

ERIO ACTIVITIES

ERIO receives visit of CoE HR Commissioner Hammarberg

On January 28th, Thomas Hammarberg, Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe, visited the premises of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) in Brussels. During the meeting, Mr. Hammarberg discussed with ERIO's Executive Director Ivan Ivanov and other staff members about the Roma situation in Europe, with particular focus to East European countries and candidate/acceding countries. Mr Ivanov described ERIO activities and proposed to regularly provide Mr. Hammarberg with information concerning the rights of Roma and also to cooperate with his office in future initiatives.

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

EP: Livia Jaroka, Romani women are the most vulnerable women

Brussels, 28/01/10 - The EP's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality hosted a hearing on the new EU strategy for gender equality. In her speech Livia Járóka (European People's Party - EPP) the Vice-Chair of the committee drew the attention to multiple discrimination and to the harmful economic effects of disparities among women and men. "On the one hand the low-quality implementation of equality-related directives needs to be improved, while on the other hand antidiscrimination legislation itself is not sufficient to tackle the complex and deep-rooted patterns of inequality" - underlined Livia Járóka who is the shadow-rapporteur of the EP's report on the new strategy. The MEP expressed her hope that the new strategy would place proper emphasis on combating multiple discrimination, given that women from ethnic minorities and especially Romani women encounter much different experiences than men from the same ethnic group or women from the majority. She also pointed out the extremely vulnerable situation of Romani women in ... Speaking of the challenges of the new strategy, Járóka underlined that inadequate investment in economic and social opportunities of women limited economic growth and slowed the reduction of poverty and disparities in education, employment and access to health care were not merely unfair but made for a bad economy. The MEP quoted the latest survey of EUROSTAT, according to which 16% of EU citizens are directly affected by poverty and when it comes to elderly poverty, the gender gap is 22%. Professor Sylvia Walby, the UNESCO Chair in Gender Research pointed out in her speech that the human rights related aspects of gender equality were not as much institutionalized as the principle of equal treatment in employment, even though the application of this aspect necessary in such fields as combating violence against women. Professor Giovanna Da Molin from the University of Bari drew the attention to the situation of single mothers, as well as elderly and immigrant women who are most threatened by poverty and social exclusion in modern society. In 2006 the European Commission launched its roadmap for equality between women and men aiming to foster economic independence and better reconciliation between work and family life as well as to diminish the pay gap among men and women and violence against women. Belinda Pyke, director of the EC's DG Employment promised to present the draft for the new strategy in July 2010, which after consulting the EP and the stakeholders might be launched in early 2011 during the Hungarian Presidency.

Hammarberg: Language rights of national minorities must be respected

Language rights have become an issue of contention within several European countries. While some governments take steps to strengthen the standing of the official language, national minorities are concerned that their linguistic rights are being undermined. The spelling of personal names on passports, the displaying of street names and other topographical indications, the language used in schools, the language requirements when communicating with the authorities and the possibility to establish minority media – such issues are again being raised by minority representatives in several European countries. The redrawing of the political map in Europe over the past twenty years has in some places made these problems more acute. Also, emerging nationalistic tendencies - combined with confusion and insecurity about “national identity” - appear to have encouraged extremists to promote a xenophobic discourse against minority interests. This is an area in which mature political leadership is particularly needed. Language is an essential tool for social organisation, including for the very functioning of the state. However, language is also a central dimension of individual identity on a personal level, and is often especially important for those in a minority position. Disputes have arisen in some countries where the status of the state language has been perceived as threatened in regions where minorities are strongly present in number and perhaps also in politics. An argument for the controversial amendments last year to the Law on State Language in Slovakia was the importance of ensuring that Slovak-only speakers would be able to understand all official communications, even when residing in areas primarily populated by the Hungarian minority. Minorities, primarily the Hungarian population, found the proposed law changes discriminatory, reacted strongly against the introduction of sanctions for non-respect of the language law and felt that the minority languages needed better legal protection.

Full article: <http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/32954>

Remembering Holocaust key to fighting today racism, says OSCE Roma adviser

New York City, 27/01/10 - Remembering the Holocaust is key to fighting modern day manifestations of racism and intolerance, said the OSCE's senior Roma and Sinti adviser, attending a Holocaust remembrance ceremony at the United Nations headquarters in New York today. Andrzej Mirga, the head of the Roma and Sinti Contact Point at the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), stressed the need to teach people about the Holocaust, including the long-neglected ordeal of the tens of thousands of Roma and Sinti who perished in Nazi concentration camps. "I hope that the narratives of Roma and Sinti and their stories about suffering and persecution under the Nazi regime will be heard and will become part of the teaching on the history of the Holocaust, and thus make clear what should never happen again," said Mirga, who will speak at a ceremony to mark today's International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. The ceremony was organized by the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, which has partnered with ODIHR since the programme was established in 2006. He said racist ideologies remain virulent in modern society: "Those who suffered during the Nazi era, including Roma and Sinti, cannot forget that racist ideologies were the root cause of their persecution at the time, and that is also why they feel particularly threatened today by extremist or neo-Nazi groups." Holocaust remembrance and education on tolerance must be complemented by laws protecting the dignity and human rights of all people, as well as by the effective application of law enforcement tools to prevent or punish violent manifestations of racist and extremist ideologies, Mirga added. OSCE participating States have committed themselves to promote remembrance of the Holocaust. At least 41 of the OSCE's 56 participating States commemorate the Holocaust with official events, according to a new survey pub-

lished by ODIHR today. Thirty-three OSCE states have established official memorial days for Holocaust victims. Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, the director of ODIHR, is taking part today in the commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Oswiecim, Poland. The OSCE has played a prominent role in developing responses to anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR assists participating States in implementing their commitments to combat hate crimes and promote tolerance and non-discrimination.

Source: <http://www.osce.org/item/42488.html>

ROMA NEWS FROM AROUND EUROPE

Slovenia: Roma finally get Councillor in Grosuplje

Grosuplje, 24/01/10 - The Roma community in the municipality of Grosuplje, some 30 kilometres southeast of Ljubljana, have eventually managed to elect their representative on the local council. Final unofficial results of Sunday's vote show the seat will go to Elko Hudorovac.

Source: <http://www.sta.si/en/vest.php?s=a&id=1472844>

Slovenia: Gantar discusses topical issues with Roma representatives

Ljubljana, 27/01/10 - National Assembly Speaker Pavel Gantar received on Wednesday a delegation of the Slovenian Roma Association, discussing topical issues and assessing the situation of the Roma in Slovenia. Gantar emphasised the recent attempt to prevent a funeral of a Roma woman in a village in SE Slovenia.

Source: <http://www.sta.si/en/vest.php?s=a&id=1473832>

Romania: Roma family forced to live in metal cabins behind sewage works, says AI

Bucharest, 26/01/10 - "We are Gypsies and that is why they don't listen to us" - Monika, May 2009 More than 100 Roma people – including families with children – are living in metal cabins next to a sewage works in Romania after they were forcibly evicted from their homes, according to a new Amnesty report launching today. The report, Treated like waste: Roma homes destroyed and health at risk in Romania, tells how the Roma people were forcibly evicted by municipal authorities from a building in the centre of Miercurea Ciuc – the capital city of Harghita County in central Romania. Most were resettled by the authorities in metal cabins on the outskirts of the town, behind a sewage treatment plant. Some decided to move to a nearby waste dump, rather than live next to the sewage plant. Erszebet, who lives next to the sewage treatment plant with her husband and nine children, told Amnesty International what life is like in a metal cabin: "It is tight, when the whole family goes to sleep we don't fit in. We cannot take a bath; we cannot clean ourselves. It is too small. We don't want the older girls to take a bath in front of their father." The temporary metal cabins and shacks are close to the sewage treatment plant, falling within the 300-metre protection zone established by Romanian law to separate homes from potential toxic hazards.

Full story on: http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=18587

EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

New EU Roma website

You want to know what the EU does for the Roma? We invite you to visit the brand new EU Roma web portal: www.ec.europa.eu/roma. The Roma web portal works as a central source to gather and present information on Commission activities and funding supporting Roma inclusion. It also links to the NGOs and international organisations active in this field. Finally, it provides updated information on the recent major research and studies on Roma inclusion in Europe.

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=518&langId=en>

Policy Briefing with Thorbjørn Jagland, CoE Secretary General- 16 February 2010

Strengthening human rights across Europe, with Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe on Tuesday, 16 February 2010, 9.00-10.15 (Registration at 8.45) at Résidence Palace (Polak Room), 155 Rue de la Loi, 1040 Brussels. The European Policy Centre, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, is delighted to invite you to a Policy Briefing with Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, on 16 February 2010. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty opens up new possibilities to strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe, as the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights acquires binding force. Likewise, under the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is required to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights, which is the most important of all human rights instruments of the Council of Europe (CoE). All 27 member countries of the EU are already parties to the Convention. The nomination of an EU Commissioner (and Vice-President of the College) responsible for fundamental rights, and the recent establishment of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (based in Vienna) have raised the human rights profile of the EU further and increased opportunities for cooperation with the CoE whose core goal is the promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law throughout the European continent. The CoE has 47 member countries with 800 million inhabitants. Through their membership, those countries have accepted legally binding comprehensive standards and commitments concerning fundamental rights, including strong monitoring mechanisms for their implementation. Such standards and commitments are important not only for the EU countries themselves, but also for relations with their neighbours - who are to a large extent fellow CoE members. At this Policy Briefing, newly-elected Secretary-General Jagland will address the prospects for reinforcing human rights and fundamental freedoms across the entire European continent in the wake of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, and its implications for relations between the EU and the Council of Europe.

Source: www.epc.eu



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.

ERIO

Av. Edouard Lacomblé 17
Brussels 1040

Belgium

Tel: 0032(0)27333462

Fax: 0032(0)27333875

For more information: news@erionet.org / ivan.ivanov@erionet.org / www.erionet.org