

## EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

### EU: Sefcovic fends off anti-Roma allegations

Brussels, 19/01/10 - Slovakia's commissioner-designate, Maros Sefcovic, emerged relatively unscathed after a hearing by MEPs despite threats by centre-right MEPs in the run-up to the meeting that they would try and derail his candidacy over supposed anti-Roma comments made several years ago. The Roma issue came up twice in the three-hour hearing on Monday (18 January) with Mr Sefcovic sticking to the line that he cannot remember ever having made derogatory comments towards the ethnic minority, which constitutes a small part of his own country's population. The controversy concerned alleged comments he made in 2005 while Slovakia's EU ambassador suggesting that Roma abuse the Slovak welfare system. Conservative Spanish MEP Inigo Mendez de Vigo introduced the issue as the first question while Hungarian MEP Jozsef Szajer, instrumental in bringing it to the attention of the press five days ago, followed up in a more combative manner towards the end of the hearing. Defending himself, Mr Sefcovic said the words were "clearly taken out of context" and that he "honestly did not remember it." He asked deputies to take his "track record" of taking pro-Roma initiatives into account. Mr Szajer tried to inflict some damage by repeatedly asking how he could not remember making such a statement but the heat had been taken out the situation prior to the hearing, as Roma organisations had spoken out in favour of Mr Sefcovic. This meant he never looked like being in any political danger on the issue. According to Scottish Socialist MEP David Martin, even the Roma community in Glasgow, while initially not knowing who he was, had "zero problem" with the Slovak politician once they had done some background checking.

Full article: <http://euobserver.com/9/29292>

### MEPs investigating Šefčovič, some Roma standing up for him

Brussels, 19/01/10 - The influential EPP faction at the European Parliament does not want Slovak Commissioner-designate Maroš Šefčovič to step down over alleged anti-Roma statements he has previously made, but does want him to explain his attitude further. The faction also wants to ask him to give more visibility to the problems of the Roma community and other minorities should he join the Commission. Hungarian MEP Lívia Járóková, who identifies herself as a member of the Roma community, communicated the faction's stance to journalists in Brussels on Friday. Some Roma from Slovakia have come to Šefčovič's aid, with their organizations backing his candidacy on Friday as well. [...] Šefčovič's personal engagement is said to have decisively contributed to the adoption of a new strategy for improving the Roma minority's situation in Slovakia. Bratislava media quote the Roma declaration as saying that Šefčovič is also allegedly partly responsible for the fact that Slovakia and other Central European states have announced cross-border cooperation on improving the living conditions of the Roma and their social inclusion through the so-called Roma Decade. Šefčovič's candidacy for Vice-Chair of the European Commission was allegedly in jeopardy after Hungarian MEP József Szájer published a demand for the Slovak candidate to explain a remark he is alleged to have made five years ago at a conference in Brussels. The remark was allegedly anti-Roma.

Full article: [http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007\\_1456](http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_1456)

## EU rights body aims to change agenda with reliable data

Dublin, 11/01/10 - The Fundamental Rights Agency is one of the lesser-known institutions of the EU. Yet it occupies a large building next door to the French embassy in Vienna, employs 65 staff, which is set to rise to 120 this year. It also has just had its remit extended by the European Parliament to monitor issues such as access to justice, asylum and data protection as well as minority rights. The agency has its origins in the EU Monitoring Committee on Racism and Xenophobia, which compiled evidence on racism and racist incidents in the EU. This was particularly important at the time of the accession of new states, as most of them had little experience of the anti-discrimination machinery of the older member states. In 2007 the monitoring committee was replaced by the rights agency, with Irish academic Anastacia Crickley, who is head of Applied Social Studies in NUI Maynooth, in the chair. In June 2008, it appointed as director Morten Kjaerum, former head of the Danish Human Rights Commission and by the end of this year it had a senior management team in place. "Our role is to give evidence-based advice to EU institutions and governments, at both national and local level," its head of communications, Friso Roscam Abbing, told *The Irish Times*. "There is a need for joined-up thinking at this level. Local authorities can have more impact on an individual's life." He described the agency's work as providing a "high-resolution photograph" of a situation in a specific place at a specific time, linked to recommendations. These recommendations are drawn from best practice to be found on the ground in other EU countries.

Full article: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0111/1224262051042.html>

## CoE: Roma women urge European governments to respect their human rights

Athens, 12/01/10 - The increased and alarming human rights violations against Romani women and ways of ensuring full enjoyment of their rights topped the agenda of a two-day conference of Roma women, which ended today in Athens. In a final declaration of the conference, the participants unanimously called on European governments to uphold their obligations and ensure that Romani women enjoy their fundamental rights, to put an end to a climate of impunity around atrocious abuses of their rights, to take unequivocal measures to punish perpetrators and compensate Romani women victims. Romani women also urged the governments of European countries, where forced sterilisation is as an ongoing practice, to take active measures to compensate the victims, sanction perpetrators and initiate state medical reform in the area of patients' rights. The conference's conclusions stressed the need to prevent *de facto* segregation in housing and education, while promoting the principles of equality and integration. Participants also encouraged Roma activists and human rights communities to actively engage with Roma communities to raise awareness on their human rights and facilitate access to public services and law enforcement mechanisms. The declaration invites the governments to take steps to monitor and evaluate the situation of Romani women at national level through developing specific methodologies for data collection based on gender and ethnicity as a basis for targeted and comprehensive measures including all areas of life. Finally, participating Roma women discussed the negative perceptions of Roma women in the media and called on international organisations to support Roma journalism in order to facilitate a learning process with mainstream journalists about Romani women's realities and promote an objective journalism. The conclusions of the conference, organised by the Council of Europe, the Greek Ministry of Interior, Decentralisation and E-Government, the Greek Inter-Municipal Rom Network (ROM Network) and the International Roma Women's Network (IRWN), will be available on the Council of Europe website shortly. Finland will host the next conference of Roma women in 2011.

Source: CoE press service

## Experts: Roma are victims of Europe's 'undeclared Apartheid'

Strasbourg, 10/01/10 - Violence, poverty and widespread discrimination have made Roma communities the "punch bags" of Europe and victims of an "undeclared Apartheid" system. These were among the conclusions reached by an expert panel which took part in the Council of Europe's 'Viewpoint' human rights talk show. Gwendolyn Albert, a political analyst based in the Czech Republic, claimed on the television programme that the current plight of Roma confirmed the "undeclared Apartheid" which marginalises Roma communities throughout Europe. "This is probably Europe's biggest untold story and most unrecognised social situation," she said. "The levels of violence that Roma face across Europe at the hands of their fellow citizens are medieval in nature. Their human rights are being violated every single day all across Europe." Sociologist Donatella De Vito, Roma projects manager for the Milan-based Casa della Carità, endorsed this view. She said Roma people came to Italy thinking that it would be their "America," only to find "poverty and exclusion." The programme, recorded last December, also discussed the revival of 'Roma-phobia' since the fall of Communism, the targeting of Roma women for sterilisation and the worsening campaigns of intimidation and violence towards Roma communities

Video: [http://www.romea.cz/romeatv/index.php?id=detail&source=w&vid=mms://coenews.coe.int/vod/100107\\_w01\\_w.wmv&detail=mms://coenews.coe.int/vod/100107\\_w01\\_w.wmv](http://www.romea.cz/romeatv/index.php?id=detail&source=w&vid=mms://coenews.coe.int/vod/100107_w01_w.wmv&detail=mms://coenews.coe.int/vod/100107_w01_w.wmv)

Source: [http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007\\_1446](http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_1446)

## ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

### Italy: Roma begin leaving camps in Rome

Rome, 19/01/10 - Italian police began moving out Roma (Gypsies) living in one of the largest camps in Europe. Around 50 Roma, mainly of Bosnian origin, were the first group of more than 600 living in the Casilino 900 camp in Rome. They were taken to their new homes in Rome. Italian police officers and Red Cross officials were on hand to assist them as they left the Casilino 900 camp, that has been in existence in Rome for the past 40 years. Rome mayor Gianni Alemanno called the transfer a success and a very important day for the Italian capital and the nomadic community. He said authorities want all illegal and tolerated Roma camps to disappear by the end of the year and in a few years all the others must no longer exist as well. He added that such camps must become only a temporary thing. It's no longer possible to have the shameful situation of camps without running water and filled with garbage. These people must be given a document that gives them rights and they must be assisted to find work. The first group of around 50 Roma to leave the camp was mainly of Bosnian origin. They were taken to a nearby camp with proper homes with running water. More than 600 Roma live in the camp. Authorities hope to completely evacuate Casilino 900 by the beginning of February. But not all of the camp residents want to leave. This woman says she had lived in Casilino 900 for 35 years. Her ten children grew up here, got married and she has 62 grandchildren. They are all here, she says, in their homes here in the camp. "My grandchildren live here as well and what they are doing is not right. It's not right that they are creating problems among us," she added. Others are pleased they are finally getting better living conditions. They have had enough of living amid the dirt and want a better future for their children. Hakisa, who was been living in the camp for years, said the whole of Europe considers this a disgrace. He has six children and they are forced to study by candlelight in the evening. Hakisa said he was happy to leave although it will be sad to see a crane demolish the home which he built with his bare hands.

Source: <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/europe/Roma-in-Italy-Begin-Leaving-Camps-82066237.html>

### **Spain: first Roma university professor Jose Heredia Moya died in Granada**

The author and first Roma university professor in Spain, Jose Heredia Moya died this weekend in Grenada after clashing for years with a long degenerative disease. Antonio Zapata, one of the greatest friends of Heredia Maya yesterday showed very sad about the death of the poet from Granada. "It's been very hard years, especially as we saw Jose passing away slowly. It is a great loss."

Source (in Spanish): <http://www.elalmeria.es/article/ocio/609718/fallece/granada/poeta/jose/heredia/artista/muy/vinculado/almeria.html>

### **Slovakia: exposition "A bridge towards Roma inclusion"**

Bratislava, 11/01/10 - Walking across Bratislava's New Bridge instead of driving over it by car can sometimes turn out to be much more enjoyable. Apart from enabling you to avoid one of the frequent traffic jams, the stroll can take you to a completely different world, which you would hardly expect to find among the bridge's grey concrete pillars. Such was the case in recent weeks, when this futuristic construction landmark, also known as the UFO bridge, hosted an interesting photographic exhibition. Entitled Aven Romale, or Come On, Gypsies, the event was the fruit of co-operation between the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bratislava and the Košice 2013 European Capital of Culture (ECOC) team. Five months after its premiere in the eastern metropolis, the exhibition was moved to Bratislava on the occasion of International Human Rights Day, December 10. "When the embassy was planning an activity for International Human Rights Day, we thought Aven Romale would be a perfect match for the topic," said Yvette Daoud, the Dutch Embassy's deputy head of mission. "By the way, we chose to focus on the position of the Roma because Slovakia holds this year's presidency of the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion' and also since the theme for International Human Rights Day 2009 was 'diversity'." On December 10, the display was installed above the Danube, on the New Bridge. It is not that Bratislava lacks sufficient exhibition halls, but the organisers wanted to make the photographs accessible to as many people as possible.

Full article: [http://www.spectator.sk/articles/view/37588/9/a\\_bridge\\_towards\\_roma\\_inclusion.html](http://www.spectator.sk/articles/view/37588/9/a_bridge_towards_roma_inclusion.html)

### **Ireland: Gardaí (Irish police) accused of racial discrimination**

Dublin, 11/01/10 - Gardaí have been accused of racial discrimination following the release of EU research which found Sub-Saharan Africans are twice as likely to be subjected to police stops than other members of the public. The European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey found in a 12-month period 59% of Africans surveyed had been stopped at least once by gardaí. One in three eastern Europeans were stopped at least once in the same period. More than 1,000 Sub-Saharan Africans and eastern Europeans were surveyed. The stop rate for Sub-Saharan Africans in Ireland was the highest for any ethnic minority surveyed in any of the 27 EU member states. Only members of the Roma in Greece experienced similarly high levels of police stops, with 56% stopped at least once in the pervious 12 months. Claire McCarthy, policy officer with the Cork-based Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre, said her organisation was concerned that gardaí were instigating a policy of "ethnic profiling." "There is a feeling on the ground that there has been ethnic profiling by the gardaí. I think if you're black and you live in Ireland you have a much, much higher chance of being stopped by gardaí." "The EU report goes a long way to proving such an approach by the gardaí is a reality."

Read more: <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/gardai-accused-of-racial-discrimination-109427.html#ixzz0caCmq5B5>

### **Canada: Ottawa considers visas for Hungarians**

Ottawa, 11/01/10 - Ottawa is considering imposing visa requirements on visitors from Hungary to stem a growing flood of refugee applicants, according to the Canadian Press. Last summer, Canada imposed visas on visitors from Mexico and the Czech Republic. A visa requirement for Hungarian visitors could provoke even more backlash from the European Union, which has spoken out against the requirement for Czech travellers. Hungary joined the European Union in 2004 and Canada lifted the visa requirement for Hungarian visitors in the spring of 2008, when it also lifted the visa requirement for visitors from Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the number of refugee claims from Hungary and in the past year the numbers have increased dramatically, especially among the country's Roma community. The number of monthly claims was usually between 20 and 40 immediately after the visa requirement was lifted. By the fall of 2009, the monthly total was about 200, making Hungary one of the top three sources of refugee claimants.

Source: <http://www.hrreporter.com/ArticleView.aspx?l=1&articleid=7471>

### **Bosnia: peer educators to help raise trafficking awareness in schools**

School students in northwest Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are being trained as 'Peer Educators' who will help raise awareness about Trafficking in Persons' (TiP); a crime which has reportedly increased in the country over recent years. World Vision's 'Combating trafficking in persons in BiH phase III' follows a successful pilot project which involved more than 2,000 children in 15 elementary schools in workshops aimed to raise awareness about TiP. The two-year project will involve some 800 students, including 120 peer educators and at least 24 teachers across 12 primary schools. World Vision's partner, the Genesis Project, will run workshops in each school involving student-created theatre plays that will help students convey messages about trafficking. BiH is primarily a country of origin for domestic trafficking, but it is also a destination and transit country for women and girls trafficked to Western Europe for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, according to the U.S. State Department's TiP Report for 2008. The report states BiH was categorised as 'a country meeting minimum standards/making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with the standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act 2000'. Yet the number of victims, many of them minors, trafficked within the country has dramatically increased in past years. Reports of Roma children being trafficked for forced labour continued. Victims from Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and Russia are generally trafficked into BiH via Serbia or Montenegro for commercial sexual exploitation. Most traffickers held victims in private homes and safe-houses to avoid law enforcement detection and there were reports that some forced foreign victims to apply for asylum to keep them in the country.

Full article: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/wvmeero/37b1a5a2f63297c173b0613624cd6fe3.htm>

### **Bosnia's forgotten minorities**

Sarajevo - As Jewish and Roma officials win a major victory in Strasbourg against Bosnian constitutional discrimination, which should pave the way for the 'Others' to participate in government, recent history indicates that the Court's decision is unlikely to be implemented, Anes Alic writes for ISN Security Watch. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in late December that the Bosnian Constitution contains discriminatory and unlawful provisions after ethnic minority officials filed complaints in an attempt to remedy at least one aspect of the country's institutional and constitutional absurdity. Bosnian Jewish official Jakob Finci and Roma official Dervo Sejdic sued Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2006 with the simple goal of bringing attention to the fact that the

Bosnian Constitution allows only the three main constituent ethnic groups - Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats - to run for the presidency or parliament. The two complained that their bids to run had been rejected because they were not members of Bosnia's main ethnic groups. The court found by a 14-3 vote that the exclusion of Jews, Roma and other minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina could not be justified, and that the authorities must use all available means to combat racism. "Eliminating the possibility for members of a minority to participate in the elections has no objective and reasonable justification.

Full article: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=111215>

### Turks target Roma as tensions explode

Istanbul, 13/01/10 - Ercan Koca says he and his family owe their lives to a well-locked door. "They tried for half-an-hour, but they could not break down the iron door," Mr Koca told Turkish media after his house in Selendi was attacked by a mob last week. "If they had gotten in, we would have all been killed. They set my car on fire with a Molotov cocktail." He said some of the attackers wore masks. More than 70 people, all Roma like Mr Koca, were driven from their homes in Selendi, an agricultural town of about 8,000 people in Manisa province close to the Aegean, after being attacked by several hundred Turks. The violence started when a row between a local tea house owner and a Roma client escalated. Houses of Roma were pelted with stones while attackers shouted, "Selendi is ours and will remain that way," news reports said. Some Roma said they heard cries of "Hit the Gypsies" from the crowd. But Musa Yildiz, the tea house owner, said the Roma had sworn at him and hit him. Police did not make any arrests but later escorted dozens of Roma, including women and children, out of town. Some have been staying with relatives in nearby Gordes while others were re-housed in Salihli, further to the West.

Full article : <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100113/FOREIGN/701129862/1002>

## EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Debate: "Roma, Gypsies and Travellers," Paris, February 3, 2010

On the occasion of the publication of issue of the journal Diversity on "Roma, Gypsies and Travellers". Ville-école-intégration organises a day of discussions and debates in the auditorium of the Cité Nationale de l'immigration history in Paris.

Source (in French): [http://www.fnasat.asso.fr/agenda/INVITATION\\_3.pdf](http://www.fnasat.asso.fr/agenda/INVITATION_3.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-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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