

ERIO's participation in NICEM Annual Human Rights Conference

On February, 12 January 2007, NICEM (Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities) organised the 9th Annual Human Rights and Equality Conference in Belfast, under the heading "Minority Rights and Protection: International Standards and the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland". In the framework of the conference international and regional standards of minority protection and the methodologies to translate them into domestic protection were discussed. The NGOs' perspective on minority protection in Europe was analysed in five workshops, focusing on migrant workers, Roma and Travelers, asylum seekers and refugees, religious education, and, language and cultural rights.

Ivan Ivanov, Executive Director of ERIO, was speaker in workshop on Roma and Travelers. He stressed in his speech the need of Member States to adopt ECRI's General Policy Recommendations N°7 (on national legislation to combat racist discrimination and racial discrimination) to complement the Race Equality Directive and build up a comprehensive legislative framework for protecting the rights of minorities and of the Roma and Travelers in particular.

ERIO's involvement in addressing multiple discrimination

On 17 January 2007 a meeting of the Steering Group on Multiple Discrimination of the European Commission took place. The Steering Group, of which the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) is member, is coordinated by the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The Steering Group devoted this meeting to discuss the research project of the Danish Institute for Human Rights on multiple discrimination. According to the researchers multiple discrimination takes place when one person is discriminated against because of more than one ground of discrimination, e.g. when a person is discriminated because of his/her ethnicity and sexual orientation. Multiple discrimination has various implications for legislations, positive actions and the treatment of the victims. The approach, methodology and expected outcomes of the project were presented and discussed.

The research project of the Danish Institute for Human Rights is covering 10 countries: Denmark, Greece, France, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and United Kingdom. The project aims at researching which forms of multiple discrimination take place in each of the countries covered by the project; how legislations address this problem; which experiences the victims have had; and how institutions and non-governmental organisations deal with it. Gathering good practices in the field of tackling multiple discrimination is also among the aims of the project. The methods of the project are: literature review, interviews, questionnaires and roundtables. Interviews will be conducted with national equality bodies, ministries, legal experts, non-governmental organisations and social partners. The Victims of multiple discrimination will be also interviewed. Multiple discrimination faced by Roma and especially Roma women, will be addressed in the framework of the study. The project is in an early stage and will be implemented within one year.

Here it should be stressed that ERIO is also member of the Working Group on Multiple Discrimination hosted by the Social Platform which is a network of European NGO's working to build an inclusive society and promote the social dimension of the European Union. The goal of this working group is to discuss issues related to and to carry out joint actions on multiple discrimination. This working group meets every two months and is composed by following

NGOs: European Network against Racism (ENAR), European Older Peoples' Platform (AGE), European Roma Information Office (ERIO) Social Platform, European Youth Forum (EYF), European Disability Forum (EDF), European Women's Lobby (EWL) and International Lesbian and Gays Association (ILGA).

ERIO's contribution to the 2008 - European Year for Intercultural Dialogue

On January, 17th 2007, the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) participated in a meeting organised by the DG Education and Culture of the European Commission with the Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, in the framework of the implementation of the 2008 - European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID). Here, it should be mentioned that ERIO is member of the aforementioned Civil Society Platform. Objective of the meeting was to present the results of the "Call for Ideas" launched in summer 2006, to discuss the selection criteria for the Call for Proposals to be launched in February in the framework of the EYID, to learn from the implementation of the 2007- European Year of Equal opportunities for All, and to get feed-backs on the provisional Communication strategy of the EYID.

The Civil Society Platform welcomed the consultative approach endorsed by Vladimír Šucha, Director for Culture and Communication of the EC, DG Education and Culture, and Xavier Troussard, Head of the Culture Unit. The proposed selection criteria for the Call for Proposals are meant to promote a concrete European dimension, cost-effectiveness and direct involvement of the beneficiaries. Emphasis was given to trans-sectoral approach and sustainability, in a view to improving the quality of projects in the long term.

A vivid debate followed the presentation on Communication Strategy by the communication agency Media Consulta. Themes of the discussion were: visibility of the projects promoting intercultural dialogue, sustainability and effectiveness of the campaign (take advantage of existing events, e.g. the Heritage Day); the language approach (multilingualism vs. English as a lingua franca); the approach to the target group (youth as a subject rather than an object, groups rather than only individuals, disadvantaged groups to be addressed specifically or not); concrete measures to reach the grassroots' level (particularly the impact of relying on "target multipliers", i.e. existing communication channels with the civil society, as target groups of the Year).

Guillermo Ruiz, Policy Officer of ERIO, criticised the lack of impact of massive communication campaigns and stressed the importance of involving NGOs at all stages of the decision-making process and not just after relevant decisions have been taken. Consensus was found on the need to include an educational aspect in the strategy, to focus on best practices, to avoid folklore. As a result of the discussion, Mr. Šucha openly invited the participants to send their written contributions to the DG for redefinition of the communication strategy.

European Human Rights Court Hearing on Landmark Case on Segregation in Education

On January 17, 2007, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg heard oral arguments in one of the first anti-discrimination cases in Central and Eastern Europe. The case is raising major issues concerning the European Convention of Human Rights' prohibition against discrimination in Article 14. During the hearing the legal experts representing the applicants made clear that thousands of Roma children are subjected to racial discrimination and that the European Court of Human Rights has one more chance to stop

this particularly debilitating form of racial school segregation, practice prevailing in Central and Eastern Europe.

The case, *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*, is the first challenge at European level to the practice of educational discrimination—widespread throughout Central and South East Europe—in which Roma children are routinely placed in schools for the mentally disabled regardless of their actual intellectual abilities. The case commenced in the Czech court system in 1999, and was first brought before the Strasbourg Court in 2000. In February 2006, the Court's Second Section ruled that although the Roma children suffered from a pattern of adverse treatment, the applicants had not proved the Czech government's intent to discriminate.

In their arguments before the Grand Chamber of the Court, the applicants contended that the Second Section's restrictive reading of the concept of discrimination is inconsistent with the European Court's previous jurisprudence and the dominant trends in other leading courts in Europe and beyond. If allowed to stand, it would render the protection given by Article 14 theoretical and illusory. The case of *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic* presents a particularly compelling illustration of this crabbed interpretation of the non-discrimination guarantee, because it involves overwhelming evidence that Roma have been treated less favorably than similarly situated non-Roma for no objective and justifiable reason.

In their arguments before the Grand Chamber the legal representatives of the Czech government stated: *"... This case presents rather political issue than legal...No improvement of the situation is possible if each member of the Roma community does not show an interest...Special Schools were aiming at providing Roma with special education according to their special needs, but not inferior education...this curriculum is more appropriate to their intellectual potential....Roma do not show sufficient interest to improve their situation..."*

The Grand Chamber is expected to render its judgment later this year.

For more information related to the case visit <http://www.justiceinitiative.org>

To see the submission of *third party amici* visit www.erionet.org/erioadvocacydocuments.html

Far-right formally established in European parliament

The far-right caucus in the European Parliament was officially launched yesterday with anti-immigration and a defence of "Christian values" to form the backbone of its political platform.

<http://euobserver.com/9/23263/?rk=1>

Gypsy-haters, holocaust-deniers, xenophobes, homophobes, anti-Semites: the EU's new political force

Europe's far-right, xenophobic and extremist parties crossed a new threshold yesterday, winning more speaking time, money, and political influence in the European Parliament than ever before.

Claiming the backing of 23 million Europeans, ultra-nationalists secured enough MEPs to make a formal political grouping, underlining the growing challenge posed by the far right across the continent. For the first time since the Second World War a series of elections has swept nationalistic, far-right parties into office in municipal, regional, national and European parliament elections. The admission of Romania and Bulgaria in January of this year brought in enough far-right MEPs to form a bloc.

More on <http://news.independent.co.uk/europe/article2157360.ece>

By Stephen Castle

Roma in Sulukule, Turkey

"...this Project is the most social project the world has ever seen".
(Fatih Mayor Mustafa Demir, about Sulukule last week to the press)

Roma people settled in Sulukule long before the Turks in 1054. After a thousand years the municipality shows up with a project which does not take this history into consideration. In 2005 the Council of Ministers endorsed the urban renewal decision on Sulukule. The same year, the Municipality of Fatih made surveys in the region, which neglected to say that the houses of the Roma will be demolished and that they will be debited, but only treated questions like number of households and the risk of an earthquake. In this project the Roma culture is completely overlooked, as the opinion of the Roma was never asked on any of the stages of the project process, and the Municipality presented to newspapers last week in Sulukule "Classical Ottoman Turk architectural houses". Sulukule people have the possibility to "be house owners by incurring debt" and if they cannot afford this they may be house owners somewhere else. This is where the problem arises: the economic conditions of 3500 Roma, namely 571 rightful owners and 303 renters at the moment, do not allow them to be a house owner by incurring debt. The general director of Sulukule Roma Culture Development and Solidarity Association told the press that "it is ridiculous to pay for something which is ours already. The real aim of the Municipality is to remove us from here!"

The real aim of the Fatih Municipality to remove the Roma from Sulukule became clear with the "press compulsory purchase" decision on 13 December 2006. With this decision there was no choice for Roma but selling the houses to the Municipality. The project of the Fatih Municipality only mentions how the buildings will be developed in Sulukule but does not take into consideration the culture of Roma nor their human rights. There are 303 renter families in Sulukule. At the moment they pay cheap rents. It is impossible for them to rent another house somewhere else. Until 1991 the Sulukule people made their living of music and dance in entertainment houses. In 1991, when those entertainment houses were closed, the police broke the *darbukas* violins of the musicians and tortured people. The economy of Sulukule has collapsed as well and the Roma musicians began to suffer from hunger. Roma in Sulukule are so poor that they cannot afford to pay their electric and water bills. No work has been done to preserve the culture of Roma.

The Sulukule people stated on a press release: "we know that those who do not have a land registry and the renters will be disadvantaged at the most in this project. All the choices of the municipality lead to demolishing our district and our history. The 3500 Roma who lived here opposed to demolitions. We do not want demolitions anywhere, let alone historical Sulukule. If the municipality really wishes to protect this district as a historical site, it can give us architectural and engineering support for maintaining and fixing our houses. We wish to embellish and reinforce our houses, too. And we wish to refresh historical Sulukule and to contribute this way to the culture and entertainment of Istanbul; we expect to create this way employment opportunities for everybody, young-old-woman- man."

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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.

The 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.