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ERTF Update

01/2007

Political Developments

European Roma and Travellers Forum

Kosovo status talks democratic disguise (Press release)

Strasbourg, 24 January 2007: On the occasion of the visit of UN Special for the Kosovo status negotiations process, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, to the Council of Europe's Plenary Assembly, the European Roma and Travellers Forum reiterated its request for the Roma to be included in the talks over the future of the Serbian province under UN-mandate.

In a letter to Mr. Ahtisaari, Forum's president, Mr. Rudko Kawczynski, reminded that despite the recommendations of high level international representatives Roma have not been included in the status negotiations process.

"If the international community continues to ignore the specific claims and concerns of the Kosovo Roma the status negotiations process turns into a democratic disguise," Mr. Kawczynski said in Strasbourg reminding that the European Roma and Travellers Forum has been unsuccessfully trying to obtain a meeting with the UN Special Envoy for almost a year.

"No fair and democratic decision over Kosovo's future can be reached without a fair and democratic participation of Kosovo's Roma including the Diaspora.", Mr. Kawczynski said in his letter reiterating his request for an urgent meeting with the UN Special Envoy before any official statement over the future of the province. He also warned the governments of the host countries not to create a "Palestinian refugee problem" in Europe.

Kosovo before the war had a population of more than 200,000 Roma. Further to their forcible expulsion from Kosovo many have become refugees and IDPs in Serbia, neighboring countries and Western Europe. In spite of the unstable security situation

in Kosovo which is fueled by the talks over Kosovo's future, Western countries continue to deport Roma to Kosovo and Serbia.

Mr. Ahtisaari is expected to reveal his plan for the future of Kosovo to the members of the International Contact Group on Friday. The status negotiations process has been going on since February last year. Roma participation has been reduced to a merely consultative role in the committee on minorities.

Follow-up: The Secretariat of the Forum has received a fax answer from the UN Special Envoy for the status negotiations process on 31 January. In his letter Mr. Ahtisaari says that he considers the rights of all communities an important issue. Further on he says that his team met with members of the Roma community in Pristina and proposes for the Forum to meet with one of his staff members.

The European Roma and Travellers Forum has persistently highlighted that the status negotiations process needs to involve the Roma Diaspora, by far the largest group and has insisted on having a personal meeting with Mr. Ahtisaari or one of his senior advisors to discuss a fair representation and participation of Roma in the status negotiations process.

ERTF reacts against racist TV commercial

The European Roma and Travellers Forum reacted against a racist TV commercial displayed on Belgian TV in the context of an anti-smoking campaign. In a letter to the Belgian Minister for Public Health, Rudy Demotte, Forum's President, Rudko Kawczynski, asked for immediate removal of this TV spot which put Roma in relation with farm animals and undue behaviour from the website of the Ministry where it remained posted after its removal from TV circulation. The commercial has been removed from the Ministry's website, but is still available on *youtube*:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4W4vHyDS0ZI>

International Organisations

Council of Europe

European Court of Human Rights

On 17 January 2007, the European Court of Human Rights held a Grand Chamber hearing today 17 January 2007, in the case of ***D.H. and others v. the Czech Republic*** (application no. 57325/00).

"The case concerns an application brought by 18 Czech nationals of Roma origin who were born between 1985 and 1991 and live in the Ostrava region (Czech Republic).

Summary of the facts

Between 1996 and 1999 they were placed in special schools (zvláštní školy) for children with learning difficulties unable to follow the ordinary school curriculum. By law, the decision to place a child in a special school is taken by the head teacher on the basis of the results of tests to measure the child's intellectual capacity carried out

in an educational psychology and child guidance centre, and requires the consent of the child's legal representative.

Fourteen of the applicants sought a review by Ostrava Education Department (školský úřad) on the grounds that the tests performed had been unreliable and that their parents had not been sufficiently informed of the consequences of giving consent. The Education Department found that the placements had been made in accordance with the statutory rules.

In addition, 12 of the applicants appealed to the Constitutional Court. They argued that their placement in special schools amounted to a general practice that created segregation and racial discrimination through the coexistence of two autonomous educational systems, namely special schools for the Roma and "normal" primary schools for the majority of the population. That appeal was dismissed on 20 October 1999."

Source: ECHR Press Release

<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=24&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=&sessionid=10355435&skin=hudoc-pr-en>

Parliamentary Assembly

On 24 January 2007, the Council of Europe Plenary Assembly adopted a resolution on Kosovo.

See:

<http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta07/EREC1780.htm>

Reports

Council of Europe

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

In its third country report on Switzerland the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance asks for further improvements of the situation of Travellers.

http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ecri/2-country-by-country_approach/switzerland/switzerland_cbc_3.asp#P231_28009

European Commission

Eurobarometer: 77% of Europeans think that being a Roma is a disadvantage in society

On 7 June – 12 July 2006 TNS Opinion & Social on behalf of the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, carried out a survey wave 65.4 of the EUROBAROMETER about discrimination and inequality in Europe. The SPECIAL EUROBAROMETER N°263 is part of wave 65.4 and covers the

population aged 15 years and over in the twenty-five Member States of the European Union and in the two acceding countries. The methodology used is that of the Standard Eurobarometer surveys of the Directorate General Communication ("Public Opinion and Media Monitoring" Unit). In the report findings the six legally prohibited forms of discrimination in the EU are examined: discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, age, disability and sexual orientation.

The survey highlights that a large proportion of Europeans are of the opinion that discrimination is widespread in their country. Discrimination based on ethnic origin is felt to be the most widespread. A broad majority of European citizens believe that being disabled (79%), being over 50 (69%) or having a different ethnic origin (62%) is a disadvantage in their society.

With regard to the Roma, who collectively form the largest ethnic minority in the enlarged EU, 77% of Europeans think that being a Roma is a disadvantage in society. These proportions vary quite significantly among the countries surveyed. Nine out of ten Swedish respondents hold the view that being a Roma is a disadvantage in their society, compared to around 6 out of 10 respondents in the two acceding countries, namely Bulgaria and Romania. Secondly, at the socio-demographic level the data shows that the age at which people completed their full-time education slightly influences how they judge the position of Roma in their society. The longer people stayed in full-time education, the more likely they are to feel that being a Roma tends to be a disadvantage. However, regardless of how long people stayed in school, very few believe that being a Roma is an advantage in their society (5.3. The position of Roma, pages 42-43).

Finally, the survey highlights that awareness of the existence of anti-discrimination laws remains quite low in the European Union. Disability is the only type of discrimination which more than half of the European public knows is prohibited by law when hiring employees. And only one third of European Union citizens (32%) know their rights should they become a victim of discrimination or harassment.

Source: European Roma Information Office, E News

A summary of the report is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_263_sum_en.pdf

The full report at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_263_en.pdf

European Parliament

Educational discrimination against young women and girls Women's rights/Equal opportunities (01.02.07)

"Education and training of girls and women is a human right and an essential element for the full enjoyment of all other social, economic, cultural and political rights", says the Parliament in an own-initiative report drafted by Vera Flasarová (GUE/NGL, CZ). The House believes a range of measures are needed to tackle educational discrimination between men and women in Europe.

In the European Union women make less progress overall than men through the education system, including life-long learning, on account of diverse gender-related restrictions, say MEPs. The rapporteur lists a number of barriers: economic factors in socially disadvantaged families; gender-based prejudices in the choice of field of

study; gender-based reasons hindering the completion of studies and preventing young women from improving their existing qualifications; prejudice against educated women; religious prejudice preventing women from fulfilling their potential in society in certain countries; difficulty of access to education for girls and young women from immigrant or minority backgrounds.

Among its recommendations, the European Parliament suggests that policy in the area of equal access to education should involve an assessment of gender-differentiated statistics. It also recommends that Member States create and monitor national educational policies designed to enable all girls to complete compulsory schooling.

Vulnerable groups

Special policies are needed for national, ethnic and cultural minorities, especially the Roma minority, including pre-school and zero grade programmes, with a multicultural approach to combat double discrimination. Action is also urged to protect the rights of immigrant women and girls and combat the discrimination they face in their communities of origin by rejecting all forms of cultural and religious relativism which could violate women's fundamental rights.

Flexibility needed

Member States should devise more flexible adult education and lifelong learning programmes so that working women and mothers are able to continue their education in programmes that fit in with their schedules.

Pay gap

The pay gap between women and men remains high: on average women earn 15% less than men, which is the result both of non-compliance with equal pay legislation and structural inequalities such as labour market segregation, differences in work patterns, access to education and training, biased evaluation and pay systems and stereotypes.

Member States are urged to encourage access by women to positions of responsibility and decision-making in public and private undertakings. Particular attention should be paid to academic positions: in education and research, women outnumber men as graduates (59%), yet their presence decreases consistently as they progress on the career ladder, from 43% of PhDs down to only 15% of full professors.

Source: European Parliament (Press release)

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/014-2617-031-01-05-902-20070130IPR02603-31-01-2007-2007-false/default_en.htm

The draft report is available at:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/pr/632/632069/632069en.pdf

News digest

World

UN asked to name official to protect Roma rights

30 January 2007

Representatives of the Roma and Sinti, also known as gypsies, urged the United Nations today to appoint a senior official to promote and protect their rights.

The groups make up Europe's largest minority, with 12 million members spread mainly across central and eastern Europe.

The representatives presented their case two days after the annual international day of commemoration of Holocaust victims on Saturday. An estimated 200,000 to 800,000 Roma people were killed in Nazi concentration camps during World War Two.

Sixty years later, some governments are waging an effective battle against discrimination. But Roma and Sinti remain widely excluded from social, educational and job opportunities in many parts of Europe, representatives from seven nations told a news conference at UN headquarters.

"We direct a joint appeal to the new secretary-general (Ban Ki-moon), who intends to make human rights a central plank of his policy, to stand up more strongly for the rights and social emancipation of the largest minority in Europe," said Romani Rose, chairman of the German Central Council for Sinti.

A UN Special Representative for Roma and Sinti Questions would "point out abuses and develop practical measures" to ensure their recognition as citizens with equal rights in their respective countries, Rose said.

Ban was travelling in Africa today and had no immediate response to the groups' appeal.

REUTERS

Source: The New Zealand Herald

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/2/story.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10421549

Europe

Robert Badinter: European Discrimination on Trial

What good are Europe's treaties aimed at ensuring the legal equality of all citizens when entire groups face systematic discrimination? That is the question that the

European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) faces this week as its Grand Chamber, consisting of 17 judges, begins considering an appeal of an initial ruling that rejected claims of discrimination against the Roma by the Czech Republic's education authorities.

All European states are members of the Council of Europe, all have signed the European Convention on Human Rights, 39 of the 46 member states have adopted the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and 14 have ratified Protocol 12 on the prohibition against discrimination. Nevertheless, the living conditions of many Roma remain appalling.

Although recent reports published in 2006 by the European Union's Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia and the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner note some improvements, they indicate Roma living conditions have stagnated, if not deteriorated. Roma are still victims of discrimination in access to housing, employment, healthcare, and education, despite significant local efforts at the Council of Europe's instigation and with its support.

Discrimination in educational access is particularly important, given its profound effect on its victims' life prospects. In the most extreme cases, the education system itself is segregated: isolated schools in remote camps; special classes for Roma children in mainstream schools; and an over-representation of Roma children in classes for children with learning difficulties.

The ECHR was confronted with the third issue in the case *D.H. and others vs. Czech Republic*. The Court was referred to 18 cases of girls and boys who, between 1996 and 1999, were placed in special schools for children with learning difficulties, either directly or after a period of time in primary schools. The question was whether the children were victims of discrimination owing to their national minority status.

The Czech government admitted that some of the special schools' student bodies comprised 80% to 90% Roma children. However, if there was discrimination, it was not direct, because under Czech law, such a move could be decided only by a school headmaster based on the results of an intelligence test at an educational psychology counseling centre, and subject to the approval of the child's parents or legal guardian.

A difference in treatment is not discriminatory in itself. According to the case law of national supreme courts and the ECHR, discrimination exists only when people in a similar situation are treated differently. Yet national and international case law recognizes that a non-discriminatory measure in theory can be discriminatory in practice. So, in the current case, the alleged discrimination does not stem from the law itself, but from its effects, with the plaintiffs relying mainly on statistics showing the over-representation of Roma in special schools.

Many other reports on the situation of Roma in the Czech Republic, including by the Council of Europe, are available. But, as the Court rightly noted, it should rule only on the cases to which it is referred, and should not make known its opinion on the Czech education system's legitimacy, as choices concerning educational opportunities fall under the jurisdiction of states and therefore can vary accordingly.

Working on this assumption and given the case it had to solve, an ECHR panel of seven judges ruled against the plaintiffs in February 2006, concluding that the law on special schools is not aimed specifically at Roma and does not apply only to them. According to the Court, the law's legitimate purpose is to adapt teaching to the difficulties of a specific category of pupils, and psychological tests seem to be objective enough not to be suspected of racial bias. Moreover, the requirement of parents' approval for placing children in special schools remains valid, while Roma children who were initially placed in those schools could have returned to mainstream schools later, and thus reintegrated into normal schooling.

As well-founded as the Court's reasoning may be, a feeling of unease persists. The statistics showing the enormous proportion of Roma children in those schools are hard to ignore, and the suspicion of discrimination is difficult to avoid. While laws have changed, mentalities do not always follow at the same pace, and we intuitively know that it is easy to get psychology to mean a lot of things.

Indeed, before announcing its decision, the Court felt it necessary to state that while it did not conclude that the Convention had been violated, statistics still revealed "worrying figures, and the situation in general in the Czech Republic regarding Roma children's education needs to be improved." The Court's president, Jean-Paul Costa, expressed a similar view, without questioning the legitimacy of the decision, although Judge Cabral Barroto wrote a dissenting opinion. http://www.project-syndicate.org/print_commentary/badinter1/English

Moreover, it is significant that the Court agreed, at the request of the parties, to refer the case on appeal to its Grand Chamber. According to Costa, rejecting the ruling in February 2006 would contradict previous case law. Will the Court, then, decide on the workings of the Czech education system itself? Or will it follow Judge Barreto, who calls for recognition of an obligation to adopt affirmative action policies aimed at benefiting Romanies?

Whatever formula is adopted, it is certain that Roma children should be afforded the same opportunities as other children. It is this imperative that underlies the importance of the coming decision, for it provides an occasion for the Court to reassert the fundamental principle of non-discrimination that defines our democratic societies.

Robert Badinter is a former President of France's Constitutional Court. As Minister of Justice he abolished the guillotine and the death penalty in France. He is now a member of the French Senate.

Source: Project Syndicate

http://www.project-syndicate.org/print_commentary/badinter1/English

Comment: Xenophobes, not workers, are uniting across Europe

29 January 2007

Yudit Kiss/The Guardian

East European racists are giving new muscle to the continental far right by preying on the losers from the region's upheaval

The long awaited and welcome accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union has already had a nasty side-effect. It has made it possible for the extreme right to form its own group in the European parliament - giving its parties extra time and money - Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, formerly a vociferous opponent of the EU's enlargement, has delegated Bruno Gollnisch, a recidivist Holocaust denier, to head the group. He has received with open arms the five representatives of the Greater Romania party and Dimitar Stoyanov of the Bulgarian Ataka party, who had already made his debut in the European parliament commenting on the bodies and purchase price of Gypsy women. The newcomers will certainly feel at home in the company of Alessandra Mussolini ("proud to be a fascist"), Ashley Mote (formerly of the British Ukip), and the MEPs of the migrant-bashing Belgian Vlaams Belang, and the Austrian FPÖ, formerly headed by Jörg Haider. The proletarians of the world seem to be so disoriented by the blows of industrial change and deregulation that they are rather slow to move. So it is the xenophobes of Europe that are uniting - and demonstrating a great deal of mutual tolerance, despite not so long ago having depicted each other as dangerous aliens.

Bulgaria, a delightful country that saved its Jewish citizens during the second world war and has been living in peace with its Turkish minority, will be represented at the highest political forum of Europe by a party whose manifesto calls for "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians" and whose leader is quoted as claiming that Turks still dominate his country and Jews exploit it. Its supporters have been accused of calling for Gypsies to be turned into soap.

Romania has more extreme-right traditions to reach back for, and since these were demonised by the Communists and mystified by the nationalists, they have now re-emerged with a frightening virulence. The Greater Romania party's president, Vadim Tudor, openly proclaims his hatred of foreigners and ethnic minorities - in particular the Roma, the largest group of losers in eastern Europe's transformation, who are marginalised and despised with a shameful unanimity in the whole region.

As a Hungarian, I would be proud that my country's extreme-right Hungarian Life and Justice party did not make it into parliament at the April 2006 elections - were it not for the fact that by the autumn its rhetoric and demands were being echoed by angry crowds outside the parliament building (as well as some opposition politicians inside it). For more than two months Budapest was targeted by violent protesters who shouted xenophobic slogans, daubed anti-semitic graffiti and demanded the head of the prime minister who revealed the truth about the state of the economy and the corruption of the political class. Legitimate criticism was turned into fake demands.

Some years ago, when Le Pen threatened to become the president of France, French society mobilised itself to stop him. When Haider's party entered the Austrian government, half of Austrian society protested vehemently. Even at the recent municipal elections in Belgium, the advance of the Vlaams Belang was halted by the awakening of civil society and the emergence of liberal-left coalitions. But when the Poles and Slovaks voted extreme-right, racist parties into their parliaments, it was accepted with apathy tinged with incredulity.

Two factors are smoothing the re-emergence of the extreme right in eastern Europe and its ability to prey on the many losers from the region's social and economic transformation: the democratic deficit accumulated during the region's peripheral pre-war and state-socialist past, and its undigested history. Historical myths remain powerful political tools, as the bloody Yugoslav wars painfully showed. The post-first-world-war partition of Hungary remains such a trauma that discriminatory rhetoric can exploit it with frightening success. In Poland it is enough to evoke the country's multiple partitions - or in Slovakia the scars of Hungarian domination - to get massive support for extremist policies. People have still not come to terms with their 20th-century history, and many political players are doing their best to confuse them further. Democratic institutions and civil societies are not yet mature enough either to distinguish between justified protest and manipulation or to resist when fundamental human and political rights are in danger.

Extreme-right rhetoric is a powerful and long-lasting poison, because it addresses people's darkest anxieties. If it is not exposed and confronted clearly, it lingers on in people's minds, like cyanide in polluted waters, killing flora and fauna invisibly, but systematically.

The unexpected eastern contribution could give such an impetus to the European extreme right that it might succeed in establishing itself as an accepted political actor in the continent. This would endanger the precarious political balance and wobbling institutional systems of Europe and add to its external vulnerability as well. A continent in which identity politics, exclusion and xenophobia become accepted political currents would be easy prey for radical extremist mobilisation and attacks.

Yudit Kiss is a Hungarian economist based in Geneva

Source: The Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/farright/story/0,,2000940,00.html>
18/01/2007 - 6:23:20 PM

Asylum seeking Romanian gypsies get cold shoulder

Asylum applications by more than 200 Roma gypsies from Romania have been rejected without even being considered, Tánaiste and Justice Minister Michael McDowell revealed tonight.

But civil liberties campaigners warned there was confusion as to how they ended up in the system as they are citizens of the European Union and had a right to freedom of movement.

The 220 Romas applied for asylum to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner in the last week.

But outlining what he said was "firm action to deal with influx of Romanian asylum seekers", Mr McDowell said he would apply an EU treaty which blocked applications from EU citizens unless there are exceptional circumstances such as human rights abuses.

Mr McDowell said: "I am taking this firm action now in order to prevent the institution of asylum and our asylum determination process being resorted to for

purposes other than those for which they are intended.

"It is abundantly clear that this is the situation which applies in the current circumstances and requires immediate firm action."

The Department of Justice said the Romanians, on their asylum applications, said they wished to improve their economic well-being and to access the labour market.

And the department also said they indicated an intention to avail of health and housing services in the state.

Under law, Romanians and Bulgarians, despite becoming EU citizens on January 1, cannot come to Ireland to work, nor can they claim benefits on arrival. But it is understood they could travel to Ireland and stay for three months without applying for asylum or registering their presence in the country.

Officials could however block their entry on the grounds that they had no financial means to live or are a threat to national security.

It is understood a number of NGOs working with refugees believe the Romanians made the applications by mistake.

And Peter O'Mahony, chairman of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, said there was confusion over how the Romanians ended up in the asylum system.

"I can't think of a good reason why Romanians or Bulgarians would voluntarily go into the asylum system where they are going to be in fairly rigidly controlled accommodation and guaranteed a cash income of only €19.10 a week," Mr O'Mahony said.

"They are not allowed to work. They are limited in access to education for adults and their children almost uniquely have no entitlement to child benefit."

The Romanians do have the right to stay in Ireland for three months, after that they must seek permanent residency but it is understood some of them are already making arrangements to return home.

Source: Irish Examiner

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/breaking/story.asp?j=207600712&p=zx76xy4y8&n=207601472>

Le ministre belge de l'intérieur veut expulser les ressortissants de l'Est sans emploi

16 janvier 2007

Patrick Dewael, le ministre belge de l'intérieur, membre du Parti libéral flamand (VLD), veut prendre un arrêté pour permettre l'expulsion vers leur pays d'origine des citoyens issus des nouveaux Etats membres de l'Union européenne qui se retrouveraient sans emploi.

Cette annonce, faite par son porte-parole dans un entretien publié, samedi 13 janvier, par le quotidien *De Morgen*, intervient après la révélation des conditions de vie déplorables de Roms slovaques qui avaient profité des mesures d'ouverture limitée du marché du travail belge pour tenter de s'installer comme travailleurs indépendants.

Rapidement privées de ressources suffisantes, une cinquantaine de personnes - dont des enfants - avaient été contraintes de se loger dans des immeubles abandonnés, à Gand. D'autres municipalités flamandes, mais aussi bruxelloises, redoutent une aggravation du problème avec l'ouverture des frontières aux Roumains et aux Bulgares.

"GRANDE PAUVRETÉ"

M. Dewael veut rendre possible le retour forcé vers leur pays des citoyens des nouveaux Etats membres privés de ressources. *"Aujourd'hui, des gens travaillent comme indépendants en attendant d'obtenir des papiers, mais ils ne gagnent pas assez et plongent dans la grande pauvreté"*, a expliqué le porte-parole du ministre. Leur situation serait exploitée par certains secteurs économiques, comme la distribution de dépliant publicitaires, qui emploierait massivement des ressortissants des pays de l'Est, apparemment recrutés dans leur pays d'origine par des réseaux qui leur font miroiter la perspective d'un emploi et d'une installation dans un pays riche. M. Dewael a invité son collègue des affaires sociales à lancer une enquête sur la situation dans ce domaine d'activité.

Le ministère de l'intérieur affirme vouloir, parallèlement, lancer, avec l'aide des fonds européens, un plan d'action pour améliorer la situation de certaines populations, Roms et Tziganes, notamment dans leur pays d'origine.

Après l'élargissement de l'Union en 2004, la Belgique n'a ouvert que partiellement son marché du travail aux nouveaux arrivants, en privilégiant des secteurs qui connaissent un manque chronique de main-d'oeuvre (construction, santé publique, services, etc.) La procédure pourrait être assouplie pour d'autres domaines d'activité.

Jean-Pierre Stroobants

Source: Le Monde

<http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3214,36-855495@51-855617,0.html>

Gypsies put EU to the test

Colum McCann, 9 January 2007

THIS MONTH the European Union swells by another 28 million people. With the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria into the European fold, there's cause for celebration in the streets of Bucharest and the courtyards of Sofia. For two of Europe's poorer countries, inclusion in the ranks of the Western power structure brings innumerable benefits, not least roads, recognition, grants, travel access, but also a sundering of the Soviet past.

Yet for others -- in Paris, Dublin, Brussels, and perhaps even in Bucharest and Sofia themselves -- it spells the inclusion of 3 million potential problems: more Gypsies.

In a week that also heralds 2007 as "The European Year of Equal Opportunities for All," the word "Gypsy" still holds freight, even amongst those to whom it applies: the Roma.

Newspaper editors are stumped by how they should address the largest minority on the European continent. Town mayors all over the former Soviet satellites talk of "whitening out" their inner cities. Skinheads are happy to call for flame-throwers in rock songs on the radio.

If a society recognizes itself, and ultimately critiques itself, on how it treats its most downtrodden, then surely the most significant acid test for the Union is its ongoing treatment of the Roma. They can be found living in the housing projects of Paris; the toxic dumps of Kosovo; the ruined outskirts of villages in eastern Slovakia; the gray flatlands of Dublin. Each place has its own -- sometimes tiny -- community, but collectively these groups form a 10-million-strong mosaic of poverty and exclusion.

There are, of course, Romani doctors, ethnographers, poets, and scholars who have called for a new era of consciousness. They point to Romani contributions to the arts, politics, and music by figures of Gypsy descent as diverse as Picasso, Django Reinhardt, Bob Hoskins, Charlie Chaplin, the Polish poet Papusza, Carmen Amaya, and even Bill Clinton. But for the large part, theirs is an echo chamber that doesn't pierce the old clichés of lying, cheating, stealing, breaking curfew with violin.

"The persistent, relentless portrayal of Roma as rootless, lawless, immoral, childlike thieves . . . will ensure that anti-Gypsy prejudice will remain firmly a part of Euro-American attitudes," says Ian Hancock, a Romani scholar from the University of Texas.

In Bratislava one afternoon -- while researching the situation of the Roma in Slovakia -- a young intellectual engaged me in a debate on American civil rights. He knew of the Weathermen, Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael. He was an eloquent defender of the marginalized, but when I asked him about contemporary issues of sterilization, school discrimination, and burnings of Romani houses in his own country, he said without rancor: "Of course, yes, but they're just Gypsies."

Malice is sometimes another name for silence.

The young girl paddling through the polluted streambed in Kosovo isn't likely to have heard of the "Year of Equal Opportunities." The boy huffing glue in the broken elevator of the Saint-Denis project will probably not be aware that the decade from 2005 to 2015 is supposed to be "The Decade of Roma Inclusion."

It is important, of course, not to turn any culture into a list of sorrows and benedictions. Even the Roma themselves have a deep ambivalence about their own identity. While they are as internally diverse as any other group, it's the roving gangs, the scams, the illiteracy, the violence -- and the silence -- that often get the headlines.

Scholars like Ian Hancock have called on governments, poets, journalists, activists, and the general public to remember that the Roma, like African-Americans, were enslaved in Central Europe only 150 years ago. The Holocaust sent Gypsy ash up the chimneys. This, and other bedrock history, is the story that must unfold into a larger understanding if the 3 million Roma from Bulgaria and Romania are not to be considered "just Gypsies."

"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting," says Milan Kundera.

The moral direction of the European initiatives is decent and right. Why not be in the habit of hoping for a better world?

Yet so much about Romani history is still wrapped up in a willful forgetfulness. It is not that Europe or America doesn't care -- dozens of conferences and non-governmental agencies confront "The Roma Question" in capital cities each year, and 2007 promises to be a bonus year -- but the prevailing attitude still echoes the old Slovakian joke: "What is small, dark, filthy, and knocking on the door?"

The answer is not just the future, but the past as well.

Source: Boston Globe

http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2007/01/09/gypsies_put_eu_to_the_test/

Countries

Bulgaria

Roma Population in Bulgaria Said to Exceed 1 M

18 January 2007

Data on the number of Roma population in Bulgaria varies widely, setting it from nearly 400,000 to over 1 million, it emerged at a conference on Roma integration.

Bulgaria's population has fallen by a million to 7.7 M over the last eight years. According to the 2001 census, the major groups in Bulgaria's population are Bulgarians, 83.9%, Turks, 9.4% and Roma, 4.7%.

Experts say they find it difficult to fix the number of Roma population in Bulgaria due to their mobility and lack of competence.

The conference on Roma people integration into the Bulgarian society was hosted by the Social Ministry and organized by the Sociology Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the country's Culture Ministry. Representatives of the institutes of social and humanitarian sciences will take part in the event.

The two-day conference aims to unite the efforts of the academic society to found lasting cooperation on the development and implementation of projects dealing with minorities.

Source: *Novinite Sofia News Agency*
http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=75532

Republic of Macedonia

Public hearing for the condition of the Roma in Macedonia

1 February 2007

The Roma issue in Macedonia – lack of knowledge or lack of political will is a subject on the today's public hearing which is held in the Assembly of Republic of Macedonia. According to the report of the European Roma Rights Centre and the National Roma Centrum from Republic of Macedonia, the Roma in Macedonia in regard of employment and conditions for work are in a very difficult condition.

The report states the 31% of the Roma in Macedonia do not have any education and as a result of that many of them are unemployed or do manual labor.

The president of the Assembly, Ljubisa Georgievski pointed out that Macedonia needs to get closer to the EU, and the issue about the Roma is an European issue and it needs to be resolved in that direction. The Roma are a constitutional category and because of that we all need to have political will to improve their condition, said Georgievski.

For the Foreign Affairs Minister, Antonio Milososki a strategic determination of Macedonia is a guarantee for the constitutional rights of all citizens. We must plaster efforts for applying of the Roma Strategy which represents implementation of special measures for equality in the society in order to achieve higher standard and educational level of the life of the Roma. He pointed out that there is a political will for solving of the problems of the Roma, but also that a complex approach is needed for improvement of life and socio-educational status of the Roma community.

The Euro-ambassador Ervan Fuere considers that the Government needs to implement a policy of international standards, and the NGO sector to conduct an effective program for resolving of the Roma status. He pointed out that the Roma representatives in the Parliament need to have a great role in all of this.

The representative in the European Parliament Eric Mayer pointed out that Macedonia is striving towards the EU and because of this it is very important to offer solutions for the Roma in the future.

The report of the European Roma Rights Centre and the National Roma Centrum from Republic of Macedonia also recommends for the Macedonian Government to take measures for improvement of the condition of the Roma through free training programs in order to increase the level of their employment. It also recommends adoption of measures for greater inclusion of the Roma in the educational process.

Source: *Macedonian News Agency*
<http://www.mia.com.mk/>

Russian Federation

Gypsies rounded up by police

2 February 2007

Police in the city of Volzhsk, Russia (Volgograd Region) have launched a massive operation to round up Roma (also known as Gypsies), according to a January 30 report by the Russian human rights web site hro.org. Citing a local Roma leader, the article reports that since January 24 police have singled out Roma in an operation called "Tabor" (Gypsy camp). Roma have been detained on the street and in their homes. Police officials have reportedly told the local Roma leader, Elena Nikolaevna, that the operation was inspired by reports of fraud. "This is ethnic discrimination, pure and simple," Nikolaevna said. "Why are Gypsies being singled out? Are they saying that fraud is an ethnic trait only of Gypsies?" She plans to hold a meeting of local Roma to educate them about their legal rights. Most of those detained by police are reluctant to file complaints for fear of the consequences.

Source: Bigotry Monitor/Union of Councils for jews in the Former Sovjet Union
<http://www.fsmonitor.com/stories/020207BM.shtml>

Serbia

Kosovo

Former Kosovo PM ordered to The Hague for trial

2 February 2007

AMSTERDAM, Feb 2 (Reuters) - The U.N. war crimes tribunal has ordered Kosovo's former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj to return to its detention unit in The Hague on Feb. 26, a week before his war crimes trial is due to begin. Haradinaj, a former regional commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), resigned as prime minister in 2005 to face charges of murder, rape and torture allegedly committed by his troops during a 1998-99 war against Serb forces. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges. Haradinaj, 38, is accused of leading a campaign to drive Serbs and Roma from their villages and for attacks on ethnic Albanian and Roma civilians the KLA saw as collaborators. Considered a hero by many Kosovo Albanians, Haradinaj is the most senior former KLA guerrilla to be indicted over the war against Serb forces and the first serving head of government to be indicted since former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic. A former nightclub bouncer in Switzerland who was appointed prime minister in late 2004, Haradinaj was granted provisional release by the tribunal pending the start of his trial and allowed to engage in politics. He has urged Kosovo's Albanian majority of close to 2 million people to maintain the struggle for independence from Serbia after the 1998-99 war that killed 10,000 people. Kosovo has been run by the United Nations since 11 weeks of NATO bombing drove out Serb forces in 1999. Revenge attacks for Serb repression of Albanian civilians prompted up to 200,000 Serb civilians to flee their religious heartland. On Friday, United Nations special envoy Martti Ahtisaari handed Serbia a plan that sets its breakaway Kosovo province firmly on a path to independence, an outcome Belgrade said it would "never accept".

Source: Reuters

Conferences and Events

High-level conference on Education Reform

The Roma Education Fund is organizing a high-level Conference on Education Reform to Support Roma Inclusion in Budapest, on April 2-3, 2007. The overall objective of the conference is to review the last two years of progress on Roma inclusion in the education systems of the Roma Decade countries. For further information please contact Agnes Osztołykan at osztolykan@romaeducationfund.org

Conference: "Equal opportunities for all: What role for positive action?"

The European Commission is organising a conference on "Equal opportunities for all: What role for positive action?" in Rome, Italy on 23-24 April 2006. The objective of the conference is to facilitate the exchange of experience and knowledge on positive action and anti-discrimination issues.

For further information please contact: Conference-registration@nondiscrimination-eu.info

The deadline for registration is 9 February 2007.

Vacancies

Project Manager and Project Assistant

The European Roma and Travellers Forum is looking for a Project Manager and a Project Assistant to set up its new subsidiary in Brussels.

Job Description (Project Manager)

- in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Forum, set up and maintain a functional office in Brussels,
- establish and maintain good working relations with the European Commission, Parliament and other EU institutions and national government representations,
- liaise with the national member organizations and the Secretariat in Strasbourg and keep them informed about relevant developments affecting Roma at EU level,
- in cooperation with the ERTF Secretariat, draft regular reports on specific policy areas,
- in cooperation with the Secretariat and the network members issue policy recommendations to the EU institutions on specific policy areas and policies affecting Roma,
- establish and maintain good working relations with civil society organizations working in Brussels, in particular with the Commission sponsored networks.

Requirements

- University degree in Social Sciences or Law,
- minimum of three years of experience in a similar position with a national NGO or public administration,
- knowledge and understanding of the situation of Roma in Europe,
- knowledge and understanding of EU politics, in particular on areas which particularly affect Roma,
- good communication and writing skills,
- professional fluency in English and good knowledge of Romani compulsory,
- additional language skills in particular of French will be considered as an asset.

Job Description (Project Assistant)

- assist the project manager in his/her daily duties,
- perform administrative tasks including book-keeping.

Requirements

- University degree in Social Sciences or Law or commensurate professional experience,
- professional fluency in English and good knowledge of Romani compulsory,
- additional language in particular of French and Dutch will be considered as an asset,
- flexibility and adaptability.

Candidates must be nationals of a Council of Europe member State and must be aged under 55 on the closing date of the vacancy notice.

Both positions are initially limited until 15 December 2007.

Applications

Interested persons should send their application together with a cover letter and CV outlining their interest and experience in English, French or Romani to:

European Roma and Travellers Forum
c/o Council of Europe
rue Toraue
F - 67075 Strasbourg

E-mail: ertf@ertf.org

Letters of recommendation from Roma or Traveller NGOs as well as of recommendation from a former employer will be appreciated.

Part-time assistants on Human Rights, Social Cohesion and Culture
The European Roma and Travellers Forum is looking for part-time assistants to support the work of its directorates Human Rights (Czech Republic), Social Cohesion (Romania) and Culture (Poland).

Under the direction of the directors of the directorates the assistants will be in charge of following up on any important developments in their field and assure a

smooth communication flow between the directorates, the Forum's delegates and the Forum's central offices. They will also support the directors in administrative tasks and provide logistic support to the organisation of meetings.

Minimum requirements:

- Undergraduate studies in a relevant field such as social sciences, law or economics
- Good knowledge and experience on Roma issues
- Experience in drafting and writing of reports
- Administrative and logistic experience
- Good knowledge of English and Romani compulsory

The positions are on a consultancy basis (300 Euros per month) and do not constitute a full-time employment.

Interested persons should send their application (letter of motivation plus CV) to the

ERTF Secretariat at: ertf@ertf.org

For further information:

European Roma and Travellers Forum

Tel.: + 33 3 90 21 4331

Established in 2004, the European Roma and Travellers Forum is a international Roma umbrella organisation which gathers Romani organisations from all over Europe. Its aim is to promote the effective exercise by Roma and Travellers of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as protected by the legal instruments of the Council of Europe and other international legal instruments. A partnership agreement with the Council of Europe gives the Forum a unique status and makes it a prime interlocutor for the Council of Europe and national governments on issues affecting Roma communities.

The ERTF Update is conceived as an information bulletin on Roma issues. The views represented in the articles and comments do not necessarily represent the view of the European Roma and Travellers Forum. For reactions, comments, and subscriptions please write to ertf@ertf.org.