

ERIO ACTIVITIES

ERIO participated in the Peer Review meeting on Roma in Greece

On May 27th, a Peer Review meeting on social inclusion on Roma took place in Athens. The meeting was attended by Greek experts and officials, European level stakeholders, including ERIO, as well as European Commission and country representatives from Finland, France, Germany, Hungary and Spain. During the meeting the discussion paper prepared for this peer review by Will Guy, an independent thematic expert, along with the host country report was discussed. The meeting aimed at discussing the experience of countries with Roma inclusion practices and to identify good practices and recommendations applicable in the case of Greece. Based on the recommendations and conclusions of the meeting, Greek authorities will design a social inclusion plan for Roma. ERIO's Executive Director, Ivan Ivanov presented ideas for the inclusion and integration of Roma from the European level perspective. He presented recommendations concerning national Roma policies related to housing, education and access to funding. Mr. Ivanov stated that different policies and programs aiming at the integration of Roma should not work in isolation. Instead there should be coordination of successes and failures among those running the programs, in order not to repeat the same mistakes. An essential part of the success of such policies is that Roma take part of the policy building groups and are not left outside the process as passive beneficiaries. Mr. Ivanov also emphasised that policy makers should not review social inclusion of Roma without linking it to anti-discrimination legislation and policies.

ERIO Conference on Roma and Migration

On May 27th, ERIO organized the conference "Roma Migration: A European Challenge", held in the European Social and Economic Committee premises. The conference gathered representatives from various organizations and institutions such as the European Commission, Roma NGOs and human rights activists. Works opened by Mario Sepi, EESC President. He stressed the fact that there are continuous violations of the rights of the Roma as European citizens: "Inside Europe there are no more frontiers. But for the Roma there are legal frontiers, in health, policy, education. The free circulation of people in Europe is also in question in the case of Roma." He finally pledged for a more systematic dialogue among Roma communities and civil society organisations. The conference aimed at addressing the complexity of migration patterns among Roma migrants: there are those who are EU citizens, those who are Third Country Nationals and those who are asylum seekers and refugees. This requires different intervention approaches from national governments and European institutions, in order to guarantee their social inclusion and equal treatment. In the opening remarks, ERIO's Executive Director Ivan Ivanov stressed that Roma permanents and Roma migrants are discriminated in the same way and this proves that first and foremost discrimination is by ethnicity and not by migration. Racism is the key problem and therefore intercultural dialogue must be promoted and non-discriminatory regulations implemented. Housing, education, health and employment are the best ways to get the Roma into mainstream society. ERIO called upon DG Justice and Home Affairs to address the migration not from a security perspective but from a human rights perspective.

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

CoE Secretary General Terry Davis on an anti-Roma video on Czech television

Strasbourg, 22.05.2009 - "I share the distress of many people in the Czech Republic after the broadcast of an anti-Roma advertisement on Czech public television, calling for "a final solution to the Gypsy issue". I understand the Czech Government is determined to take action against the political party which produced the video for the purpose of their election campaign for the European Parliament. "The final solution" was a Nazi euphemism for a premeditated murder of millions of Jews, Roma, homosexuals and people with disabilities. This is the background against which the courts should assess this incident. The European Convention on Human Rights guarantees the right to the freedom of expression, but the Convention also sets limits. Personally, I believe that a call for "a final solution to the Gypsy issue" falls well outside these limits."

Source: Council of Europe press unit, www.coe.int

UNICEF film fosters prejudices against Roma, Roma NGOs say

27/05/09 - On the occasion of the launch, in France, of the film "All the invisible children", Roma organisations from all over Europe have sent a protest note* to the sponsors, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the Italian Development Cooperation, in order to express their grave concern regarding "Blue Gypsy" by the Yugoslav filmmaker Emir Kusturica, as one out of the seven short movies to highlight the violation of children's rights around the world. (*Object: Emir Kusturica's contribution to the "All the invisible children" production <http://romarights.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/letter-blue-gypsy-260509.pdf>) "Blue Gypsy" tells the story of a young Roma boy called Uroš who is just released from child detention to be immediately pushed again by his lazy and drinking father into stealing. Non surprisingly, he finally decides to return to detention, where he learns from another inmate that he has more freedom than outside. The organisations, that do not entirely deny the existence of such a phenomenon, nevertheless express their disagreement with the fact that it has come to dominate the public representation and discourse about Roma. They say that this is also the consequence of awareness raising campaigns led by international organisations and NGOs, which have excessively focussed on the phenomenon of child begging and trafficking within Roma communities. The organisations acknowledge that such an approach may indeed be powerful to attract public attention and funding, but has the negative side-effect in diverting attention from the root causes, i.e., the abject poverty and marginalisation of Roma families, to expose one of its possible consequences." They also say that they would have welcomed if the film had shed light at the living conditions of Roma families as they may indeed by themselves constitute as a violation of children and human rights.

Full article on: <http://www.unobserver.com/layout5.php?id=6014&blz=1>, <http://www.romarights.wordpress.com>

ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

Italy: administrative tribunal countermand Sinti eviction

The Lombardy Region TAR (Regional Administrative Tribunal) countermanded the eviction of 80 Italian Sinti from a camp in Gambolò (Pavia) due to its discriminatory purposes. All Sinti are Italian citizens having resided in Gambolò for many years. Pietro Massarotto, from the NGO Naga, commented the judgment as a proof of the discriminatory policies adopted by Italian local and national authorities.

Source (in Italian): <http://www.ilmanifesto.it/il-manifesto/argomenti/numero/20090526/pagina/05/pezzo/250726/>

UK: Lords refuse to hear Travellers' appeal, whilst UN pledges support

London, 25/05/09 - Dale Farm residents' hopes of an eleventh hour reprieve from eviction have been crushed by the House of Lords' refusal to hear their appeal - a matter of hours after a spirited meeting in parliament saw the UN pledge its support. Residents from Dale Farm in Essex, often described as the largest 'illegal' Traveller site in Europe, were lobbying the House of Lords, hoping for an eleventh hour intervention. This followed the Court of Appeal ruling on 22 January 2009, which had found in favour of a decision taken by Basildon Council to forcibly remove the families from the land which they partly own, but have not been given planning permission to build on. Yet the Lords refused permission to hear their appeal, hours after a meeting in parliament hosted by Lord Avebury at which the UN's Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE) endorsed the residents' plea to remain in their homes. The residents' only remaining legal option now is to apply to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Dale Farm is home to some ninety families who have been involved in a seven-year campaign to be given planning permission to reside on land legally-owned by some of the families, and to have those who are resident on illegal sites around the camp to be given the right to buy and build. Traveller families have lived on the site near the village of Crays Hill, Essex, since the 1960s.

Full article: <http://www.romarights.net/content/lords-refuse-hear-travellers-appeal-while-un-pledges-support>

UK: Gypsies and Travellers, 'Build us five sites'

Leeds, 22/05/09 - Gypsy and Traveller leaders have challenged Leeds City Council to save up to £1m – by building five new caravan sites. Since March 2006, Leeds taxpayers have had to fork out nearly £1.4m to cover clear-up costs after unauthorised camps on council land. Last week, the YEP reported that the bill stands at a minimum of £10,000 a month. But Eileen Lowther and James Connors, two senior members of the Traveller community, say just 50 extra caravan pitches on five sites would solve the problem. However, Coun Les Carter, the council's housing chief, said city councillors had been asked to identify possible sites in their wards, but none had done so. Mrs Lowther said the Travellers who keep setting up – and being evicted from – camps are the same families. She explained: "They are Leeds people, this city is their home. There is no room on Cottingley Springs so they keep being shifted around, and every time that happens it costs money. "The new sites would pay for themselves quickly enough through the rent." Mr Connors added: "The contracts for new sites would be good for the building trade with the recession that is on." Helen Jones, director of Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange, said: "Five sites would spread the accommodation around the city. It would be easier for the settled community to cope with new families in their area if they see other parts of the city are doing the same." Coun Carter said the authority was bound by Government guidelines, which say sites must be near GPs, health services, bus routes, shops, and schools. He said: "Finding a site that meets these requirements and that fits alongside existing communities would be a significant challenge." He

said there was evidence across the UK that where sites had been built, there had been no fall in the number of unauthorised camps. Coun Carter said he believes the number of unofficial camps would drop if neighbouring councils to Leeds built their own sites. He added: "It is my view that unauthorised parking should be made a criminal offence, which would mean that encampments were moved with greater speed. Such a law exists in southern Ireland."

Source: <http://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/Gypsies-and-travellers-39Build-us.5295459.jp>

Slovenia: minister, Roma education relatively well regulated

Brdo pri Kranju, 25/05/09 - Education of Roma children is relatively well regulated in Slovenia, compared to other European countries, Education Minister Igor Luksic told the press after the first day of an international conference on education of the Roma, which is taking place at Brdo pri Kranju on Monday and Tuesday.

Source: <http://www.sta.si/en/vest.php?s=a&id=1394440>

Czech Republic: school not to open special class for Romani pupils

Valasske Mezirici, 27/05/09 - A primary school in Valasske Mezirici will open only one first class for all children and not a separate class for Romanies only, school head teacher Oto Medek announced on Tuesday after a meeting with ministerial officials. Medek has discussed the issue with the deputies to the education and human rights ministers, Klara Laurencikova and Czeslaw Walek, respectively. On the basis of consultations with the school management, parents and experts, the Town Hall in Valasske Mezirici originally decided to launch an experimental class that was to enable Romany children to grasp school routines more quickly. The project was allegedly to prevent Romany children from ending up in special schools for pupils who need a special approach over their severe learning difficulties or physical disabilities. Most Romany kids namely do not attend kindergartens where they would prepare for school attendance. The ministries' representatives on Tuesday promised the school management to help them with the integration of Romany children into society and organise various support programmes. Medek said on Tuesday that the original plan was meant well. A total of 16 children, including ten Romanies, will start attending the first class in the school as from September. "At present when racist views are being intensified, we must say it clearly and simply that not segregation into two classes but one class leads to integration," said Walek. The school is now attended by some 40 Romany kids. Laurencikova pointed out that the ministry would try to provide a school psychologist and a special teacher for the school. The school is seeking integration, but "with good intent" it has selected quite an unfortunate solution," Laurencikova added. A kindergarten is planned to be established within the primary school in the future. The primary school has cooperated with the Zeferino centre, operated by a local charity, in the Romany children's preparation for school attendance. The school and the Town Hall agree that the integration of Romany children is successful. It is proved by the fact that more and more Romanies advance to higher classes now. Only one Romany child was enrolled for a special school this year, while most Romanies were placed there in the past.

Source: http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_1227

Czech Radio not to broadcast some EP election spots

Prague, 22/05/09 - The public Czech Radio (CRo) management has decided not to broadcast some election spots of the nationalist National Party (NS) and the ultra-right Workers' Party (DS) and it will file a legal complaint over them, radio spokeswoman Eva Ticha said Thursday. Ticha

said the NS delivered three alternatives of its election spot and two of them led to substantiated fears that their broadcasting would violate law. "The same fears emerged in the case if two of the three alternatives of the DS spot," she said, adding that "the individual entities running in elections are responsible for the contents of the election spots." Tomas Vandas, DS chairman and number one on its list of candidates for the European Parliament, told CTK Thursday he disagreed that the party election spots violated the law. "We consider the decision [not to broadcast some of them] scandalous," he said, adding that the party was considering filing a criminal complaint against the Czech Radio management. The Workers' Party, which experts and police believe is connected with the Czech neo-Nazi National Resistance movement, said on its website on Wednesday that it did not intend to submit its election video to the public CT as CT is not a trustworthy institution for the party. The DS Thursday placed its radio spots on its website. Their titles say: "We reject this regime," "Problems with Gypsies," and "The Workers' Youth and national socialism." "We reject the government policy of Gypsy racism when we pay for Gypsies from our taxes so that they do not have to work and use their spare time for bullying decent people," a man says in DS's radio slot. The NS also published its radio spots on its web pages Thursday. "Do you know what is the worst sentence you can hear from a Gypsy? Good morning, my neighbour," actor Vaclav Vydra says in one of the spots evidently alluding to the fact that Czechs do not like living near Romanies.

Full article on: <http://praguemonitor.com/2009/05/22/czech-radio-not-broadcast-some-ep-election-spots>

Hungary: extract from an interview to a representative of Jobbik racist party

Jobbik likes to talk about the "Gypsy question". What solutions do you propose in a European framework?

It has to be made a European issue because it does not only affect Hungary. In order that the problem be approached properly and solved, financial and professional resources need to be tapped and knowledge and experience need to be exchanged. The topic can no longer be swept under the carpet and treated as "delicate". For all those concerned this is connected to human dignity and human rights. The cooperation of different countries is conceivable in this. It is particularly important that the decision-making powers are taken away from the corrupt leaders who do not represent the people within the Gypsy community. In addition we are demanding work opportunities for Gypsies. In the Jobbik programme the establishment of social workshops is proposed. The current social benefits should be replaced by measures supporting work which serves the common good. It is unfair that the living costs of people capable of working are financed by others. We also see better education as a way out of the situation. That includes Roma children actually attending school and becoming acquainted with ways of living which enable them to break out of the inherited patterns.

Full article on: <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/content/view/12071/219/>

Kosovo: Serb and Roma journalists to register with the Association of Journalists

Pristina, 24/05/2009 - The Kosovo Association of the Professional Journalists has announced that during the next week they are going to register dozens of Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Roma journalists. The Association will also add two more members in the Steering Board of the Association, one member per community. This development is a part of the continuous efforts of Kosovo civil society to create equal opportunities for all.

Source: <http://www.kosovotimes.net/flash-news/268-serb-and-roma-journalists-to-register-with-the-kosovo-association-of-professional-journalists.html>

Kosovo: non-Serb minorities leaving the country

Lack of will on the part of Kosovo's ethnic Albanian leadership to ensure minority rights has driven out many Bosniaks, Turks, Roma and other non-Serb minorities, a report issued on Wednesday said. The Albanian majority declared independence in February last year, nine years after NATO carried out a 78-day bombing campaign to drive Serb forces out of Kosovo. Since then, ethnic divisions between two million Albanians and 120,000 Serbs who remained in the country have deepened, with 14,000 NATO peacekeepers and a 2,000-strong European Union mission overseeing a fragile peace. The report by Minority Rights Group International (MRG) said that Bosniaks, Croats, Gorani, Roma, Ashkali Egyptians and Turks, who together make up 5 per cent of the population, are facing discrimination and many have left the country. "There is a lack of political will and substantive investment in effective implementation of minority rights among majority Albanians," it said. "Together with a bad economy, these conditions mean that many members of minority communities are now leaving the new Kosovo state altogether." The Kosovo government said the report was not "factually accurate" and that minority rights were guaranteed by the constitution. "There still exists some reluctance on the part of the Kosovo Serb community to integrate fully in Kosovo society," government spokesperson Memli Krasniqi said. "But the same doesn't apply for other non-majority communities, as they are all integrated in public life and represented in the government, parliament and other state institutions of the Republic of Kosovo."

Full article on: http://www.javno.com/en-world/kosovo-driving-out-non-serb-minorities_260972

EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Russia: TV reportage, 'Gypsies, citizens without rights'

TV FRANCE 24 met with the Gypsies of Chudovo, a town situated around 100 kilometres south of Saint-Petersburg. The 2,000-strong community settled there in 1986, soon after the Chernobyl disaster, but without title deeds. For 20 years, the local authorities did not mind their presence but with the downfall of the Soviet Union everything changed. Land now has to be registered and paid for. In the spring of 2007, policemen and soldiers moved in to demolish the Gypsies' homes. Today, they seem to be threatened again. Since 2005, the administration has been tightening the laws on land occupation. For example, it ordered the demolition of one of the Gypsies' camps installed a few meters from an asphalt factory which had closed five years ago, citing health reasons. However, the Russian homes situated 50 metres further on are not threatened. Next spring, the Gypsies will have to move out. In exchange for 4,000 rubles to register the land, they will be able to settle in a muddy pastureland sandwiched between the motorway and the railway, with no schools close by. Here, the welcome is rather hostile. "We knew very well what they got up to. They stole firewood, they caused trouble all over," declares the doyenne of the village, who is about to send a petition to Moscow against the Gypsies and says she will do all she can to stop them moving here. The Gypsy community is not treated any better by the local authorities. The rural administration refuses to register them. They then lose all access to free health care, all family aid and therefore all legal existence. The town of Chudovo is not an isolated case. Since 2006, half a million Russian Gypsies have been affected by forced expulsions. Despite condemnation by Human Rights groups and a warning from the UN, the Russian federation has so far done nothing to solve the problem.

Source and video: <http://www.france24.com/en/20090522-roma-citizens-without-rights-russia-discrimination-housing-land-registry-deeds>

Education of Roma children in Europe: final conference in Slovenia

Date: 25-26 May 2009 | Location: Conference Centre in Brdo (Slovenia)

Description: Some 100 governmental and non-governmental experts and senior officials from Council of Europe member states will take stock of the 6-year Council of Europe project "Education of Roma Children in Europe." Given the crucial importance of the issue of Roma education throughout Europe – especially amidst continued discrimination against the Roma and Traveller communities – the strengths and successes of the project, which began in 2002, will be identified for further actions and programmes initiated by the Council of Europe and other key players, including member states, NGOs and international organisations. The conference will allow participants to identify areas where further work is required in the wide field of Roma and Traveller education, including issues of early childhood education and life-long learning opportunities. Working groups will be formed to examine specific issues, from pre-school education and equal access to education, to teacher training. They will identify actions for member states and international organisations in order to achieve lasting change for the education of the Roma and Traveller communities. The conference programme will also include an "Info Market", to display innovative approaches and materials. Council of Europe materials which have been developed through the Project "Education of Roma Children in Europe" and other materials regarding Roma;

- A special stand on the Council of Europe "Dosta" campaign;
- The Slovenian experience regarding Roma education and other Roma issues;
- Material from other international organisations, experiences and projects from member states and INGOs.

Conference programme and registration: <http://www.zrss.si/econference>

[Education of Roma Children in Europe website](#)

Source: www.coe.int/education/roma

Documentary 'La cité des Roms' on-line:

<http://plus7.arte.tv/fr/detailPage/1697660,CmC=2635740,scheduleId=2610842.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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