

ERIO at the OSCE annual meeting

ERIO Executive Director travelled to Warsaw to attend the OSCE annual meeting on October 1st and 2nd. As usually, a side event was organised, where Roma activist, experts and governmental representatives gathered to discuss Roma related issues. Also the main program included a session on Roma anti-discrimination and integration policies. OSCE member states and NGOs presented their activities and views on the latest developments about the human rights issues in the Roma community as well as the effectiveness of European and governmental programs concerning Roma's integration and social inclusion.

ERIO's Director participated in key conferences in Lisbon and Warsaw

Ivan Ivanov, ERIO's Executive Director, participated in a conference organized in Lisbon by the European Forum on Street Children and the Child Care Institute of Portugal on the 7 October. The conference was aiming to contribute to the reflection process on the role of the civil society in the promotion of active society involvement from new and old Member States, this in order to develop innovative practice-oriented concepts, focusing in particular on the active role of the civil society and voluntary work carried out in the area of strongly excluded children. Ivan Ivanov took part in a panel discussion with distinguished speakers from the Portuguese Government, the European Commission and the European Parliament. In his intervention Mr Ivanov stated that: "Many Roma children are on the street and considered as children in high risk. They are the most vulnerable to discrimination and violence. Their exploitation in the black labour market and forcibly involving them in the begging business should be considered as crime. Until recently Member states were hesitating to recognise that street children are an issue, but lately it became a subject of public discussion. Urgent measures in this regard should be taken and street children's social inclusion must be priority to the EU."

ERIO at the EP Public Hearing on Human Rights in Europe

ERIO attended the Public Hearing on MEP Giusto Catania's Report on "Fundamental Rights in the EU". The hearing was organised by the Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament on Monday 6 October 2008. During the hearing, the violation of Roma rights emerged several times as one of the most alarming human rights emergencies in the EU. Particular attention has been given to the problem of the 'erased' in Slovenia, many of whom are Roma. "The 2004 enlargement has limited the power of the EU to control the human rights record of the former accession countries. Now governments don't want to sanction themselves anymore", MEP Catania stated. Andre Wilkens, from the Open Society Institute, welcomed the report and shared its concerns. He agreed with the report's points 22 to 25 citing "security shall not be a pretext to allow human rights violations, as it has been the case in Italy during the alleged 'Roma emergency'". The OSI representative also said that his institution believes that the EU failed in the integration of Roma: "Until the 2004 EU enlargement, the Roma issue has been defined as an Eastern Europe problem only. But the Italian crisis clearly shows that is not true". Wilkens also deplored the technical approach used by the Commission towards the Roma issue: the need for a European Roma Policy based on human rights instead of an approach based on security, as it happens in Italy. MEP Sophie in 't Veld from ALDE said, "Even if Roma rights are not my area, I can see that nothing has moved despite all the reports the EU institution has produced. The Roma rights violations in Italy are not only a bureaucratic problem, they are an urgent human rights issue". Tansy Hutchinson, vice-chair of the Fundamental Rights and Non Discrimination Working Group of the Social Platform, added "social rights (i.e.: rights to housing, education, healthcare, employment) are human rights too". Roma are in most cases deprived of those rights, thus worsening the alarming record of human rights violations against them.

ERIO participating in the debate on Structural Funds

On October 6th, ERIO attended the workshop on "Structural Funds: Support to Roma Community" in the framework of the Open Days organised by the DG Regional Development of the European Commission. The aim of the workshop was to discuss different ways to use properly European Structural Funds towards Roma inclusion. The workshop included presentations on good practices in the field of education, employment and housing; and, on regional programming issues, specifically on data collection and how to support local governments to use Structural Funds for Roma inclusion. Representatives of cities and regional governments as from Paris and Wales participating in the workshop shared their experiences with policies aiming at Roma inclusion. Andrej Mirga, Senior Adviser of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights stated in the opening remarks that Structural Funds remain the "unfulfilled promise" since no fundamental achievements can be observed until now.

ERIO presents its communication activities to its Social Platform peers

ERIO's Communication Officer Matteo Manzonetto met with Ariella De Gennaro and Mehran Kalili, his Social Platform counterparts on Tuesday, October 7th. During the meeting, Mr. Manzonetto illustrated ERIO's Communications activities, in order to contribute to the Social Platform's overview of the communication activities of its members. Mr Manzonetto also took this occasion to evaluate future joint initiatives regarding the Social Platform's communications network, such as a series of peer-to-peer learning sessions where the twenty-some communications officers can exchange best (and worst) practices concerning their job.

EU boosts national efforts to fight poverty and social exclusion

Brussels, 03/10/2008 - The European Commission has today put forward a set of common principles to help guide EU countries in their strategies to tackle poverty. The Recommendation is based around three key aspects: adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services. National governments will be encouraged to refer to these common principles and define policies for 'active inclusion' on this basis so as to step up the fight against exclusion from society and from the labour market. "Current schemes for tackling poverty often don't work," said Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimír Špidla. "Social exclusion is the result of numerous problems, ranging from lack of a job or insufficient skills to poor housing, social isolation or family breakdown. We must take an integrated approach to offer people a genuine way out of poverty. This means reintegrating as many people as possible in the labour market, while ensuring that those who cannot work also have access to adequate resources to live a dignified life."

Read more on <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1448&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

European Commission to grill Czech Republic over delayed anti-discrimination law

Brussels, 02/10/2008 - The European Commission will soon file a complaint against the Czech Republic because the country has not incorporated the EC anti-discrimination directive into its legislation, Czech Labour and Social Affairs Minister Petr Necas told CTK Thursday. Necas discussed on Thursday discrimination against minorities with his EU counterparts in Luxembourg. Necas said the EC will definitely file the complaint in a "relatively short time," or by the end of October at the latest, according to the information he received. He said the complaint would be no surprise for Prague. "It was just a question of time when it would be filed," Necas said. The anti-discrimination bill aims to ensure equal access to education, work, health care and social advantages, for instance, irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, health handicap, sex, religion and world outlook. The Czech Republic should have had the law already when it joined the EU in 2004. It is the last EU member country not to have it as yet. Czech parliament passed an anti-discrimination bill, but President Vaclav Klaus vetoed it. The lower house is to take a repeat vote on the bill after the regional and Senate elections to be held in late October. It may not be pushed through because of the disunity of the government coalition. The European Court of Justice may impose a high fine on the Czech Republic if it does not pass the bill.

Source: The Prague Daily Monitor

Council of Europe: Roma are the most oppressed minority in Russia

Brussels, 04/10/2008 - The Council of Europe's anti-racism commission found that the Roma are the most oppressed minority in Russia, the national daily "Vremya Novostey" reported. "Gypsies, like people from the Caucasus, are stopped 20 times often more by police than people of Slavic appearance," said the commission's deputy chief Michael Head, a conclusion seconded by Russia's human rights ombudsman Vladimir Lukin. But Galina Kozhevnikova of the Sova Centre observed that people from Central Asia are more likely to fall victim to neo-Nazi violence. The commission also found that the Russian government has not taken the necessary steps against neo-Nazis and that migration laws contribute to discrimination against migrants. Both the CoE commission and Kozhevnikova found that Russian police have increased the number of neo-Nazi arrests, though hate crimes laws are still rarely applied.

Source: UCSJ

Council of Europe, PACE: Serbia "Must Tackle Roma, Romanian Rights"

Belgrade, 06/10/2008 - Serbia must do more to fight discrimination against its Roma, Vlach and Romanian minorities, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe says in a new resolution. The resolution states that Serbia must promote diversity and fight against intolerance and discrimination directed toward its Roma, Vlach and Romanian minorities. The council wants Serbia to develop national councils and enact a law against discrimination. The situation in the ethnically-diverse Northern Province of Vojvodina was deemed satisfactory by the report. The resolution highlights and questions the dominance of the Serbian Orthodox Church in deciding which religions and churches are officially recognised by the state. The resolution also highlights as negative the fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church is not officially recognised.

Read more on http://www.divers.ro/actualitate_en?wid=37647&func=viewSubmission&sid=9229

Italy: Many Roma Gypsies 'gone to permissive Spain' says minister

Rome, 03/10/2008 - Italy's Interior Minister Roberto Maroni said that Roma Gypsies have left the country and gone to 'permissive Spain' in an interview with Italian weekly L'Espresso. "We thought there were 120,000 (Roma Gypsies in Italy). There are less. Many of them have spontaneously gone to the more permissive Spain of Zapatero," said Maroni, referring to Spain's Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. However, Spanish Minister of Work and Immigration Celestino Corbacho responded to Maroni on Friday by saying: "I think that Roberto Maroni would do better by making his remarks and policies fit with what we agreed on, only 15 days ago, in the Council of Ministers of the Interior and Justice, which is the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum," said Corbacho quoted by Spanish daily El Pais.

Read more on <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Politics/?id=3.0.2536557554>

Italy: Roma-Gypsy camp dismantled again in capital

Rome, 06/10/2008 - A group of 45 Roma-Gypsy families were expelled for the third time from their camp on Monday by Italian police. The 'Via Salamanca' camp located in the Tor Vergata area on the south-eastern outskirts of Rome was set-up in June after its inhabitants were kicked out of the central Campo Boario and northern Saxa Rubra camps. The camp housed 120 people, approximately 40 of them children. "Once again we were moved. This time from a parking area in the Tor Vergata University, to another parking lot a couple of kilometres away," said Aldo Hudorovic, spokesperson for the Kalderash Roma-Gypsy clan in an interview with Adnkronos International (AKI). "We are 45 families, all Italian citizens. The authorities tell us they cannot find a place for us," Hudorovic said. Authorities say 45 caravans were removed and the area given back to students and staff of the Tor Vergata University. After being expelled by the authorities from the Campo Boario and Saxa Rubra camps, the Kalderash families were offered a place in what is described by many as the 'squalid' Castel Romano camp, located 30 kilometres outside the city, which houses 800 people living in prefabricated housing. The Kalderash families, who are traditionally metal workers, refused to settle there because they do not identify with the other Roma-Gypsies in the camp. Many of the Castel Romano camp's inhabitants are Roma-Gypsies from Bosnia who left after the ethnic cleansing campaigns of the early 1990's during the Balkan wars.

Italy: Northern League calls for licensing system for immigrants

Milan, 08/10/2008 - Italy's anti-immigration Northern League party is under fire after it suggested a points system for would-be immigrants - with expulsions once people reach zero. The Northern League, which is part of the ruling centre-right coalition, said it was making the proposal so it would be easier to expel immigrants and tougher for Italians to marry foreigners simply for the purpose of getting them citizenship. Under the scheme, immigrants would start off with 10 points - but they would lose the points on a sliding scale if they committed crimes both criminal and civil.

Read more on www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1073949/italian-party-calls-licensing-immigrants--expulsions-hit-zero.html

UK: Judge stops Council destroying Dale Farm Community School

Basildon, 04/10/2008 - Residents at Dale Farm will on Monday morning stand by ready to hand bailiffs a copy of the injunction granted last night (4 Oct) which restrains Basildon council from demolishing their community centre. The interim injunction was granted by an out of hours High Court Judge pending the hearing of an application for a judicial review of the council's decision to use direct action to remove the Saint Christopher Centre. The log cabin was erected at Dale Farm, Crays Hill, Essex, with funding from the Essex County Council through the Racial Equality Council, to serve as a centre for youth activities. The suppliers told Dale Farm Housing Association it did not require planning permission.

Read more on <http://eu.youthspeak.org/roma/?p=7753>

UK: Health inequalities: travelling communities

London, 06/10/2008 - The alarming levels of health inequalities experienced by travelling communities can be better understood and tackled by health professionals, says Richard O'Neill. The health of Gypsy Roma Travellers is more scary tale than fairy tale. I know from first-hand experience of having been born and brought up in a caravan that accessing healthcare while on the road is never easy. In the four decades since then, it has not improved much. Study after study shows that Gypsies and Travellers have the worst health of any ethnic minority in the country and the anecdotal evidence that my colleagues and I collect on our travels shows an even worse picture. It can be worse still for men, who can just drop out of the health service altogether, only to re-engage with it when absolutely necessary, usually in accident and emergency. A cause for concern, yes - but also an opportunity to tackle the problem once and for all.

Read more on <http://www.hsj.co.uk/goodmanagement/2008/09/travellers.html;jsessionid=C8310FDA458DC317132ABC791092FBDF>

Hungary: Thousands take to the streets to say no to prejudice and intimidation

Budapest, 05/10/2008 - A colourful crowd gathered under a grey sky Saturday on a square in the windswept and eerily deserted centre of Budapest. A non-political alliance of civil organisations had called for thousands to assemble on Erzsébet tér and march down Andrásy út in a show of solidarity against the encroachment of an increasingly vocal extreme right wing into Hungarian public discourse and the streets. Tarka Magyar (Multicoloured Magyar) was the name chosen for a movement that includes Amnesty International and many homosexual and Roma organisations.

Read more on <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/content/view/9377/219/>

Ireland: Increase in number of migrants repatriated

Dublin, 06/10/2008 - The Irish government repatriated more than 500 eastern European migrants to their home countries so far this year under a scheme aimed at assisting destitute immigrants. In the eight months leading up to August a total of 511 migrants were repatriated. The number for the full year is set to well exceed last year's total of 538 repatriations. The figures come at a time when unemployment among foreign nationals is rising sharply, with an increase of almost 80 per cent in the number of non-Irish signing onto the live register over the past year.

Read more on <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2008/10/06/1222959410662.html>

Romania: government announces 300 social homes for the Roma

Bucharest, 06/10/2008 - With state budget money, 300 social homes shall be built and leased to families with low income from the Roma communities, according to the decision of the Government from the 1st of October. Upon the initiative of the SGS and the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing, the executive body approved the Pilot-Program "Social Housing for Roma Communities", intended to build 300 social homes. These dwellings can be leased to families, as well as households from Roma communities with a average net monthly income per person, over the past 12 months, lower than the average net monthly salary per economy, as communicated by NIS in the most recent Statistics Bulletin prior to the months when the application is processed, as well as prior to the month when the dwelling is distributed.

Read more on http://www.divers.ro/actualitate_en?wid=37647&func=viewSubmission&sid=9227

Serbia: Planned Roma settlement sparking angry reaction

Belgrade, 08/10/2008 - Ovca residents have threatened to use force to prevent the beginning of planned construction of a Roma settlement there. They have also warned that they will block the Zrenjanin road, which, in previous protests, has led to traffic chaos. Rajko Duric, president of the Roma Union of Serbia, told B92 that the state needed to invest more effort to solve the problems of minorities, and not treat them like second-class citizens. Ovca residents say that the Roma settlement would change the ethnic structure of that part of Belgrade, adding that there was not sufficient infrastructure to satisfy basic living conditions. Duric said that Ovca residents' opposition to the construction of a Roma settlement breached measures adopted by the state and the city, and that consequences would have to be borne for this. The Roma population, which lives in unsanitary conditions in central Belgrade under the Gazela bridge, was initially supposed to be moved out to three other parts of the capital, but the city authorities gave up following angry protests by local residents. Judging by the reaction of Ovca residents, it would appear that the Roma population is not welcome there either.

Source: B92

Albania: UNICEF Executive Director visits Roma community

Tirana, 3 October 2008 - UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman, on a two day visit to Albania, highlighted the plight of Roma children and efforts to strengthen the juvenile justice system. Veneman visited a Roma community where approximately 100 families were living in makeshift housing by a large landfill in Tirana. "An 11-year-old girl told me that she does not go to school because she has to work scavenging through the garbage," said Veneman. "A recent study found that there are approximately 5,000 Roma children between the ages of 3-16 years old. Results showed that only about 27 percent of Roma 6-year-olds are enrolled in school and that on average, 43 percent of Roma children between the ages of 15 and 16 are illiterate."

Read more on http://www.unicef.org/media/media_45832.html



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 inter-governmental 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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