

ERIO at the International Roma Day in Saint Josse, Brussels



On 9 April, the Brussels municipality of Saint-Josse organised several activities to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the International Roma Day. ERIO, as an invited speaker, took part in a debate which followed two film projections entitled "The gypsy industry, burden or opportunity?" ("La gipsy industry, fléau ou opportunité?"). Other speakers included Koen Geurts from Foyer, Luc Bolssens from Rom en Rom and Mihaela Mihai from Illo Romano.

The discussion, moderated by Christine Pauporté (Prevention service from Saint-Josse municipality) covered issues such as the French deportations of summer 2010, Roma integration as a two-way process involving both Roma and non-Roma, and the general discrimination faced by Roma, in particular their lack of access to education

E.U. Lays Out Plan to Improve the Lives of the Roma

BRUSSELS — Calling for better integration of its 10 million to 12 million Roma citizens, the [European Union](#) conceded on Tuesday that its 27 member states were doing too little to tackle discrimination, prejudice and intolerance against the minority group. "There is no evidence that strong and proportionate measures are in place to tackle the social and economic problems of a large part of the E.U.'s population," Viviane Reding, vice president of the [European Commission](#), said as she outlined a strategy to improve the plight of the Roma.



Ms. Reding, also the European Union's justice commissioner, was at the center of a furious dispute last year when she criticized France's expulsion of Roma and likened French tactics to those used in World War II. On Tuesday at the [European Parliament](#) in Strasbourg, she described that episode as a "very necessary wake-up call."

Laszlo Andor, European Union's commissioner for social affairs, condemned attacks on Roma in his own country, Hungary, where the far-right party Jobbik has been accused of harassing minorities. Xenophobic and racist tendencies must be confronted, Mr. Andor said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/06/world/europe/06iht-union06.html>

Moves towards Roma integration promised

New European Union strategy a beginning, not the end

EU Commissioner for Justice and Rights Viviane Reding said last Thursday that Europe was united in the challenge of integrating its Roma citizens.

Year-end deadline

Reding was speaking at Millenáris Park in Budapest to launch the 5th European Roma Platform, and two days after the European Commission unveiled a new Roma strategy that gives member states until the end of the year to come up with comprehensive policies to address the problems faced by their Roma citizens. She noted the need for a new mindset in Roma communities as well as among Europeans as a whole. The commissioner said that research found only 42 per cent of Europe's Roma children regularly attend primary school.

Long road

Fidesz politician Lívia Járóka, the European Parliament's only Roma member, said the EU's new Roma strategy was the beginning, not the end of the considerable work ahead. Full integration could take generations, she suggested. Echoing Hungary's EU Presidency slogan, EU Commissioner for Social Affairs and Inclusion László Andor said a strong society is needed to build a "strong Europe" that will not tolerate discrimination. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said upon taking the stage that he would soon sign an agreement with the head of the National Roma Council, Flórián Farkas, aimed at helping Hungary's estimated 700,000 Roma citizens. The agreement would call for 100,000 community work jobs, while vocational training would be made available to tens of thousands of Roma youngsters. It could be signed as early as this week.

Járóka, speaking later on television, warned that community work alone was not enough and that training and education must be offered to allow Hungary's Roma to escape the dire poverty in which most of them are trapped.

http://www.budapesttimes.hu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17273&Itemid=219

EU Roma strategy falls short in fighting prejudice



A statement of position:

We, Roma and Roma-supporting civil organisations, have gathered at the site of the Fifth Roma Platform in Budapest to draw attention with a peaceful demonstration to the fact that anti-Roma prejudice is one of the main obstacles to their social integration. The European Union and its member states will be able to achieve long-term results in improving the situation of Roma citizens only if the states take decisive steps to eradicate all forms of negative discrimination and take a stand in defence of the fundamental rights of EU citizens.

While the European Roma Framework Strategy is being finalised at the meeting of the platform, Roma families still cannot feel safe in their homes because the EU governments cannot provide them with appropriate protection against intimidation and racially motivated harassment. Roma citizens continue to suffer negative discrimination and segregation in education, employment, healthcare, housing and access to social allowances in numerous member states.

We consider it a step forward that the European Union in the European Roma Framework Strategy requires all member states to draw up a national strategy for the social integration of Roma citizens and to earmark appropriate funds for that task.

However, in order to achieve real change it is vital that the EU and the member states at the same time also take effective action against anti-Roma feeling and set specific, named goals based on common indicators to eliminate all forms of negative discrimination. The Framework Strategy needs to provide precise guidelines for the more effective implementation of national strategies, ensure accountability and require the member states to draw up appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems.

The Framework Strategy recognises the importance of tackling negative discrimination and respecting fundamental rights, but it falls short of defining actual tools and measures against racist anti-Roma violence, intimidation, anti-Roma feeling, hate speech and hate crimes.

It is the joint responsibility of the European Union and the member states to eradicate anti-Roma discrimination and to guarantee equal opportunities for all EU citizens. Politicians of the EU and the member states must therefore condemn racist violence, intimidation and exclusionary rhetoric.

The Framework Strategy on social integration of the Roma and the development of national strategies can be credible only with the active participation of the Roma. We therefore call for Roma and Roma-supporting civil organisations and experts to be actively included in planning, drawing up, coordinating and monitoring EU policies and national strategies. Without real dialogue and participation both the Roma Platform and the national strategies lack credibility.

http://www.budapesttimes.hu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17271&Itemid=210

Roma Integration: Hungarian EU Presidency Takes Action

"The Hungarian Presidency undertook to promote awareness in Europe, of the problem of Roma integration. The goal was to demonstrate, by actions and not just words, that by uniting forces, we can get closer to a solution," said Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, at the annual meeting of the European Roma Platform, in Budapest on April 7-8 2011.

"I have had an opportunity to hear a great deal of remarkable ideas and concepts in meetings like this one," the Hungarian head of government began his speech, during the opening evening of the 5th European Roma Platform concerning the social integration of the Roma. Viktor Orbán stated that so far, despite the best intentions, efforts by both the European Union and the individual Member States have fallen short of the target, in this field.

Mr. Orbán underlined the commitment of the Hungarian Presidency by stating, "Now is the time for action, and the Hungarian EU Presidency intends to take action." The Presidency considers the development of a framework strategy defining common basic principles for Roma integration strategies of Member States, as a particularly important aim.

<http://www.eurasiareview.com/roma-integration-hungarian-eu-presidency-takes-action-08042011/>

EU states to draft national Roma inclusion strategies

All EU member states must develop national strategies for Roma inclusion by the end of 2011, the European Commission (EC) said on Tuesday (April 5th).

The aim of the initiative is to end the widespread discrimination against Europe's biggest ethnic minority, numbering between 10 million and 12 million people. More than half of them live across the EU, with Romania, followed by Bulgaria, Spain, Hungary and Slovakia being the countries with the largest Roma communities. Malta is the only member of the 27-nation bloc without any representative of that ethnic group, according to 2009 statistics.

"Despite some good intentions from national politicians, too little has changed in the lives of most Roma over the last few years," EU Vice-President and Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding said at the European Parliament (EP) on Tuesday, as she presented the EC's European Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.

http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/04/07/feature-01

OSCE: Better census data needed for Roma minority

Vienna - Europe's Roma could be empowered if countries collected better demographic data, the Organization for [Security](#) and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said Friday on the occasion of International Roma Day. With an estimated 11 million people, Roma are Europe's largest minority. Its members have been persecuted throughout history and are still socially and economically disadvantaged in many countries.

Governments cannot develop successful integration [strategies](#) without basic information on how many Roma live in which locations, said Andrzej Mirga, the OSCE's top official dealing with Roma issues from Warsaw.

http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/europe/news/article_1631822.php/OSCE-Better-census-data-needed-for-Roma-minority

Roma communities in Serbia continue to be denied adequate housing

The Roma community in Serbia continue to face discrimination at the hands of civic authorities, a new report highlights.

The Amnesty International report, Home Is More Than a Roof Over Your Head, which looks at the denial of adequate housing rights for the Roma minority in Serbia, was issued on the eve of World Roma Day on 8 April. It highlights the connection between the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction & Development (EBRD) and the forced evictions of Roma that occurred during construction of Belgrade's Gazela Bridge, as well as how "the Serbian government has failed to comply with its obligations to respect the right to adequate housing by failing to prohibit, and protect against, forced evictions".

"Both banks have acknowledged the issue and have promised to apply international human rights standards, but haven't been able to create safeguards to prevent violations of this sort from being repeated", the Director of Amnesty International's European Institutions Office, Nicolas Berger said in a separate statement.

Accordingly, the report highlights some of the measures that the institutions have taken to ensure that those displaced Roma receive suitable alternative housing.

<http://www.neurope.eu/articles/Roma-communities-in-Serbia-continue-to-be-denied-adequate-housing-105778.php>

EU's Roma blueprint 'disappointing'

EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS - A freshly launched EU policy framework for the national Roma strategies is "disappointing", as it leaves it up to member states to deal with the discrimination of this minority - something governments like the one in Hungary are not really willing to follow up on, grassroots activists say. "We are really disappointed that the framework does not set out any concerted approach to tackle the discrimination of Roma. It only talks about the response of member states to have projects for social inclusion," Matthias Verhelst from the European Roma Grassroots Organisation Network told this website on Tuesday (5 April).

He highlighted the racist treatment of Roma in Hungary, where the centre-right government seems to tolerate torch-lit marches through Roma ghettos and hate speech of the extreme-right Jobbik party and its affiliated vigilante groups. "There is a contrast between the proposal that came out today and what needs to be done in the member states, something that was very well illustrated in the incidents in Hungary this past weekend," Verhelst said.

His comments during the EUobserver show came just a few hours before the European Commission launched its "Framework for national Roma strategies", aimed at better "guiding" member states in tackling discrimination, poverty, health and unemployment issues of Europe's largest minority.

<http://euobserver.com/9/32126>

Netherlands curbs Bulgarian, Romanian workers

As of 1 July, Bulgarians and Romanians as well as foreigners from the Dutch press reported on Tuesday (12 April). The proposal by Social Affairs Minister Henk Kamp was backed by the Dutch government, according to press reports.

Kamp wants employers in agriculture and horticulture, for example, to make more use of unemployed people of Dutch nationality. This is in line with the government's policy of putting the jobless under pressure to accept work, he explains. Since the EU's 2004 enlargement to ten member states, some 165,000 people from Central and Eastern Europe on average have been working in agriculture and horticulture, construction, industry and the transport sector in the Netherlands. "Meanwhile, over one million people aged below 65 are without work and sidelined on social benefits," Kamp argues.

By "outside the EU," Kamp also means Romania and Bulgaria, the website adds. Both countries did join the EU in 2007, but the Netherlands has made use of the option of keeping working restrictions for those countries (see "Background").

For workers from other EU member states - primarily Poland - nothing will change. "They have a fundamental right" to work in the Netherlands, the minister acknowledges.

Read more on: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/netherlands-curbs-bulgarian-romanian-workers-news-504028>

The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) is an international advocacy organisation 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 organisations, governmental authorities and intergovernmental bodies. ERIO cooperates with a large network of organisations and acts to combat racial discrimination and social exclusion through awareness raising, lobbying and policy development.

For more information: www.eronews.wordpress.com
office@erionet.org; ivan.ivanov@erionet.org
Website: www.erionet.org

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Brussels-Belgium/ERIO-European-Roma-Information-Office/83443273876>

