temporary reprieve by the High court after Basildon Council ordered them to leave the site at Dale Farm. In January, the decision was overturned after an appeal by the council. Three senior law lords have now dismissed an appeal by the travellers to challenge the ruling. Lord Justice Pill who was sitting with Lords Justices Lloyd and Moses said that in his view the council had acted "lawfully" in the stance it had taken. Half of the 1,000 people living at the farm do not have planning permission. A spokesman for Basildon District Council said they "continue to work with other organisations to assist travellers who are relocating from these sites. "Fundamentally, these cases are about the need to uphold planning law for the benefit of the whole community while taking full account of the needs of individuals who require a place to live in accordance with their cultural heritage. "The council expects to have further discussion with the travellers on how best to achieve an orderly withdrawal from these sites." Last week, the travellers were supported by a committee from the United Nations. The UN group on forced evictions is recommending the district council grant planning permission where needed or offer alternative land for the travelling community.

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/essex/8055579.stm

UK: Lords won't hear Dale Farm appeal

Only hours after a UN agency launched an urgent plea for a freeze on plans to bulldoze Britain's biggest Gypsy community, Dale Farm residents learnt that the House of Lords has refused to hear their appeal. Lawyers acting for Dale Farm say the case may now go to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. But with a likely two year wait before the court could rule on the matter, it will be necessary to seek a prolonged protection from eviction. Meanwhile, Basildon District Council has yet to consider the homeless applications submitted by over 90 Dale Farm households. They include a joint homeless application seeking to be re-accommodated together as a community. Permission has been refused (14.5.09) "because the petition does not raise an arguable point of law of general public importance which ought to be considered by this House at this time, bearing in mind that the cause has already been the subject of judicial decision and reviewed on appeal." Outlining its preliminary findings at the meeting in the House of Lords (14 May) Brazilian lawyer Leticia Osorio said UK local councils should not only stop evicting Gypsies and Travellers but also refrain from criminalizing those living on their own land without planning authorization. While visiting Dale Farm, at Crays Hill, Essex, an estate of some ninety families facing eviction by Basildon District Council, Osorio had been impressed by their seven-year campaign to legalize homes and gain stability for the future. "All attempts to obtain retrospective permission have been rejected," she told her audience, which included Lib-Dem Lord Avebury and Labour peer Baroness Whitaker. "We hope now that the Lords will agree to hear their case."

Full article on: <http://bristolnoborders.wordpress.com/2009/05/17/lords-refuse-to-hear-dale-farm-appeal/>

UK: nurses call to review care of homeless people and travellers

London, 13/05/09 - The RCN Council must lobby agencies to review access to health and social care for socially excluded groups such as travelling communities and homeless people, nurses have said. Nurses voted almost unanimously in favour of a motion, proposed by Marcelle De Sousa, of the RCN's adolescent health forum, which raised concerns about quality of care for these groups. 'The gap between rich and poor is the widest it has been since 1960. Travellers often find that permanent sites are by the sides of roads, factories or industrial plants and they

have high incidences of asthma and eczema.' However, she added that the care they received was often inadequate. 'When they access the health service, they find they don't fit in the system,' she added. Many struggle to access care and when they do, they sometimes face discrimination, said Lorraine Tinker, of the paediatric oncology forum. 'Ambulances won't attend fixed sites, or they are not able to access primary care. Yet there are drug and alcohol problems and domestic violence. I support the resolution to ensure that there is an end to this inequality of access for these most vulnerable members of society.' Gareth Phillips, RCN council member for Wales, warned delegates to ignore leaflets left outside the congress hall from the Taxpayers' Alliance. The leaflets criticised Ealing Council for hiring a 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Liaison [sic] Officer'. 'These leaflets have no place at RCN Congress,' he said. The motion was agreed by 99% of those present.

Source: <http://www.nursingtimes.net/whats-new-in-nursing/rcn-congress/call-to-review-care-of-homeless-people-and-travellers/5001441.article>

Hungary: several thousand demonstrate in Budapest against exclusion

Budapest, 17/05/09 - Around three thousand people gathered peacefully in a park in Budapest on Saturday afternoon to protest against hate speech and exclusion. The demonstrators, called together by the Hungarian Democratic Charta and the Roma Civic Movement, gathered in St Stephan's Park in the 13th district to hear addresses by politicians and other public personalities. Demonstrators were shown a video on a large display compiling recent events connected to anti-Roma and anti-Semitic actions, including the recent murder of a Roma man and his child in Tatarszentgyorgy. The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the Legal Defence Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities (NEKI) and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ) recently called on the authorities to publish the results of their internal disciplinary investigations related to the killings. The Roma man and his son were shot dead upon fleeing from their house which had allegedly caught fire from a petrol bomb in the early morning of February 23. The authorities initially reported that the cause of death had been smoke poisoning and the fire had been caused by an electric fault. The incident was the latest in a series of violent attacks against the Roma -- reckoned to number around 600,000 -- in Hungary. Gabor Ivanyi, a Methodist preacher and a member of the liberal Free Democrats, said that the situation in Hungary was no longer an internal matter. He said it would be a disgrace if UN peacekeepers had to be called in to defend predominantly Roma areas. Aladar Horvath, chairman of the Roma Civic Foundation, told those gathered that there was a grand coalition against the Roma, and the governing Socialists and their one-time ally, the liberal Free Democrats, had let the Roma down.

Full article on: <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/content/view/11951/219/>

Hungary: Liberal chief says state must do more for Roma minority

Budapest, 12/05/09 - Hungary's government must do more to provide social support for the country's impoverished Roma, the leader of the liberal Free Democrats said in a letter sent to the prime minister on Monday. Gabor Fodor urged the government in the letter to make use of European Union financing to implement education and employment programmes helping the Roma. State and EU money should also be used to put in place frameworks to ensure Romas' rights and equal opportunities, as well as boosting employment prospects, the letter said. In the environment of growing intolerance and manifestations of hate in the country, Roma have become the focal point, Fodor said, adding that the basis for a long-term policy should be set in place urgently.

Source: MTI

Hungary: public support for Magyar Garda 10%

Budapest, 17/05/09 - Around 10 percent of the Hungarian public sympathises with the radical nationalist Magyar Garda movement, according to a survey by the Progressive Institute published on Sunday. If the movement were a political party it would have the backing of 9 percent of voters, according to the survey of 2,500 adults. The Garda -- which is appealing against a court ban -- is closely allied to Jobbik, a radical nationalist party which, according to polls, has sufficient support to cross the five percent threshold for seats in parliament. The Progressive Institute said in an accompanying report that there is clearly a greater openness in Hungary today towards extremist movements. Its survey found that many people are increasing under the pressures of poverty and job losses resulting from the financial and economic crisis. People are also worried about crime and violence. Whereas they do not want to take any greater responsibility for their self-defence, they do want greater protection. Jobbik registered the Magyar Garda in June 2007 as a "cultural organisation" to "prepare youth spiritually and physically for extraordinary situations when it might be necessary to mobilise the people." The Guard, which has recruited well over 1,000 militiamen, has staged several marches to intimidate the Roma community in several localities. Its activity has drawn condemnation both in Hungary and abroad, drawing harsh protests from the parliamentary parties, NGOs and minority organisations alike. Jobbik, however, officially dissociates itself from attacks against the Roma and recently described the Holocaust as a "tragic event", though it does not support an initiative to bring a constitutional amendment banning Holocaust denial.

Source: <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/content/view/11950/219/>

Czech pig farm on Nazi Gypsy death camp

Prague, 13/05/09 - A Czech Cabinet minister said he will try to collect money to pay for the removal of a pig farm from the site of a Nazi camp for Gypsies in World War II. Michael Kocab, Czech minister for minorities and human rights, Wednesday said he will urge companies to help form a foundation to provide \$35 million to relocate the large pig farm at the southern Bohemian town of Lety, Prague Radio said. In the Lety concentration camp, established by the Nazis in 1942, hundreds of Czech Gypsies, including 241 children, were killed. Addressing a commemoration at Lety, Kocab said he would like to transform the camp site to a memorial. In the 1970s, communist authorities of the former Czechoslovakia built the large pig farm at Lety. The European Parliament and Czech Gypsy rights groups have been unsuccessful for years in urging Prague to relocate the farm. Czech government officials argued they were short of money, the radio said.

Source: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/05/13/Czech-pig-farm-on-Nazi-Gypsy-death-camp/UPI-58191242248351/

Canada concerned about Czech asylum seekers

Prague, 07/05/09 - Canada is concerned about an influx of Czech asylum seekers and will act if the situation does not improve, its Prime Minister Stephen Harper said in Prague on Wednesday. Czech Roma feel persecuted in their own country amid a rising wave of extremism that Prague has so far looked upon with leniency, but are now migrating to Canada in large numbers, according to local press reports. "The flow of asylum claimants from the Czech Republic is a real concern," Harper told reporters after talks with his Czech counterpart Mirek Topolanek, whose country holds the European Union presidency.

Read more on <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1241630221.17/>

Canadian PM encouraged to tighten Canadian visa laws for Czech refugees

Ottawa, 13/05/09 - The Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has indicated that he may re-introduce Canadian visa requirements for Czech Roman citizens visiting Canada, since a surge in Canadian visa applications has resulted in the Czech Republic to be the seventh largest source of refugee claimants in Canada. The Canadian visa requirements for Czech visitors to Canada were lifted in late 2007, and according to Canada.com news, Harper is considering reinstating those requirements to avoid Canada being swamped by asylum seekers. In 2008, 853 Czech nationals applied for a Canadian visa using asylum as their motive, and Harper says some action needs to be taken. "It's not necessarily the fault of the Czech Republic, but it is a reality that we do have to deal with." The Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek expressed different views, saying that the Roma people are not discriminated against or persecuted, but that they are "economic migrants" taking advantage of the Canadian immigration system. "Canada has a . . . very soft asylum procedure," he said. "And it's very easy to get asylum in Canada, and for that reason it is being targeted by individuals who seek economic (gain) rather than any other asylum." Despite this, Topolanek acknowledged that the lifting of the Canadian visa requirements two years ago has been taken advantage of by his nationals. While Immigration Minister Jason Kenney will be visiting the Czech Republic soon to investigate the state of affairs, Harper is being encouraged to take affirmative action and strongly pressure Topolanek to pass an anti-discrimination law as required by the European Union.

Source: <http://www.visabureau.com/canada/news/11-05-2009/canadian-pm-encouraged-to-tighten-canadian-visa-laws-for-czech-refugees.aspx>

Czech Republic: Roma from Jirkov show the Nazis they are unafraid

Jirkov, 12/05/09 - About 100 Roma decided to take a stand against neo-Nazis meeting for a concert in Jirkov. After the police were unable to protect a peaceful demonstration against neo-Nazism in Chomutov on 3. 5. 2009, the Roma have decided not to take any chances and to provide for their own security. The Roma have shown they are prepared to defend themselves against the neo-Nazis. "The Roma feel threatened. On the one hand, they perceive the rise in extremist tendencies, and on the other hand they are concerned because they do not know where this is heading," Jan Šipoš, chair of the Roma Council, described the mood to Deník.cz. In his view, the arson attack on the family in Vítkov and the disruption of the recent demonstration organized by Roma have made things worse. Several dozen right-wing radicals provoked the demonstrators on 3 May, throwing flares and smoke bombs into the crowd. The anti-conflict team and Romani leaders succeeded in calming the acute situation. "Some people wanted a radical solution, but I calmed them by saying that the police were there to supervise. Others came because they knew we are here and we are not afraid," Šipoš described the atmosphere on the scene to Deník.cz. "The concert itself took place without incident. After 11, a small group of Roma met on the square near Ervěnice. They were informed that the extremists wanted to attack them. The anti-conflict team refuted that information and the Roma dispersed peacefully," Chomutov police spokesperson Marie Pivková told tn.cz. Workers Party Vice-Chair Petr Kotáb participated in the neo-Nazi concert.

Source: http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_1220

Serbia: Roma educational centre in Gračanica

Gracanica, 16/05/09 - Children from Gračanica's Roma community visit an educational center every day after school, where 15 teachers and volunteers help them with their homework. The

Roma educational center in Gračanici was founded eight years ago. The idea was to help bring Roma children up to speed for regular school work. Paid instructors and volunteers work with children of pre-school to school age. A poor knowledge of Serbian often poses a problem for Roma children at school. The center keeps a close eye on Roma children's progress at school. 100 children visit the center on a daily basis. The center was established thanks to the Balkan Sunflower NGO, and moved to new premises two years ago. The local Communities Office and the Irish KFOR battalion helped in its construction. A center of this nature means a great deal to local Roma. In future, there are plans to build a children's playground around the center, while a summer camp for Roma children is also under preparation.

Source: http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society-article.php?yyyy=2009&mm=05&dd=16&nav_id=59195

Kosovo: UNMIK thanks Mitrovica for resettling Romas

Pristina, 15/05/2009 - UNMIK chief Lamberto Zannier on Thursday (May 14th) praised the work of local authorities in Mitrovica for trying to resettle Roma families in a new neighbourhood and for closing down their camps in the north. Zannier expressed hope that this project will attract support from donors. Mitrovica Mayor Bajram Rexhepi emphasised that the return of internally displaced persons is a humane gesture and that the municipality is working to create conditions for all to return, irrespective of ethnicity. The Romas have been living in camps with excessive levels of contamination, which represent a health threat, particularly to children.

EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Documentary on Roma on ARTE

On Saturday 23 May at 22h55 ARTE will broadcast "The City of Roma", the beautiful and instructive film by Frédéric Castaignede that has been shown at the closing ceremony of the Symposium "Roma in Europe: Ruptures, Home and school" in Besançon. We hope that you will have the same interest as us to see, review and make known this film, the work of first order and a tool for understanding and training of all.

See it on: http://www.arte.tv/fr/programmes/242_day=1_week=22_year=2009.html, <http://www.lacitedesroms-lefilm.com/dossier-presse.pdf>



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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