

Outcomes of ERIO's preparatory meeting for the EU Roma Summit

On the 15th of September 2008, the European Roma Information Office ERIO hosted a preparatory meeting participated by many Roma organisations. During this meeting, that took place at the European and Social Committee premises (Room JDE-63), Roma speakers, chairs, rapporteurs and key activists participating at the Roma Summit discussed the priorities to be raised the following day, also coordinating their interventions. Ivan Ivanov, ERIO's Executive Director stated: "This was a wonderful occasion to create more unity in our advocacy activity in favour of the Roma people. Lack of unity among Roma civil society is often one of the major causes of the misunderstanding between us and the European, national and local authorities. The meeting achieved its goal to come up to the Summit with a clear message. The brainstorming among the 40 Roma leaders that attended the meeting was useful for us to articulate the priorities and go to the Summit with a common position. It was agreed that the issues of the Italian crises will be raised but should not turn the topic of the day". For first time a Roma organization gathered such a high number of Roma leaders and activist to discuss hot topics. Roma activists had the possibility to talk in their native Romani language: this made them more comfortable to communicate with each other.

ERIO's participation at the EU Roma Summit

The first ever EU Roma Summit, that took place in Brussels on Tuesday 16 has seen ERIO as one of the most active Roma organisations. During the whole day, ERIO – that was present with its own information desk – distributed informative and advocacy documents to all the participants: its Newsletter, e-news, statements and recommendation papers were collected and read by an interested audience. Its Executive Director, Ivan Ivanov, and its Communication and Policy Officers were interviewed by a number TV, radios, news-agencies and newspapers from all over Europe. Mr. Ivanov also chaired a very lively panel, that seen the committed intervention of EU Commissioner for Freedom, Justice and Security Jaques Barrot and of the fiery speech of the first ever Roma Member of the European Parliament, Juan de Dios Ramirez Heredia. Other speakers were Anastasia Crickley (Fundamental Rights Agency) Mohamed Aziz (ENAR), Alexander Filipov (Bulgarian Deputy Minister of Emergency Situations) and Valeriu Nicolae (ERGO). ERIO will be involved in the follow up of the European Roma Summit and will push for the adoption of a European Roma Policy.

These are some extracts of ERIO presence in the media:

In Italian: Swiss Italian Radio:

http://real.xobix.ch/ramgen/rsi/rg/2008/rg_18_09162008.rm?start=15:54

In Slovak: Slovak TV:

<http://stv.livetv.sk/tvarchive//video/video.html?video=37103>

In French: RTBF1, Belgian Public Broadcaster

http://mediaserver.rtf.be/sites/rtbf-media/themes/rtbfmedia/iPlayer/MediaPlayer.php?skinURL=http://mediaserver.rtf.be/sites/rtbf-media/themes/rtbfmedia/iPlayer/skins/white_retro/white_retro.swf&runtimeCSS=http://mediaserver.rtf.be/sites/rtbf-media/themes/rtbfmedia/iPlayer/skins/white_retro/runtimeCSS.swf

ERIO participation at the Extreme Right Watch Conference at the EP

ERIO' Executive Director, Ivan Ivanov, participated at a conference on discrimination and violence prevention organised by Extreme Right Watch and the Socialist group (PSE) at the European Parliament (EP). In his speech, Mr Ivanov reminded that a number of reports and researches showed that Roma are the most discriminated group in Europe. "In order to achieve equality for Roma, anti-discrimination legislation should be effectively implemented – he stated – In addition to this, anti-discrimination policies should be also adopted. One of the hopes that the civil society has about the outcomes of the EU Roma Summit are the commitments made by high level European officials for a EU comprehensive Roma Policy, with a necessarily shared approach between EU and Member states". Mr Ivanov also focused his words on the importance of Roma participation in the making of these policies. He also said that "it is very important that this policy promoted positive action and positive duties, something which should eliminate ongoing and future discrimination and will compensate for past discrimination. Regular reporting on the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation in the case of Roma is fundamental from the governmental side". Belinda Pike from the European Commission said that "the fight against discrimination should use the available tools, as the Race Directive 43/2000. New legislation with for more grounds was introduced in July this year. Concerning Roma, now it is the moment to build up. Roma civil society also should take advantage of this momentum. A strong political will is necessary and the Commission is committed to this issue, as well as the French EU presidency".

Roma Summit: World Bank laments slow progress in Roma integration

Brussels, 16/09/08 – The European Commission and the French Presidency jointly hosted on September 16th the first ever EU Roma Summit in Brussels. Attended by more than 400 people including NGO representatives, Member States and World Bank officials, as well as the EU Commissioners for internal affairs, labour, social policy and education, the Summit is trying to find ways and means to tackle integration problems of the Roma people across Europe. Speaking to New Europe on the sidelines of the Summit, Shigeo Katsu, World Bank Vice President for Europe and Central Asia Region said, "The first Conference in Budapest in June 2003 attracted more than 600 participants including the World Bank, the UNDP, Council of Europe, the European Commission and the Soros Foundation." "There the Roma Initiative was established with four broad areas of concern: Education, health, housing and jobs. Out of these four, as education was found to be crucial to the Initiative, the Roma Education Fund was organised and it has more than 20 donors today and Mr. George Soros is becoming a key driver for this Initiative." "Looking at individual country programmes the social uplifting at grass root level is being provided for most disadvantaged group which in our case here is Roma," he told New Europe. "We are working with the governments to develop Institutional Development Capacity so that these can become capable of receiving EU's structural funds and implement programmes," he added. Clarifying that the World Bank projects are always government projects, Katsu said, "When we start programmes, we are involved in designing the programmes and then after funding, we support implementation and do the necessary reviews periodically." Asked to comment if he is happy with the progress made so far, Katsu said, "No, we still have a long way to go. Although we can say we have come some way since 2003, we need to push further and step up to next level." Other dignitaries attending were European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso along with Bernard Kouchner, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and Christine Boutin, Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs (on behalf of the French EU Presidency), several ministers from EU Member States and candidate countries as well as George Soros, Chair of the Open Society Institute and Romani Rose, President of the German Central Council of Sinti and Roma. Political pundits and social observers pointed out that this Roma Summit is the first time that EU institutions, national governments and civil society organisations representing the Roma community from around Europe are getting together at the highest level platform to discuss the situation of Roma in the EU and find ways to improve it. Although the European Community Law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race and ethnic origins in all areas of life, its a common knowledge that discrimination against Roma persists.

Source: <http://www.neurope.eu/articles/89801.php>

Roma Summit: NGOs want results

Brussels, 16/09/08 – Human rights groups have called on the European Commission to refrain from preaching empty words and come up with concrete strategies to tackle the problems faced by Europe's Roma population during the first EU 'Roma Summit' in Brussels.

Read more on <http://www.euractiv.com/en/socialeurope/ngos-want-results-eu-roma-summit/article-175412>

Roma Summit: looking at ways to improve lives of Roma

Brussels, 16/09/08 – The meeting of some 400 government, Roma and civil society officials on Tuesday, Sept. 16, came amid controversy over an Italian move to fingerprint Roma, including children, which was watered down under pressure from rights groups. "The problem which we are facing together -- as political leaders and citizens, as members of majority societies and as Roma -- is one of great urgency," European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said, opening the talks. "Mainstream societies need to offer the Roma a real, practical chance to improve their perspectives." There are around 10 million Roma living in Europe, mostly in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. In Belgium, where the European Commission conference is taking place, there are 20,000 Roma. Ahead of the summit, rights groups led by Amnesty International urged the EU to tackle the problems and protect the rights of Roma people. "Enough time has passed, there needs to be a framework with objectives and deadlines" the groups said in a statement. The Roma are a historically persecuted group: the Nazis sent them to concentration camps, and more recently, they've been attacked by far right-wing groups. "In many cities in eastern as well as western Europe, violence and racist agitation against our people," said Romani Rose, head of the German Central Council of Roma and Sinti. In Italy earlier this year, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announced his government would begin fingerprinting the Roma population. That move was denounced by human rights groups, but the European Commission has decided the policy is not racist. Manuel Charpentier, head of Belgium's Roma organization, travels in a white caravan, with a group of 50 men, women and children. They often stop somewhere, only to be moved on by police a few minutes later. Authorities are trying to destroy their way of life, Charpentier said. "We have a culture, a tradition," he said. "We're old Europeans." The Roma want to be a part of general society, but general society won't let them, Charpentier said. "They have to see us as equal human beings and respect us as equal members of society," he said. "We exist." According to the EU Commission, millions of European Roma face widespread discrimination, high poverty and unemployment. Life expectancy for Roma is also 10 year to 15 years lower than those of other Europeans. In Belgium, most of the Roma have Belgian citizenship. However, being a citizen requires having a postal address, and that's difficult when the address always changes. In Flemish Belgium, towns with more than 5,000 inhabitants are required to reserve a site of land for Roma. In the Belgian capital Brussels, where several thousand Roma are estimated to live, there is no such requirement. For years, Charpentier said he has been holding talks on the allocation of land to Roma in Brussels, also looking at access to power, water, sewerage and rubbish disposal facilities.

Source: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,3648166,00.html>

Roma summit draws crowds and controversy

Brussels, 16/09/08 – The event, organised by EU Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimír Špidla, managed to attract a big audience but produced little in terms of policy initiatives. Attendance at the first European Roma Summit yesterday (16 September) exceeded all expectations, with more than 500 representatives of EU institutions, member-state governments and civil society participating. But the event also highlighted differences between stakeholders. In the morning session, it soon became clear that there was no consensus on the policy course to be followed. Calls for an EU framework strategy on Roma inclusion, supported by the EU Roma Policy Coalition and human rights NGOs, received a mixed reaction from policymakers at the event. The idea of creating a Roma unit within the European Commission, modelled on a previously created Council of Europe division, drew contrasting

responses from representatives of the French government, which currently holds the EU's six-month rotating presidency, and the Czech government, which takes over in January. Czech Minister for Human Rights and National Minorities Džamila Stehlíková welcomed the proposal, saying "the Czech Presidency will support the establishment of an EU Roma unit" at the Commission. But France's Christine Boutin, the minister for housing and urban affairs, instead insisted that "it is not necessary to create new committees or policy instruments," calling for efficient and effective use of existing tools. Sharing Boutin's view, Commissioner Špidla said "existing solutions are already designed for the long term" and said it was "irresponsible to think that the European Commission might develop a centralised approach from Brussels". Scathing criticism came in the afternoon session from Roma activist Rudko Kawczynski, who accused the organisers of lacking awareness of the issues at stake. "We have spent a whole day here without understanding the problem," he said, "while Roma in this conference room are, at best, decoration". Kawczynski claimed that aid policies have created a myriad of self-referential Roma rights NGOs out of touch with the realities faced by Roma populations, who live in conditions "worse than in apartheid South Africa [...] in many little Warsaw Ghettos". "New actions are part of the problem, not the solution," he concluded. The atmosphere in the conference room became increasingly tense when Eugenia Maria Roccella, representing the Italian government, was booed as she started speaking by a small but vocal group of Roma activists. The group then left the room in a sign of protest against the Berlusconi executive's plans to fingerprint Roma. Taking the floor, Shigeo Katsu, the World Bank's vice president for Europe and Central Asia, offered a more positive perspective. Illustrating the evolution of a decade of funding by the World Bank in favour of Roma inclusion, he underlined that "some progress has been made". However, he added, "we still have a long way to go. We need to push further and step up to the next level".

Source: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/socialeurope/eu-roma-summit-draws-crowds-controversy/article-175463>

Roma Summit: EU urges action to integrate Roma

The poverty and discrimination that blight the lives of many Roma (Gypsies) across Europe have dominated an EU conference in Brussels. The special meeting on Tuesday was called to encourage EU member states to give Roma the access to education and welfare that other citizens enjoy. About 10 million Roma live in the EU - and the European Commission says they face deeply embedded discrimination. The Commission president issued an urgent appeal to help them. "The problem which we are facing together... is one of great urgency," Jose Manuel Barroso said. More than 400 officials, Roma representatives and civil society activists attended the conference, the first such EU summit. Some Roma delegates wore T-shirts saying "No to ethnic profiling," the AFP news agency reported. An Italian move to fingerprint Roma - already condemned by the European Parliament and human rights groups as discriminatory - came under fire again. George Soros, founder of the Open Society Institute, said it was "a case of ethnic profiling which ought to be illegal," the Associated Press reported. Italy's right-wing government introduced the fingerprinting measure, saying it would cut crime and push Roma children to attend school instead of begging. An estimated 150,000 Roma live in Italy, mainly in squalid, makeshift camps on the outskirts of major cities. The Brussels conference was aimed at raising awareness of Roma needs and identifying the best ways to improve their lives. Joseph Jones, vice-chairman of the UK Gypsy Council, told the BBC that "we face daily discrimination". "We face discrimination from the press, from local councillors, from local people, in education. We're totally segregated in education, we're segregated in the planning system, so we've been facing segregation for many years," he said. In 2000-2006 the European Commission spent 275m euros (£218m) on projects specifically geared towards helping Roma. A further one billion euros was spent on disadvantaged groups in general, including Roma.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/7619703.stm>

Roma Summit: Barroso: Social inclusion of Roma people is matter of urgency

Brussels, 16/9/08 -- European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso said last Tuesday that the social inclusion of the Roma is a matter of urgency for the European Union (EU). He said the living conditions of the most of the Roma population are unacceptable in 21st century Europe. "It is urgent not just in political terms, but above all in human terms," Barroso told the first ever Roma Summit in Brussels. He said the Roma represent the largest ethnic group facing extreme poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination although they have been part of Europe since the Middle Ages. He noted that there is persisting discrimination against the Roma in the European Union (EU). Over three quarters of EU citizens think that being Roma is a disadvantage in society, on a par with being disabled, he said. He said the situation is being made worse by the lack of perspectives faced by the young Roma generation. "In the 'knowledge society' of the 21st century, the lack of skills faced by this disadvantaged group increasingly means wasted lives," he said. He said the Roma must be offered opportunities to mainstream education, mainstream jobs and mainstream housing. He asked EU member states to shoulder responsibilities to tackle the problem. Inclusion of Roma is a joint responsibility of the EU and the member states, he said. But instruments for creating changes are mainly in the hands of the member states. "Key policies for the inclusion of Roma are the competence of member states," he argued. The Roma Summit was held after the Italian government drew fire from human rights groups for its plan to fingerprint Roma, including children.

Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-09/16/content_10046078.htm

Czech Republic: Čunek wants Roma to be divided into three groups

Prague, 14/09/08 – The Czech Local Development Ministry of Jiri Cunek has worked out a plan that reckons with Romany families in the country being divided into three groups according to their social level, each approached in a different way, writes the latest issue of the weekly Tyden to be out on Monday. The first group will comprise the families that live almost independent of the social allowance system. The second group is to comprise those abusing social allowances. The third group will be the Romanies who have to be supervised always and everywhere, Tyden writes. Romanies in the last mentioned group should be moved to hostels with a strict regime and under social workers' supervision. "It is necessary to set conditions for them that would force them to overcome their indolence" Tyden cites the ministerial document. Cunek, chairman of the junior ruling Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL), has reportedly presented his plan to the government council for the Romany community. Only those working for their municipality would be eligible for social allowances. If members of a family find a job and if they send their kids to school, they will get a chance to be allotted a flat in a better part of the town. The Local Development Ministry estimates the plan's costs at about a billion crowns. According to its document, it is important to weaken the ties within Romany family clans. That is why two families of relatives should be allowed to live in the same house at the most. Most of those who have already read the document have told Tyden that it is too vague and can hardly be called "a plan." "This is all a sci-fi," Ivan Vesely from the government council for the Romany community is quoted as saying. In the past, human rights activists as well as political partners criticised Cunek for having had, in his capacity as a mayor of Vsetin, north Moravia, moved several Romany families out from the town. Cunek's previous plan for Romany integration raised reservations as well.

Source: http://www.praguemonitor.com/en/422/czech_national_news/28035/

Turkey: US commission troubled by treatment of Sulukule

Istanbul, 17/09/08 – The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission), an independent government agency created by the US Congress, has stated that it is disturbed by developments in an urban development project threatening the homes of some 3,500 ethnic Roma in Istanbul's Sulukule area and called on the Turkish government to find a solution for the problems facing the Roma in Sulukule. In April, the commission's chairman, Congressman Alcee Hastings, along with Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Senator Benjamin L. Cardin and Helsinki commissioners Joseph R. Pitts and G.K. Butterfield, sent a letter to Prime Minister

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan regarding the Sulukule urban transformation project. The letter expressed concern over the demolition of this historic community, which dates back to 1054 and whose residents are being forced to relocate outside of the city or onto the streets of İstanbul. In a statement released on Monday, Hastings said: "Despite efforts to find an alternative to the project, the demolition continued on Aug. 28. I am extremely troubled by the nature of this demolition and the way it has been carried out. I believe that the Turkish government must find a common solution to this situation that not only treats the residents of Sulukule with the dignity and respect they deserve, but also ensures they are not left homeless." Hastings also noted that Mustafa Demir, the mayor of the district in which Sulukule is located, said in an interview with a newspaper earlier in September that the project "is an opportunity for the people living there that they will never again have in their life." Concerning the mayor's words, Hastings said in his message: "I do not find the destruction and subsequent forced removal of residents from one of the oldest Roma communities in Europe to be a so-called 'opportunity.' The Roma community in Sulukule has continued to live under extremely dire conditions -- conditions that no one should have to endure. This urban transformation project is not about preserving this centuries-old neighborhood in a way that would allow the Roma living there to remain and contribute to Turkish society. Instead 620 new homes, a hotel and a culture and entertainment center will be constructed, displacing an historic community. I urge the Turkish government and in particular Mayor Demir to uphold the agreement from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) 1999 İstanbul Summit," where Turkey had recognized the difficulties faced by Roma and promised to take effective measures in order to achieve full equality of opportunity for these individuals, consistent with OSCE commitments. "It is imperative that the Turkish government find a solution that will eliminate the displacement and forced migration of the Roma community in Sulukule and instead give them the opportunity to work, provide shelter and education to their families and contribute fully to society," Hastings' message said. The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is an independent US government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE commitments. The commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the US House of Representatives and one member each from the departments of state, defense and commerce.

Source: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=153389&bolum=101>



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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