

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

CoE Secretary General: Human Rights Day, “Human rights must go online!”

Strasbourg, 09/12/2009 – The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, today gave the following message to mark Human Rights Day: “Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the European Convention on Human rights and a pillar of the Europe we know today. We live in an age of technological innovation and advancing globalisation, where freedom of expression must continue to be central to our vision of Europe. The Internet is a space of creativity and enormous opportunity, but it can also present threats to our privacy, and dangers related to all sorts of cybercrime. We must never forget that the Internet can be (mis)used to promote discrimination and hatred. That is why freedom of expression is not an absolute right, it is a right that comes with responsibility. So it must be on the Internet. On the occasion of International Human Rights day and recognising the many essential advances in protecting and promoting human rights, the Council of Europe will seek close cooperation with governments and the private sector to make sure that human rights are both promoted and protected from abuse online”.

Council of the European Union conclusions on enlargement/stabilisation and association process, Western Balkans and Roma

Brussels, 7 and 8 December 2009. “The Council stresses the importance of protection of all minorities and encourages the governments of the region to take the necessary action to address these issues. Overall, the Roma minority continues to face very difficult living conditions and discrimination.

FRA Report: “racism at 'shocking' levels in the EU”

Brussels, 09/12/09 - Whether looking for a job, buying something from a shop or visiting the doctor, minorities in Europe commonly face discrimination, the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency has said. Using language rarely found in the dry reports of EU agencies, the FRA described as “shocking” the rampantly racist, anti-immigrant and Islamophobic experiences of minorities as they go about their daily lives. The agency's first-ever report, published on Wednesday (8 December), attempts to map the contours of discrimination across the bloc in a comprehensive, 276-page survey of over 23,000 individuals. It reveals that over a fifth (22 percent) of sub-Saharan Africans have been discriminated against at least once in the last year while looking for work, 17 percent of Roma say they have experienced similar incidents while being seen by a doctor or nurse and 11 percent of North Africans are subjected to racism when in or simply trying to enter a shop. The original continent of emigration is now one of the world's most popular destinations for immigration and in many countries amongst some sections of the native population, this change is unwelcome. As the economic crisis bites, discrimination is expected to intensify as people and political organisations look for outsiders to blame for the problem. But the precise extent of racism and other forms of ethnic discrimination are often unknown, particularly in government data - no similar official effort had previously been mounted on an EU-wide basis.

Full story at: <http://euobserver.com/9/29122/?rk=1>

ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

France: an online guide on legal provisions dealing with Travellers issues

Destined to be updated accordingly with the publication of new texts or ministerial circulars, this guide replaces the electronic volume of 850 pages published in 2007. "We adapt to changing Travellers habits, who although not have computers increasingly consult Internet through mobile phones," said Marc Béziat, general delegate ANGVC (National Association of Travellers/Gens de Voyages). Organized by brief records classified under headings: life, parking, housing and urban development, access to law, justice, this tool allows to find all items of legislation and regulations governing the most common situations. From parking of caravans to commercial activities on the street, through social benefits, land, family, etc. all subjects are scanned. "This is absolutely not a guide for the militants. We express elsewhere on the site our positions and demands", he said.

Source (in French): http://www.lagazettedescommunes.com/actualite/36829/gestion_locale/l_angvc_met_ligne_guide_pratique_gens_voyage.htm

Spain: Jerez's Gitanos to create their own political party for local council elections

Jerez de la Frontera, 09/12/09 - The group of Gypsies of Jerez de la Frontera works on the establishment of a local political party in order to run at the upcoming municipal elections to be held in spring 2011. The spokesman for this initiative, Luis Rebeco, explained that the intention of the promoters of this party is that Roma have to be represented in the Jerez City and become "spokespersons" of the problems of the collective. Rebeco has acknowledged that the group has "no integration problems" in Jerez, but "does not mean you do not have other needs that justify the establishment of a political party". The promoter of this initiative warns of high levels of truancy between Roma youth and assured that "approximately 30% of the group drop out prematurely". Rebeco has also found that the Gypsies of Jerez "suffer more than other citizens the housing problem, that is particularly entrenched in the historical districts needing rehabilitation". The party of the Gypsies of Jerez, yet unnamed, is clearly to be working from the ground. The managing board, whose composition is to be defined in these days, will be composed of twenty Gypsy men and women. The intention of the promoters of the project is "to achieve gender parity." Luis Rebeco is a former militant of the Socialist Party PSOE-A of Jerez and currently holds the position of delegate to Cadiz of the Romani Union, an NGO dedicated to defending the Gypsy community structured as a federation of associations composed of people from this ethnic group.

Source (in Spanish): <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2009/12/09/andalucia/1260362452.html>

Spain, Europe: one million signatures to take down wall of racism against Roma

Madrid, 04/12/09 - The Unión Romaní called Friday to support European citizens to collect a million signatures so to urge the Commission to take steps to "break down the walls of racism" against Roma which exist in various Member States. In a letter signed by the president of Unión Romaní, Juan De Dios Ramírez-Heredia, the organization says that since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December, the inhabitants of the Union are entitled to propose the Commission "citizen initiatives", provided they have the backing of one million signatures. "Surely you know of the existence of walls and partitions occasionally built by local councils and other individuals as well, in order to separate communities living in the same municipality. Usually these walls condemning the weakest in society to fall into the part where poverty and marginalization are more obvious "says the organisation. In order to "take them down" the Unión Romaní has inaugurated the www.unmillondefirmas.eu website where surfers can download the form to

register their signature and make copies for further dissemination.

Source (in Spanish): <http://www.europapress.es/epsocial/noticia-millon-firmas-europeas-combatir-racismo-gitanos-20091204194428.html>

UK: comment, "Then they came for the Gypsies"

By Grattan Puxon - The appearance of neo-fascist leader Nick Griffin on BBC's Question Time has caused outraged protest by those who fear extreme-right wing policies are becoming more acceptable in today's Britain. But if the British National Party with its million votes is moving into the mainstream, it's just as frightening that once middle-ground politicians are willing to court favour with the neo-fascists. Romanies and Travellers may have been in Britain half a millennium or more, yet are still not accepted by the middle-England majority. Those who continue to follow a nomadic life-style get it in the neck everyday due to some stubborn institutional racism locked into our bureaucracy and police forces. We're seeing it happen in Italy and Hungary, now we'll see it happening here. Twenty miles from the Mother of Parliaments, by the lorry-full and Landrover, with bulldozer and crane - stop them if you dare! - they're coming for the Gypsies. On UN Human Rights Day 10 December, Basildon's Tory chief will formally lead his cabinet in voting to give a two million pound contract to a bunch of hard-hat bullyboys to oust hundreds of Travellers from his district. It will be the ugliest yet act of ethnic-cleansing by a British local authority against an outpost of Europe's nascent Roma nation. Certainly the 4,000 Basildon voters who backed the British National Party at the last election will be pleased to have what in effect must be an endorsement of their bigoted anti-Gypsy attitudes. Something for the BNP's two MEPs to boast about it in the European Parliament.

Read more on: <http://hnhnorfolk.blogspot.com/2009/12/save-dale-farm-campaign.html>

UK: "hard decisions" on Gypsy sites, Wycombe District Council says

Wycombe, 09/12/09 - "Hard decisions" will need to be made in finding Gypsies places to live, a council boss said. Wycombe District Council is to consult on proposed sites where it would allow planning permission for Gypsies and Travellers. They hope this will stop illegal encampments such as a site in Hemley Hill near Princes Risborough. The fate of this site will be decided by an independent planning appeal next year – and the council hopes it can win by offering alternative locations (see link, bottom of story). Bosses could be forced to buy proposed sites, listed at the end of this story. Councillor Jean Teesdale, cabinet member for planning, said: "We've all got concerns. Every person involved will have concerns about this issue, that's the whole point of the consultation. "We've got to make some hard decisions. It's not easy and we know the public are concerned, and we share those concerns. We have seen the problems in Hemley Hill. "My constituents, if they have seen the Bucks Free Press, will soon be on to me."

Full story on: http://www.thisislocallondon.co.uk/news/4785140.Hard_decisions_on_gypsy_sites/

Hungary: Noble Prize Elie Wiesel tells Hungary to ban Holocaust denial

Budapest, 09/12/09 - Hungary should consider banning Holocaust denial to improve its image abroad and contain lurking hostility towards its minorities, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel said on Wednesday. Hungary is grappling with its worst economic downturn in almost two decades and rising aversion towards ethnic groups, mainly the country's large Roma population, lifted the far-right Jobbik party into the European Parliament earlier this year. Based on poll readings Jobbik is also likely to win enough votes in next year's elections to get into parliament. "Wherever in the world I come and the word Hungary is mentioned, the next word

is anti-Semitism," said Wiesel, 81, who was deported along with hundreds of thousands of other Jews to Nazi death camps during World War Two. "I urge you to do even more to denounce anti-Semitic elements and racist expressions in your political environment and in certain publications," Wiesel said. "I believe that they bring shame to your nation and they bring fear to its Jewish community and other minorities, such as the Roma," Wiesel, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 told a meeting of Jewish and Hungarian leaders in parliament. In July a court ruling dissolved the far-right Hungarian Guard, a radical nationalist organisation, which staged intimidating marches against Roma nationwide, in black uniforms and insignia, which critics say are reminiscent of the Nazi era. "I ask you, why don't you follow the example of France and Germany and declare Holocaust denial not only indecent, but illegal? In those countries Holocaust deniers go to jail," Wiesel said. Wiesel warned against what he called the perils of indifference and said Hungarians were responsible for how they handle memories of the past.

Full article on: <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-44603620091209>

Czech Republic: Council of Europe publishes report on minority languages

Strasbourg, 10.12.2009 - The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers has made public the first report on the situation of minority languages in the Czech Republic. The report was drawn up by a committee of independent experts which monitors the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The Committee of Ministers calls on the Czech Republic to promote awareness and tolerance vis-à-vis regional or minority languages as an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Czech Republic, both in the general curriculum at all levels of education and in the media. The Czech Republic should also adopt a structured policy for the protection and promotion of Romani and German, and create favourable conditions for their use in public life. It needs to ensure that speaking Romani at school is not prohibited or discouraged. Furthermore, the Czech Republic should improve legislation concerning the composition and powers of committees for national minorities, so that these rules do not present barriers to the implementation of the Charter; including the creation of regional or minority language schools and the use of Polish place names in topographical signs. Finally, the Committee of Ministers calls on the Czech Republic to take measures to make available teaching in or of Slovak, Romani and German, in co-operation with the speakers themselves. The regional or minority languages protected under the Charter in the Czech Republic are Polish, Slovak, German and Romani.

Full text of the recommendations: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/Report/EvaluationReports/CzechECRML1_en.pdf

Czech Republic: reportage, "Apartheid begins in the school"

A third of Roma children in the Czech Republic attend special schools for the mentally handicapped. A situation against which a number of associations are speaking out, and which ends up backfiring on the state when it has to foot the social and economic bill. According to recent estimates by the World Bank, Roma cost the Czech Republic no less than 16 billion crowns (€650m) a year. Though it isn't so much the Roma themselves, we should add, but their maladjustment to society. The experts say this phenomenon is chiefly due to the below-average level of education most Romani children receive, after which they have no chance whatsoever of landing a decent job. And the state is losing money because unemployed Roma do not create any economic value or pay taxes, though they do draw social security benefits. The World Bank figure does not allow for such "incidental costs" as the mediocre quality of life for socially excluded Roma, mounting social tensions, ethnic conflicts, crime and so on and so forth. For nearly 20 years now, national and international NGOs have been sounding the alarm about the disproportionate number of

Roma children placed in special schools, a fact corroborated by the first sociological survey ever commissioned by the Czech education minister. 30% of Roma children attend schools for the mentally handicapped, as against roughly 2% for the country's "white" pupils, which corresponds to the worldwide average. The vast majority of the remaining Roma children attend "Gypsy schools", where the results are not much better than in the schools for the mentally retarded.

Full article on: <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/151951-apartheid-begins-school>

Czech Republic: National Party representative charged over Roma "study"

Prague, 06/12/09 - South Bohemian police detectives have charged the author of a publication entitled "The Final Solution to the Gypsy Question" ("Konečné řešení otázky cikánské"), the main idea of which is that the Roma should be deported to India. The book's author now faces up to three years in prison. News server Týden.cz reported yesterday that the accused is evidently Jiří Gaudin, a former member of the National Party's National Council. Gaudin is the only author listed on the "study"; other contributors have hidden behind the anonymity of collective authorship. "Detectives have initiated the criminal prosecution of a 30-year-old male from the Mladá Boleslav region on suspicion of the crime of inciting hatred against a group or restricting their rights and freedoms," South Bohemian police spokesperson Jiří Matzner told Týden.cz. Matzner says Gaudin both wrote the "study" and then distributed it. The publication was released in April in Lety by Písek. Around 20 members and promoters of the National Party chose to release it at the very site where a Nazi concentration camp for Roma was in operation during the Second World War. At the time, Gaudin declared the "study" was a serious work: "This is not a provocation. It is a serious work of scholarship to which currently publishing academics have also contributed, although their names are not listed." Gaudin claimed those writing on the controversial topic had chosen anonymity as the work might otherwise cause problems for them in their other activities, although he personally did not believe this meant the "study" broke the law. Týden.cz reports that police have been investigating Gaudin ever since. According to Matzner, the "study" was made accessible on CD after its release and has continued to be distributed over the internet. Detectives had an expert evaluation produced of the publication. "The content of the 'study' incites hatred against a group of people to a significant degree," Matzner claims.

Full story at: http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_1414



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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