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ERTF Update

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Political Developments

European Roma and Travellers Forum

President Halonen met the President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum 25 May 2007

President of the Republic Tarja Halonen met Rudko Kawczynski, the President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, at the Presidential Palace on Friday 25, May 2007. President Kawczynski gave his views on the start-up of the European Roma and Travellers Forum and the challenges ahead. President Halonen and President Kawczynski also discussed about the focus of the upcoming work of the Forum.

During the three-day visit, President Kawczynski also met Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva and senior civil servants of the Ministry.

The European Roma and Travellers Forum was established within the Council of Europe in 2004, at the initiative of President Halonen. The Forum gives the Roma and Travellers a united voice with regard to decision-making in Europe concerning them.

Source: Finnish Presidency (Press Release)

<http://www.tpk.fi/netcomm/news/ShowArticle.asp?intNWSAID=63073&intSubArtID=25769&intlGID=9&LAN=FI&contlan=&Thread=&intThreadPosition=0&intShowBack=1&strReturnURL=>

Roma minority demands to be part of Kosovo status negotiations

26 May 2007

HELSINKI - The Roma minority in Kosovo insists on being part of UN negotiations on the future of the Serbian province, the head of the European Roma Forum, Rudko Kawczynski, told reporters yesterday.

During a visit to Helsinki, Kawczynski deemed “not acceptable” the international community’s argument that negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo Albanians were already difficult enough without adding another partner to the talks.

“From my point of view, the solution is not acceptable, the Roma are part of Kosovo and part of the solution,” the head of the European Roma Forum said. “We cannot keep them aside and wait for a solution afterwards.

“We have experience with negotiations from talks in Bosnia-Herzegovina where the international community exactly followed that road saying ‘first we have to stabilize the political situation and then we can start negotiating about minorities.’ And that actually was a failure,” he added.

Bosnian officials estimate that about 50,000 of the country’s 3.8 million inhabitants are Roma, who make up the largest minority. According to Kawczynski, 200,000 Roma had to flee Kosovo during the 1998-1999 conflict with Belgrade in fear of retaliation from Kosovo Albanians who viewed the Roma as partners to the Serb forces and Slobodan Milosevic’s regime.

Most Romas fled to other European countries. Germany presently has a Roma population of 45,000 people, while only some 10,000 still live on Kosovo territory. According to Kawczynski, the return of Roma refugees and the expropriations they suffered are issues that should be on the negotiators’ agenda.

The European Roma and Travelers Forum (ERTF) was established in 2004 following a Finnish initiative. It is an umbrella group consisting of Roma non-governmental organizations that defend the rights and interests of the 14 million Roma in Europe.

Source: AFP/Ekathimerini

http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_world_4351359_26/05/2007_83834

International Organisations

Council of Europe

Committee of Ministers

Committee of Ministers concerned about persisting discrimination against Roma in Romania

23 May 2007

Strasbourg - The Committee of Ministers has just adopted a resolution on the protection of national minorities in Romania. In its resolution the Committee of Ministers notes that the situation of Roma has continued to remain a priority for the Romanian authorities which have taken numerous sectoral measures in order to combat the social exclusion of the Roma and

reduce the gap between Roma and the majority population. On a positive note, the Committee of Ministers also takes into account efforts to improve the public image of the Roma as well as their relations with the police.

The Committee of Ministers however also found that despite these efforts Roma continue to experience different forms of discrimination in many fields, and that the impact of awareness-raising measures in order to improve the public image of the Roma has remained limited. As a case in point the Committee of Ministers notes the persistence of hate-speech in media and in the public discourse as well as misconduct among some members of the police.

On this basis, the Committee of Ministers recommends the Romanian authorities to

“- take more resolute action to prevent and combat discrimination and social exclusion of the Roma and address, as a matter of priority, the difficulties they face in employment, housing, health and education;

- ... promote better access of the Roma to the local radio;
- pursue and strengthen the initiatives taken in order to improve the situation of the Roma in the field of education and to develop the teaching of their language; pursue and monitor the measures taken to prevent and combat the isolation of Roma children within the educational system; pursue the efforts aimed at improving the situation of national minorities in the field of education and teaching of and in their languages;

- increase efforts, which require also an increase of the general budget for education, to ensure the availability of sufficient and qualified teachers and textbooks for education of or in minority languages, in particular for numerically smaller minorities;

- promote further the participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public affairs at central and local levels, in particular as regards the Roma and the numerically smaller minorities “

The full text of the resolution can be downloaded here:

[http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/minorities/2._FRAMEWORK_CONVENTION_\(MONITORING\)/2._Monitoring_mechanism/6._Resolutions_of_the_Committee_of_Ministers/1._Country-specific_resolutions/2._Second_cycle/PDF_2nd_CM_Resolution_Romania_eng.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/minorities/2._FRAMEWORK_CONVENTION_(MONITORING)/2._Monitoring_mechanism/6._Resolutions_of_the_Committee_of_Ministers/1._Country-specific_resolutions/2._Second_cycle/PDF_2nd_CM_Resolution_Romania_eng.pdf)

ERTF

ECRI

Limited progress in Ireland and Finland

24 May 2007

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has just released its third report on Finland and Ireland.

As regards to Finland, ECRI notes that more targeted efforts are necessary to combat prejudice and discrimination against Roma and other communities. The Council of Europe monitoring body observes in particular that discrimination in the field of housing continues to constitute a major problem. It also says that it has received numerous complaints as regards to racial discrimination of Roma in the field of employment.

Among the areas of concern listed in the report are relations with the police where ECRI notes that Roma continue to be exposed to discriminatory controls as well as access to public places including restaurants and pubs.

As regards to Ireland, ECRI welcomes recent initiatives to integrate Travellers in the field of employment and to improve access to health care services. ECRI also highlights efforts to improve access of Travellers to education including higher education, but remains concerned about the failure to acknowledge and accommodate Traveller culture and institutional discrimination which, according to ECRI, inhibit the educational performance of members of the Traveller community.

The two reports are available from ECRI's website:

http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Finland/Finland_CBC_3.asp (Finland)

http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Ireland/Ireland_CBC_3.asp (Ireland)

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European rights watchdog warns of 'cases of persistent anti-Semitism'

25 May 2007

PARIS - A report by a pan-European rights watchdog warned of an "increasing climate of hostility" towards Muslims, cases of persistent anti-Semitism, and violations against Roma or gypsy populations, "singled out as a particular target for racism throughout Europe."

"Europe's traditional values of tolerance and welcome are giving way to a dangerous rise in hostility towards foreigners, Eva Smith-Asmussen, the Danish head of the Council of Europe's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), told reporters in Paris.

"We're starting to shut people out of our communities, it's a very sad development," Eva Smith-Asmussen, she added.

"Europe is built on values like taking a humanitarian approach, tolerance," she told a press conference to mark the release of ECRI's 2006 annual report.

"But it looks as if all of a sudden the most important thing is security, and other things have to be sacrificed."

"If anything is threatening our peace and security in Europe, it's discrimination," Smith-Asmussen said, warning of a "truly dangerous" trend.

In its report on the Council of Europe's 46 member states, ECRI found that "the overall picture as regards contemporary forms of racism and racial discrimination is complex and worrying."

Across Europe, ECRI said it was "deeply concerned by the negative climate of opinion" which it said was "fuelled by some media and also by the use of racist and xenophobic arguments in political discourse."

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are the most affected by the rise in hostility, according to ECRI.

It said xenophobic discourse enjoyed a "free rein" in countries struggling to make the transition to multicultural societies, where foreigners were made scapegoats for economic difficulties and crime.

"On the subject of immigration, the tone of political debate has not only hardened considerably, but has also tended to stigmatise entire communities, notably foreigners," it said.

The fight against terrorism had in some cases led to the adoption of discriminatory legislation, it warned.

Calling on member states to combat discrimination on the ground, ECRI stressed that successful integration of minorities was "a two-way process, a process of mutual recognition, which has nothing to do with assimilation."

Smith-Asmussen said the trend towards greater discrimination had been observed "in every country in Europe, even in countries that used to be very open, forthcoming, like the Netherlands."

"Even social-democratic parties whose ideology is about protecting the weak, the welfare state, it's like they don't see that if you're an immigrant or a refugee, you're also part of society."

"Is this really a society we want?" she asked. "It is important that European countries realise what is happening and do something about it."

"To accept other people and other values is an old, old European virtue.

It's sad to see it disappearing," she said.

Source: AFP/European Jewish Press

www.ejpress.org/article/17052

European Court of Human Rights

Kroatische Skinheads blieben nach Angriff auf Roma straffrei

2. Juni 2007

Straßburg - Der Europäische Gerichtshof für Menschenrechte hat Kroatien wegen der Diskriminierung von Roma und Sinti verurteilt. Die Straßburger Richter gaben am Donnerstag einem 44 Jahre alten Mann Recht, der im April 1999 beim Sammeln von Alteisen in der Hauptstadt Zagreb von einer Gruppe Skinheads auf offener Straße angegriffen und verprügelt worden war. Der Roma erlitt dabei mehrere Rippenbrüche und musste eine Woche im Krankenhaus behandelt werden. Ihm muss die Regierung in Zagreb nun 8000 Euro Schmerzensgeld zahlen.

Obwohl die Anwältin des Mannes der Polizei Hinweise auf die möglichen Täter gab und ein Freund des Opfers einen der Angreifer identifizierte, unternahm die Polizei nichts, um diese festzunehmen. Laut Urteil wurde auch keiner von ihnen verhört. Die Skinheads waren der Polizei zum Teil wegen rassistisch motivierter Angriffe bereits bekannt.

Ein Antrag beim kroatischen Verfassungsgericht auf Beschleunigung der Ermittlungen wurde im November 2002 angewiesen. Mehr als acht Jahre nach dem Angriff ist das Verfahren heute noch

immer anhängig. Kroatien habe damit nicht nur gegen das Diskriminierungsverbot verstoßen, sondern auch gegen das Grundrecht auf Schutz vor Folter und Misshandlung, rügten die Straßburger Richter.

Quelle: Net Tribune

<http://www.net-tribune.de/article/020607-324.php>

Text des Beschlusses des Gerichtshof für Menschenrechte:
<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?>

Reports

Amnesty International

Amnesty International warns against forced returns to Kosovo

31 May 2007

Amnesty International has just issued a new report on the issue of forced returns of minorities to Kosovo. The organisation is concerned by the fact that many governments have started preparations of forced returns to Kosovo in the event of the resolution of its political status.

On the basis of its assessment of the situation on the ground, the organisation concludes that many members of minority communities including Roma continue to be in need of international protection and calls on the governments of the host countries not to put an end to the temporary protection status without a fair and independent assessment of the human rights situation in Kosovo and refrain from encouraging voluntary returns before a substantial improvement of the situation in Kosovo.

The full report is accessible here:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR700042007>

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News digest

Countries

Albania

Albanien: Roma und Aschkali besonders gefährdet

25. Mai 2007

US-Länderbericht mit alarmierenden Zahlen - Fehlende Dokumente und vielfältige Ressentiments erschweren Integration

Wien - Albanien ist 2006 ein Herkunftsland gehandelter Frauen und Kinder geblieben. Das sagt ein heuer im März veröffentlichter Bericht des US-Außenministeriums. Transitland war es demnach in nur mehr geringem Ausmaß und da vor allem für Opfer aus dem Kosovo. Zielländer

des albanischen Menschenhandels seien Italien, Griechenland und andere Länder Europas, aber auch die USA. "Weiter ein Problem" sei der Handel mit Kindern für organisierte Bettelei und sexuelle Ausbeutung nach Griechenland, aber auch in den Kosovo.

Integration erschwert

Der Anteil an Roma und Aschkali (albanischsprachige Roma) unter den gehandelten Kindern und Frauen ist laut der Schweizer NGO "Terre des Hommes" besonders hoch. Grund sind "Armut und Analphabetismus", so der US-Länderbericht. Laut Weltbank und UNO lebten 2006 acht von zehn Roma und Aschkali in "extremer Armut", fast drei Viertel waren arbeitslos. Fehlende Dokumente und vielfältige Ressentiments erschweren eine Integration in die albanische Gesellschaft und staatliche Institutionen - so war ein Schulbesuch ohne Papiere lange Zeit unmöglich. Bildungsminister Genc Pollo hat versprochen, dies zu ändern.

Koordination im Kampf gegen Menschenhandel

Seit November 2005 gibt es in Albanien eine bei der stellvertretenden Innenministerin Iva Zajmi angesiedelte Stelle der "Nationalen Koordination im Kampf gegen Menschenhandel". Einerseits will man die illegale Migration sowie den zunehmenden internen Menschenhandel besser kontrollieren, andererseits sollen Identifizierung, Überweisung und Schutz der Opfer verbessert sowie präventive Maßnahmen gesetzt werden. Mit Griechenland, wohin albanische Kinder mehrheitlich verschleppt werden, wurde bereits ein Abkommen über den Schutz und die Hilfe für minderjährige Opfer unterzeichnet. Außerdem habe man die Zwangsarbeit von Kindern strafrechtlich verboten, so Zajmi im Mai zu österreichischen Journalistinnen und Journalisten in Tirana.

In Albanien würden die verantwortlichen Stellen im Innen-, Außen- und Sozialministerium, die Opferschutzzentren und die Nichtregierungsorganisationen "beispielhaft koordiniert", urteilt Holta Koterja von der NGO "Legal Clinic for Minor", die seit 2000 mit Unterstützung des UNO-Kinderhilfswerks (UNICEF) in Tirana, Korca und Shkodra Rechtshilfebüros für "gehandelte" Opfer und gefährdete Kinder betreibt. Im Schwerpunktland Albanien werden von der österreichischen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit Makro- und Mikroprojekte von UNICEF, Caritas, Terres des Hommes sowie von der Organisation für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa (OSZE) gegen Menschenhandel finanziert.

Dreiviertel der Prostituierten Opfer

Heinz Patzelt, Generaldirektor von amnesty international Österreich über die Anstrengungen in Albanien: "Der Wissensstand ist in den Herkunftsländern sicher höher." Die Zielländer hätten das Problem aber noch nicht begriffen. Dort betrachte man Menschenhandel vorwiegend als Kriminalitäts- und Illegalitätsproblem; mit Kooperation der Opfer könne so freilich nicht gerechnet werden. In Österreich sind laut OSZE bis zu Dreiviertel der Prostituierten Opfer von Menschenhandel. (APA)

Quelle: APA/Der Standard

<http://diestandard.at/?url=/?id=2894921>

Austria

Mahnmal für Bettler in der Herrengasse

24. Mai 2007

VP fordert eine "Skulptur mit Spendenbox" für Roma, die dann nicht mehr in Graz betteln bräuchten.

Es ist ein unkonventioneller Vorschlag, mit dem VP-Gemeinderätin Sissi Potzinger aufhorchen lässt. Mit einer Art Mahnmal in der Herrengasse - in Anlehnung an die Kriegsskulptur von Alfred Hrdlicka vor der Albertina in Wien - soll auf das Leid der Roma aufmerksam gemacht werden. Gleichzeitig soll diese Skulptur als Spendenbüchse dienen. Mit einem entsprechenden Antrag wird die VP-Mandatarin heute im Gemeinderat für hitzige Debatten sorgen.

Patenschaft. Potzinger will somit eine Art Patenschaft für die Roma-Familien aus dem slowakischen Hostice übernehmen. "Damit brauchen die Männer von dort auch nicht mehr in Graz zu betteln, sondern wir schicken ihnen die Spenden. Die Gelder würden vor allem in die Bildungs- und Arbeitsprojekte fließen", erklärt Potzinger. Dieses Patenschaftsmodell soll auch von anderen europäischen Städten umgesetzt werden.

Antrag. Potzingers Antrag wird bei Kulturstadtrat Werner Miedl landen, der betont: "Eine spannende Idee. Wenn das Projekt künstlerisch etwas hergibt, unterstütze ich es in jedem Fall."

Wahlkampfthema. So bleiben die Bettler Wahlkampfthema Nummer eins für den Urnengang 2008. Erst jüngst äußerte FP-Spitzenkandidatin Susanne Winter mit so genannten "Bettlerautomaten" eine ähnliche Idee.

Gerald Winter

Quelle: Kleine Zeitung

<http://www.kleinezeitung.at/regionen/steiermark/graz/446266/print.do>

Czech Republic

Time Bomb for Roma

31 May 2007

High levels of drug use and unprotected sex create a looming crisis for a Czech ethnic community.

Prague - Milan Horvat wakes up every day and strolls into the street to meet his "clients."

The middle-aged man always wears the same clothes to work: a black suit, sleek black shoes and a white shirt, with the top two buttons undone. Four golden rings, two on each hand, gleam as he explains his routine. When he dons his large brown sunglasses and smiles, his freshly-shaved face exudes a strong whiff of perfume. He has the air of a high-caliber businessman.

But his work in Prague is anything but normal.

Every day, Horvat meets drug users in the capital city's cobbled lanes and alleys. Most of them

are Roma. He wants to help them to kick the habit, but it's a complex, and sometimes hopeless, task. At the same time, he gives them new needles and syringes in exchange for their used ones. If they're going to inject drugs, the equipment they use to give themselves their daily fixes must at least be clean, is Horvat's attitude.

Epidemic waiting to happen?

The medical basis of needle exchange is that it drastically lowers the chances of contracting HIV through drug use, because sharing needles that are contaminated with HIV is one of the surest ways to become infected with the AIDS virus.

"I am from the streets myself. I am a Gypsy and I feel at home here, though I've never used drugs myself," he mutters. "But I know what drugs mean."

Horvat has first-hand experience of the horrors of drug abuse: he and his family struggled for many years to help his brother fight addiction. Eventually, they were successful and his brother abandoned drugs. But the helper in Horvat had been awakened by his experience.

"When I saw an ad in the paper saying, 'We are looking for Romani street workers,' I grabbed it," he says. "I knew my job would be important."

Horvat is one of two street workers from the Romani organization Romodrom, which reaches out to drug users in this community in Prague. He believes drug use among Roma is a massive problem that is being underestimated.

There are approximately 5,000 drug users in the city who've registered with Romodrom. At least 40 percent of them are Roma, the organization believes - even though Roma make up only an estimated 2 percent of the 10 million people in the Czech Republic. Last year, Romodrom had contact with about 6,000 clients and distributed 25,000 clean needles.

About 140 Roma seek the center's help every day, Horvat says.

Romodrom has a special program devoted to drug users aimed at preventing their infection with various transmissible agents, such as hepatitis and HIV.

In the Czech Republic in 2004, almost 9 percent of people with HIV became infected as a result of injecting drugs, according to The United Nations AIDS agency. No one, however, knows how many of those people were Roma, as Czech law prevents health data from being collected on the basis of ethnicity.

A 2004 UN Development Program study on Roma and HIV/AIDS found a dramatic increase of HIV infection rates in Central Europe. According to the study, HIV/AIDS affects groups that are prone to high poverty rates, high mobility, and limited social services to a greater extent. Although the total number of people living with HIV in the Czech Republic is low, about 0.1 percent of the population according to a 2005 estimate by UNAIDS, the Roma seem to possess all the traits that make people vulnerable to contracting HIV: They are far more likely to be poor, women are generally disempowered, parents and children rarely talk about sexual matters, alcohol abuse is high, and condom use is extremely low.

Life on the wrong side of the tracks

What makes a dire situation even worse is that many Roma do not possess identification documents, aid workers say, so they therefore have limited access to health care. They're therefore less able to receive preventive information on the virus or get tested for it. And those who do have access to health care and information have a deep distrust of the state

health care system - especially Romani women, who in the past were often sterilized without their consent as a result of government fears of their high birth rate.

Very little formal data exists about the health and drug problems among Czech Roma - especially with regard to HIV. And this void increases the potency of an already dangerous situation.

A few kilometers outside Prague, a narrow path along a train track winds its way up a hill past a desolate playground. The smooth, asphalt pathway leads past a row of small houses until the pavement suddenly stops, as does any indication of development. Two rundown buildings, surrounded by pools of black mud, loom into view, at a distance from the other houses. A large white dog lies in front of one of the many cracked doors. The glass of many windows is broken and exposed electrical cables snake their way across the peeling walls. Each building has two floors - and families staying on the top floor don't have toilets or bathrooms in their apartments. They share dirty, bad smelling communal bathrooms without hot water.

This is where the Roma live - in isolated enclaves, "on the wrong side of the tracks" in the small town of Libcice nad Vltavou.

Of the 150 Roma living here, only eight of 80 adults have ever held a job. The other 70 Roma in this part of town are children.

Unemployment and poverty seem to follow the Roma wherever they go. A 2005 study by the Research Institute for Labor and Social Affairs in Prague estimated the jobless rate among Roma at 70 percent. Most Roma who do find jobs are limited to unskilled employment. As a result, most Czech Roma rely on state social payments either directly or through family members.

Integration through drugs

Jozef, a sturdy man in his early thirties, is one of the few in the village with a job. He has better furniture and food in his house than most of his fellows. But he's angry and paces up and down. He wants to talk about the drug problem in his community. His father, however, intervenes to stop him from speaking. Jozef's father is worried that his family could suffer repercussions among their peers if they speak out about drug use.

"Things can happen to you here," Jozef's father mutters. He fears that people will start calling them traitors and troublemakers. By speaking, you can get your loved ones into trouble, the Roma say.

"The Roma see drug use as a way of getting integrated into the larger society," says Ivan Vesely, who heads Dzeno, one of the largest Roma advocacy groups in Prague. "It's harder for us to integrate through education and employment - there's so much discrimination against Roma in these fields. By taking drugs, the Roma imitate non-Romas and their lifestyle," he says.

Roma living in cities usually take heroin and pervitin, a locally-made amphetamine, Horvat says. In rural areas, the drugs of choice are inhaled toluene, a cheap paint thinner, and Kanagon glue, which is chewed mostly by children, according to Marta Hudeckova, director of Manusa (People), a Romani women's organization.

Horvat says the situation is so serious that many "desperate mothers report their children to the police for false robbery just to get them jailed for a year or two" so that they can get off drugs, in the belief that drugs are less accessible behind bars.

"Children as young as 12 and 13 have problems with addiction," Horvat says. "But they can't

be helped - it's against the law for NGOs to work with these children because they are under 15 and must have a legal representative."

NGOs like Romodrom and Manusha have responded by running information campaigns at schools to draw attention to the drug problem among Romani children. For young children they do dramatic skits that explain what to do when someone offers them drugs, or how to tell their parents that they are on drugs.

"We want to really change something for our people," says Marie Gailova, Romodrom's chairperson. "We work 13 to 14 hours a day and help 300 Roma clients daily in the five regions where we work."

Not talking openly about drug use in communities is not the only challenge the Roma face. It's equally unacceptable to talk about sex.

"We don't use those funny things"

Jozef's partner, Gabriela, 29, tightly clutches their two-year-old son in her arms. It's clear that he's her treasure.

Jozef and Gabriela are not married. They don't see the need. Theirs is a relationship based on trust - a relationship that strictly excludes discussions about sex or HIV.

"I have never used a condom, because I can trust my partner," Gabriela says. "I don't know if my friends use condoms, because we don't talk about sex. But I don't think they do."

Neither Gabriela nor Jozef has ever taken an HIV test.

A recent study by the Wisconsin Medical College in the United States found that condom use among the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe was rare and mostly associated with contraception. Starting in the 1950s, Czechoslovak authorities employed sterilization, sometimes accompanied by cash payments, to slow the growth of the Romani population. Several Romani women who claim they were sterilized without informed consent have sued the Czech and Slovak governments.

Once women were sterilized they often refused to use condoms, as they perceived them to protect against pregnancy but not against sexually transmitted diseases. The study also showed that Romani men have far greater sexual freedom before and during marriage than women. They engage in unprotected sexual practices with outsiders and have much more power in relationships than women. The study found that Roma in Europe are aware of HIV, but don't feel personally threatened by it.

"Sex is something everyone does, but nobody talks about," says Lida Polackova, a Romani adviser at the social affairs department in the city government of Ostrava, an industrial city in the eastern Czech Republic where many Roma live. "Almost no one in Roma communities knows whether they're HIV-positive or negative. And premarital sex is completely natural, starting at 13 or 15 years of age."

Back in Libcice nad Vltavou, two teenage girls in tight jeans are coyly whispering about sex as they smoke outside one of the apartment buildings in the Romani neighborhood. They're giggling and making jokes about it. Both have had sex with their 16- and 18-year-boyfriends. They blush when asked about condoms. "We don't use those funny things," one says. "Condoms are not for us."

A long train lurches past on the nearby track, making talk impossible even if there were anyone

the girls outside. There's nothing around the two buildings, no greenery, no people, and no sign of hope. Instead of place where dozens of people live, the apartments could easily be mistaken for train station storage buildings.

HIV prevention for the Roma can't be addressed in isolation, Horvat says.

Improved access to health care, education, and employment is part of the solution, nearly everyone agrees, from street workers to high-powered experts from the European Union and the World Bank. None of the many problems facing Roma in places like Libcice can be addressed on its own. Horvat and others who know the Romani community believe that it's unrealistic to expect Roma to quit drugs and in so doing cut their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS when drugs offer their only escape from the harsh reality of the poverty, discrimination, and segregation they face in everyday life.

And when many Roma continue to live in rundown housing with inadequate hygiene, it's too much to expect them to care about safer sex, even if they are informed about sexually transmitted disease.

In his Prague office, a restless Horvat fidgets as he analyzes strategies to help his people.

"For me the best moment in my job would be when I see that there are hardly any drug users or HIV infections anymore," he says. "When services like mine are not needed anymore and everyone has access to services that can help them."

He sighs, and returns to his work. Redundancy still seems a very long way away for people like Milan Horvat.

Mia Malan and Jayalakshmi Shreedhar

Source: Transition Online

<http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=220&NrSection=3&NrArticle=18752>

NGOs: Project to improve Czech Romanies' situation threatened

30 May 2007

Prague - The "Decade of Romanies" project that is to improve the situation of the Romany minority in the Czech Republic by 2015 is threatened as the responsible government institutions to not sufficiently communicate with regional administrations and respective measures are thus not implemented in practice, the Athinganoi Romany association told CTK today.

Athinganoi is coordinating the project along with the Dzeno Romany NGO.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion is an international programme to improve the situation of Romanies, in which eight Central and East European countries participate. The programme was kicked off two years ago and will continue until 2015.

In the Czech Republic, the project focuses on the improvement of Romanies's education, employment, housing and health.

The programme has been initiated by the World Bank and the Open Society Institute (OSI). These institutions were originally expected to considerably fund the programme. However, now the particular countries are to finance Romany projects.

In the latest census in 2001, some 11,000 people declared to have Romany nationality in the 10-million Czech Republic. However, the number of Romanies in the country is estimated at some 250,000.

Up to 80,000 of them probably live in poor housing estates and districts. According to an expert analysis, there are some 300 such deprived localities in the Czech Republic. Most adults living in these areas are unemployed, families end up in debts and are fully dependent on social benefits. Children are often sent to special schools.

The Decade of Romanies is to push for Romany children to attend common schools and continue studying after they acquire elementary education. More Romany kids should also go to kindergartens.

Adult Romanies are to participate in retraining courses to increase their qualification. Special agencies are to be set up to help Romanies seek jobs. Field social workers operating in the localities inhabited by Romanies are to uncover problems with housing and possible rent-defaulting. Field health care workers are to send Romanies to preventive medical check-ups. The Czech Decade of Romanies is based on the programme of Romany integration.

However, some Romany organisations point out that the intentions set in the document are not sufficiently implemented in practice.

The associations criticise the funding of the decade as well as the lack of a method to collect data on Romanies and analyse the programme results. Consequently, it is almost impossible to assess the progress, Athinganoi says.

In June the government should debate a new programme of Romany integration to be submitted by Minister Džamila Stehliková (Greens, SZ), who is in charge of human rights and minorities. Experts from the Government Council for Romany Affairs and from ministries have cooperated on the programme.

Source: Prague Monitor

http://launch.praguemonitor.com/en/95/czech_national_news/7298/

High school fosters Roma

Integration, and not segregation, is the goal of expanding network

23 May 2007

As it approaches its 10th anniversary, the country's only high school especially for Romany teens finds itself faced with a dilemma: Administrators fiercely defend the school's future, but would rather it didn't have to exist.

Founded in 1998 in Kolín, central Bohemia, the High School for Social and Legal Issues (SOŠSP) has since expanded to have seven branches throughout the country and has graduated a total of about 300 students. Today, they have about 600 full-time students nationwide, plus another 500 who take distance-education courses.

In the nine years since then, the Czech Roma community has made strides, says Emil Ščuka, a lawyer and Roma rights activist who founded the SOŠSP. But Romany teens continue to face discrimination that jeopardizes their attendance at normal schools. The dropout rate is high, and so is unemployment within the community.

“The reality is that there are only a very few Romany students in high schools,” Ščuka says. “So [our school should be around] until there are enough Romany students in high schools.”

“The most important thing is that Romany kids can complete their high-school education here,” says Marta Tulejová, vice principal of the Prague SOŠSP branch, which rents three classrooms from an elementary-school building in a lively Žižkov neighborhood. “Because most can’t do so at Czech high schools where they are thrown into a majority that doesn’t respect their identity. The Roma are the minority.”

At the Žižkov campus, there are about 60 students. The SOŠSP doesn’t limit its student body to Romany students only, and around 20 percent of the students there are non-Roma, says Principal Irena Meisnerová.

Still, the school provides one of the few environments where Romany youth can find themselves in the majority, among peers and teachers who understand their culture and their learning needs.

Besides taking the usual high-school courses mandated by the Education Ministry, the students here learn the Romany language in class and study Romany literature, culture and history. No other high school in the country can provide them that, and no other school focuses on social issues involving the Roma population, Meisnerová says.

This allows the students to learn some valuable lessons, says Zuzana Znamenáčková, who teaches English and Romany language and culture at the Prague school.

“In the Czech Republic, there are no good conditions for learning about Romany history and culture,” she says. “I think everybody should learn about their past, their history. But in Czech high schools... it’s not written in history books about the Roma.”

This means, for example, that youths – Roma and non-Roma alike – grow up being taught only about the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, even though an estimated 500,000 European Roma were also murdered. In Bohemia and Moravia, Hitler’s final solution nearly wiped out the Roma population.

Like the teens she teaches today, Znamenáčková grew up learning nothing about the Roma people. Curious about the Romany great-grandmother she never met and knew nothing about, Znamenáčková sought out books on Romany history. Today, she’s enrolled in a Romany-studies program at Prague’s Charles University.

“For [my students], it’s very new. Some of them are very interested in their history. Some of them are angry ... about why they had to suffer,” she says.

Separate and equal?

Educational discrimination is nothing new for the Roma. Human rights groups here and abroad have harshly criticized Czech policies that once sent the majority of Romany children to “special” schools for mentally and physically disabled children.

In 1999, the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) issued a report that concluded 75 percent of Czech Romany children were sent to these special schools, versus only 4 percent of non-Romany Czech children.

“Romany kids were sent there because they were considered handicapped because of their skin color,” says SOŠSP Vice Principal Tulejová. Students at these schools are only taught basic reading and writing skills. Graduates have barely a fifth-grade education and receive a diploma that doesn’t allow them to continue on to high school, she says.

The ERRC helped a group of 18 Roma who had attended these schools lodge a complaint at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. A final ruling is expected later this year.

The government has made strides in recent years toward integrating Romany children back into the regular school system, and the situation is somewhat improved, says Znamenáčková. “But some teachers still don’t want Romany children in their schools. ... There’s still a lot of prejudice.”

Some critics have accused the SOŠSP of perpetuating the very segregation that Roma rights activists accuse the government of enforcing. SOŠSP founder Ščuka soundly rejects those accusations.

“What is segregation, anyway?” he says tersely. “We can hardly be the same. In a democratic world, difference should be supported. It would be segregation if we were actually teaching the students segregation, but we don’t.”

Tulejová also adamantly defends the school’s importance. “Our history is neglected by Czechs, and I don’t think that is going to change in the near future. ... We are still at the edge of society and we fight literally every day for our chance to live here.”

Hilda Hoy

Source: The Prague Post

<http://www.praguepost.com/articles/2007/05/23/high-school-fosters-roma.php>

Germany

Polizisten sorgen für Eklat

25. Mai 2007

Ein Gedicht im Amtsblatt beleidigt die Roma. Der Bürgermeister ist ratlos.

Šluknov. Einen Skandal weit über die Grenzen des Schluckenauer Zipfels hinaus hat ein Gedicht verursacht, das das Rathaus von Šluknov (Schluckenau) in seinem monatlich erscheinenden Mitteilungsblatt veröffentlicht hat. Es stammt aus der Feder zweier Schluckenauer Polizeibeamter und beschreibt Erfahrungen, die die beiden im Umgang mit der Roma-Bevölkerung gemacht haben. Dem Nachrichtenmagazin „Tyden“ (dem „Spiegel“ vergleichbar) war der Vorfall eine Doppelseite wert.

In den fünf Strophen wird beschrieben, wie ein Roma-Vater im Winter seine Kinder losschickt, um Holz beim Nachbarn zu stehlen - die Kinder belange schließlich niemand. Darüber hatte sich ein Roma-Bewohner beschwert. Er arbeite, zahle Steuern und fühle sich verletzt, wenn er von der Polizei undifferenziert in einen Topf mit Straftätern geworfen werde.

Bürgermeister Milan Korinek bedauerte den Vorfall zwar, will aber dennoch keinerlei Maßnahmen gegen die beiden Polizeibeamten ergreifen: „Ich habe mit ihnen geredet und sie haben mir versprochen, dass sich so etwas nicht wiederholen wird“, erklärte er dem „Decinsky denik“. Er wundere sich allerdings nicht, dass die Polizisten nicht gut auf die Roma zu sprechen seien. Es seien immer dieselben Leute, die sich Straftaten zu Schulden kommen ließen. Es sehe so aus, als sei diese Bevölkerungsgruppe „unergründlich und unverbesserlich“.

Dass das Gedicht überhaupt im Mitteilungsblatt des Rathauses erscheinen konnte, liegt offensichtlich daran, dass das Rathaus kein Konzept für den Inhalt der Zeitung hat: „Wir drucken alles ab, was nicht explizit vulgär ist“, sagte Korinek. „Sonst beschuldigen uns die Leute, dass wir hier eine Zensur betreiben.“ Auch David Hlinka, der Chefredakteur des Blattes, räumte eine gewisse Hilflosigkeit des Rathauses im Umgang mit den Bürgern ein. „Wenn wir einen Beitrag ablehnen, ruft uns der Autor sofort an und beschimpft uns, dass wir nur schreiben, was dem Bürgermeister in den Kram passt.“ (ahu)

Quelle: Sächsische Zeitung

<http://www.sz-online.de/nachrichten/artikel.asp?id=1500296>

Ab ins Stammland

Wie ein Landkreis in Rheinland-Pfalz 500 Roma-Flüchtlinge aus dem Kosovo loswerden wollte.

24. Mai 2007

Mayen-Koblenz - Es war ja nur eine Idee. Man habe nichts damit zu tun, heißt es, durchaus glaubwürdig, im Innenministerium des Landes Rheinland-Pfalz. Offenbar haben Mitarbeiter einer Kreisverwaltung versucht, »zunächst« 500 Balkanflüchtlinge, die im Bundesland Rheinland-Pfalz leben, zur Ausreise zu bewegen - nicht etwa in ihre Heimat, das Kosovo, sondern in einen völlig anderen Teil Europas, nämlich die Slowakei.

Es geht um Roma, Angehörige eines Volkes, das im Kosovo während und nach dem Krieg immer wieder der Verfolgung durch Serben, vor allem aber durch die Albaner ausgesetzt gewesen ist. In Rheinland-Pfalz lebten zum Zeitpunkt der letzten Erhebung, im Dezember vergangenen Jahres, exakt 1059 Roma-Flüchtlinge aus dem Kosovo ohne gültige Aufenthaltserlaubnis. Von Rechts wegen sollten sie Deutschland verlassen, sie dürfen aber, ebenso von Rechts wegen, angesichts der fortdauernden Gefährdung in ihrer Heimat nicht abgeschoben werden. Arbeiten dürfen sie auch nicht, weshalb sie den Städten und Gemeinden auf der Tasche liegen. Man wäre sie also gerne los - aber wie? Freiwilligen Rückkehrern bezahlt das Land eine Wiedereingliederungshilfe, doch das Programm ist nur mäßig erfolgreich.

In dieser Lage begab es sich im September vergangenen Jahres, so wird die Geschichte heute in der Kreisverwaltung Mayen-Koblenz erzählt, dass sich zwei Roma-Familien mit guten Kontakten in Ostmitteleuropa danach erkundigten, ob das Land ihnen zur Ausreise in die Slowakei verhelfen könne. Angeblich hätten die fraglichen Roma sogar angedeutet, dass weitere Landsleute an dieser Möglichkeit interessiert seien.

Leider kann man die Familien nicht dazu befragen, denn sie sind unauffindbar. Auch ausgiebige Erkundungen unter rheinland-pfälzischen Roma führen zu keiner Person, die sich zu dem Wunsch bekennt, in die Slowakei zu übersiedeln. Alles andere wäre auch überraschend, denn das Elend der Roma in der Slowakei ist allgemein bekannt. Die OSZE und die EU-Kommission setzen ihre erbärmliche Situation immer wieder auf die Tagesordnung.

In der Kreisverwaltung Mayen-Koblenz jedoch muss ein bis dahin verkannter Ethnologe wie elektrisiert gewesen sein. Lebten nicht zahllose Roma in der Slowakei? Erschien die Slowakei nicht, so gesehen, geradezu als natürliche Heimat der Roma, gewissermaßen als ihr Stammland? Und könnte es womöglich weitere Stammländer geben? So entstand ein Pilotprojekt: »Bedarfsorientierte Wiederansiedlung von Romas in ein Stammland, hier Slowakei«.

Zweifellos würde der Wiederansiedlungsbedarf der rheinland-pfälzischen Roma gewaltig sein! Von, sagen wir, zunächst 500 Ausreisewilligen auszugehen schien keinesfalls übertrieben. Voller Optimismus wandte sich der Kreis an die Bonner Außenstelle der slowakischen Botschaft, um sie auf das rege Interesse ihrer zukünftigen Landsleute hinzuweisen. Dass es lediglich eine vage Anfrage gab und dass die angeblichen Ausreisewilligen keineswegs Slowaken, ja nicht einmal EU-Bürger waren, diese Informationen müssen bei der Unterrichtung der slowakischen Diplomaten irgendwie untergegangen sein. »Der slowakischen Botschaft wurde zunächst eine Größenordnung von max. 500 Personen avisiert«, notierte ein Sachbearbeiter. Natürlich wurde nichts aus dem Pilotprojekt. Seit der Aufklärung des Sachverhalts hat die Slowakei alles Interesse an den angeblichen Auswanderungswilligen aus Deutschland verloren. Erkundigt man sich in Koblenz nach der Quelle der Erkenntnisse über Roma-»Stammländer«, so verweist die Kreisverwaltung auf einen Fund im Internet, auf der Seite der Universität Graz.

Dort gibt es in der Tat ein renommiertes Roma-Forschungsprojekt. Ein Anruf in Graz hat allerdings eine beträchtliche Verblüffung der Experten zur Folge. Wenn es überhaupt Sinn hätte, von einem Stammland der Roma zu sprechen, sagt eine erstaunte Mitarbeiterin, dann müsse es sich um Indien handeln.

In Rheinland-Pfalz sind bislang keine Roma bekannt, die den Wunsch geäußert hätten, bei Gelegenheit nach Indien auszureisen. Die Kreisverwaltung Mayen-Koblenz besteht allerdings auf ihrem Recht, Menschen, die in Deutschland »nicht so glücklich« seien, zur Ausreise zu verhelfen, wohin auch immer.

Angelika Calmez

Quelle: Die Zeit
<http://www.zeit.de/2007/22/LS-Roma?from=rss>

Hungary

Umstrittener Ombudsmann für Minderheitenrechte

2. Juni 2007

Wie gemeldet hatte Staatspräsident László Sólyom den romastämmigen Wissenschaftler Ernő Kállai zum neuen Ombudsmann für Minderheiten vorgeschlagen. Nach Angaben von Otto Heinek, dem Vorsitzenden der Landesselbstverwaltung der Ungarndeutschen, halten alle 12 Minderheiten außerhalb der Roma das Verfahren des Staatsoberhauptes für unglücklich. Nur einen Tag vor Bekanntgabe seines Vorschlages habe Sólyom die Minderheitenvertretungen nach deren Meinung zu seinem Kandidaten befragt - nicht aber, ob sie einen eigenen Bewerber aufstellen wollten.

In der Tageszeitung Magyar Nemzet erinnerte Heinek daran, dass sich die zwölf Minderheitenselbstverwaltungen zwei Wochen vor dem Staatsoberhaupt auf die Juristin und Minderheitenexpertin, Univ. Prof. Erzsébet Sándor-Szalay, verständigt hatten. Bei der entsprechenden Aussprache sei einzig die Landesselbstverwaltung der Roma nicht vertreten

gewesen. Heinek betonte, dass das Votum für die Dekanin der Rechtswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Pécs weder einen politischen noch einen ethnischen Hintergrund habe. Die Unterstützung Sándor-Szalays sei wegen ihrer Erfahrungen im Bereich Minderheitenschutz sowie ihrer umfangreichen internationalen Kontakte erfolgt.

Die endgültige Wahl von Ombudsmännern erfolgt im Parlament mit Zweidrittelmehrheit.

Quelle: Pester Lloyd

http://www.pestierlloyd.net/Archiv/2007_22/0722minderheiten2/0722minderheiten2.html

Parliament to discuss long-term Roma integration programme

25 May 2007

Budapest - Parliament is scheduled to discuss a ten-year draft programme seeking to help the integration of Hungary's Roma minority, Katalin Levai Juhasz, MP of the governing Socialist Party, said on Friday.

Priorities in the programme include social and economic integration and reducing the gap between Roma and non-Roma communities within society, as well as improving the image of the Roma minority, the MP said. She added that the programme would focus on four key areas: education, employment, accommodation and health care.

Levai Juhasz reiterated that Hungary was a member of a central and eastern European cooperation programme, in which the government was required to complete an action plan every two years; she added that the government would come up with its first such plan before August 31.

Source: MTI

<http://english.mti.hu/default.asp?menu=1&theme=2&cat=25&newsid=240434>

Italy

Neuer Bürgermeister von Verona kündigt „ethnische Säuberung“ an

30. Mai 2007

Mit überwältigender Mehrheit hat ein Aktivist der Lega Nord den Bürgermeistersessel der industriereichen Stadt Verona erobert. Mit seinem Versprechen, der Stadt der Arena Ordnung und Sicherheit zu garantieren, konnte der 39-jährige Hardliner der Lega Nord, Flavio Tosi, beim ersten Wahlgang mit 60,7 Prozent der Stimmen die Kommunalwahlen am vergangenen Wochenende gewinnen und die bisher von einer Mitte-Links-Koalition verwaltete Stadt unter Kontrolle der Rechten stellen.

Tosi verspricht eine „ethnische Säuberung“, um die 256.000-Einwohner-Stadt von Roma, Drogendealern, Prostituierten und Kriminellen zu befreien.

„In dieser Stadt gibt es keinen Platz für diejenigen, die sich nicht integrieren wollen und unsere Gesetze nicht respektieren. Wir müssen uns von Drogendealern und Kriminellen befreien, die das Gesetz verletzen“, betonte Tosi, der bereits zwei Mal wegen rassistischer Propaganda verurteilt worden ist. „Ich habe einen Kampf gegen eine illegale Roma-Siedlung geführt und habe dafür bezahlt“, rechtfertigte sich Tosi im Interview mit der Tageszeitung „La Repubblica“ am Mittwoch.

Zu seinen Prioritäten zähle auch der Kampf gegen Produktpiraterie. „Ich will Strafen einführen, für diejenigen, die gefälschte Waren kaufen, angefangen von den Straßenhändlern. Außerdem will ich Strafen für Kunden von Prostituierten und für Bettlern an den Ampeln einführen“, erklärte der Bürgermeister.

Über seinen Wahlerfolg zeigte sich Tosi nicht überrascht. „Ich bin vom Volk gewählt worden, das Antworten braucht und wirklich eine Änderung verlangt. Das Volk weiß, dass ich mich nicht in ein Büro einsperren, sondern unter den Leuten bleiben werde“, betonte das Stadtoberhaupt. Hinzu werde er sich für den Steuerföderalismus einsetzen, ein Hauptziel der Lega Nord. „Ohne Steuerföderalismus bricht alles zusammen“, meinte Tosi. Dank seines Einsatzes werde Verona in Zukunft „schöner, sauberer und sicherer“ sein.

Quelle: Suedtirol online

<http://www.dolomiten.it/nachrichten/artikel.asp?KatID=f&ArtID=94175>

Bulgarelli: «Campo nomadi in condizioni vergognose»

1 giugno 2007

ALGHERO - «Le condizioni igienico-sanitarie in cui sono costretti a vivere i rom nel campo di Fertilia, ad Alghero, sono indecenti». E' questa l'accusa del senatore di "Insieme con l'Unione" Mauro Bulgarelli, che da tempo segue la vicenda del locale campo nomadi, sul quale ha recentemente presentato un'interrogazione parlamentare. «In tutta la Sardegna - chiarisce Bulgarelli - la situazione è molto seria, probabilmente in conseguenza del fatto che la legge regionale n. 9 del 1988 per la "tutela dell'etnia e della cultura dei nomadi" è rimasta per molto tempo largamente inattuata, ma ad Alghero, dove ho visitato di persona più volte il campo in cui vive una comunità di circa cinquanta persone di etnia Rom Khorakhan, siamo giunti a dei livelli intollerabili. Il campo - analizza il senatore dei Verdi - è situato in un'area di sosta provvisoria in località "La Fighera-Arenosu", una pineta in prossimità della borgata di Fertilia, e ho constatato che le condizioni di vita di adulti e bambini sono inumane; una situazione di estremo degrado che non può passare inosservata da parte delle istituzioni locali. Tra l'altro, proprio in questi giorni, è stata scoperta in prossimità del campo, vicino al lago Calik, una vasta area, circa due ettari, adibita a discarica di manufatti di vario genere». A tal proposito, Bulgarelli annuncia la prossima presentazione di un'interrogazione per chiedere la bonifica della zona, che potrebbe essere l'occasione per ripristinare anche le condizioni di vivibilità del campo. «In ogni caso - continua Bulgarelli - il campo non può rimanere nelle condizioni attuali. Peraltro, proprio ieri ho ricevuto una dettagliata segnalazione da parte di Giovanni Oliva del movimento "Alghero viva" e Valdo di Nolfo, consigliere comunale, dalla quale emerge che nel corso degli ultimi anni vi sarebbe stato un forte disinteresse dell'amministrazione comunale: sarebbe stato sospeso da tempo ogni servizio regolare di ritiro dell'immondizie e dei rifiuti ingombranti e non sarebbe stato avviato alcun progetto, nè alcuna iniziativa positiva volta a migliorare le condizioni di vita della comunità rom. Inoltre - prosegue il senatore dei Verdi - negli ultimi anni non è mai stata convocata una riunione della Commissione ai Servizi Sociali, competente in materia, per discutere del problema. Non risulta, infine, che nel 2006 il Comune di Alghero abbia presentato alcun progetto finalizzato alla realizzazione delle infrastrutture previste dalla legge regionale per le comunità nomadi, così che la Regione Sardegna ha, per la terza volta, ritirato il finanziamento per Alghero, destinandolo ad altri Comuni dell'isola (Porto Torres e Sassari), che invece avevano già provveduto a realizzare le infrastrutture necessarie. Questa situazione non può perdurare - conclude Bulgarelli - e pertanto chiederò al più presto ai ministeri competenti di avviare un'indagine conoscitiva sul campo di Alghero».

Fonte: alguer.it

http://www.alguer.it/notizie/alghero/12273/bulgarelli_campo_nomadi_condizioni_vergognose

Montenegro

UNHCR mobilizes lawyers to combat statelessness in Montenegro

31 May 2007

Podgorica - Bursting with energy, Hadzi and Maksum Miftari grin at visitors from the family living-room sofa before rushing outside to play with their friends. They seem full of life, but in legal terms the boys practically did not exist in their birthplace Montenegro or anywhere else until recently.

It seems inconceivable that bureaucratic red tape could have derailed the hopes and potential of Hadzi, aged six, and his four-year-old brother, Maksum, whose parents fled to Montenegro from Kosovo in 1999 to escape persecution based on their Roma ethnicity.

But that almost happened until UNHCR brought in lawyers to register their births and obtain proof of nationality - essential for getting access to basic rights such as education, health, employment and even marriage. Hundreds of other members of the minority Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian people in Montenegro have not been so lucky.

The two boys were entitled to Serbian nationality through their parents, who were born and bred in the province of Kosovo. They failed to register their sons immediately after birth and later found themselves caught in a bureaucratic maze.

"I tried to register Hadzi about two months after he was born, but [the registry office] asked to see my marriage certificate," said the boy's father, Idrizi Miftari. Municipal registry offices throughout the former Yugoslav Federation kept marriage records and regularly issued copies of marriage certificates, but Idrizi was married in the western Kosovo town of Djakova and was told that his records had been lost during the conflict of 1999.

He travelled to Serbia in the hope that the records had been transferred there by Serbian civil servants fleeing Kosovo after NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) forces entered the territory in June 1999 and placed it under United Nations administration. Idrizi had no luck there either and returned to his family in Podgorica's impoverished Konik neighbourhood.

The Miftaris had almost given up hope of registering their sons when UNHCR stepped in last year by focusing a US State Department-funded legal aid programme on Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian families in Konik who were missing important documentation.

UNHCR's implementing partner, Catholic Relief Services, hired an outreach assistant from the community and he informed locals of their rights and offered free legal assistance. The assistant was soon approached by the Miftaris.

The lawyers got round the problem of the missing marriage documents by using hospital records as proof of birth. The registry office accepted this and issued them with birth certificates that they used to certify the boys' Serbian nationality.

The case of Hadzi and Maksum is one of many success stories registered by UNHCR's legal aid programmes in the Balkans region, but there is still much more to be done to help people left at risk of statelessness due to problems over civil registration or a lack of documentation.

These cases are time consuming and can involve complicated representation in administrative and judicial proceedings. They also require close coordination between legal aid providers

throughout the region. Yet this work is vital for both stateless people and the countries in which they live.

"Without proof of citizenship, people slip through the cracks in society and they are cut off from important rights," said Maja Lazic, coordinator for UNHCR's regional legal aid project. "Conversely, without registered, documented inhabitants, states are unable to effectively govern their populations."

UNHCR's legal aid implementing partners have assisted thousands of displaced persons in Montenegro since 1998. They are focusing increasingly on the issue of statelessness and, since November last year, have helped 146 people in Montenegro obtain proof of birth and/or nationality.

The refugee agency is trying to better assess the number of people at risk of statelessness in Montenegro in order to develop a comprehensive and lasting solution to the problem. By some estimates, up to 6,500 members of the Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian population may be at risk due to lack of documents.

Solutions will lie in continued legal assistance and outreach campaigns, as well as advocacy for a more active, open and transparent approach by the state bodies responsible for birth registration. They will also lie in improved access for displaced persons to documentation in Serbia. UNHCR hopes this will be achieved through legal aid providers and digitalization of documents held by municipal registries in Serbia.

Hadzi and Maksum, meanwhile, seemed delighted with their newly acquired proof of nationality, which they will need to access civil, economic, social, and political rights. Once they realized that UNHCR visitors were not doctors come to vaccinate them, the boys proudly showed off their birth certificates.

Gordana Popovic/ John Palmer

Source: UNHCR

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/UNHCR/cb750f795b72e558c8dfa5cfc8918db7.htm>

Kosovo/Serbia

Kosovo : avec des Roms de retour à Mitrovica, huit ans après

31 mai 2007

Une partie des habitants de la mahala, le quartier rrom du sud de Mitrovica, chassés en 1999 sont revenus vivre en mars dernier dans les appartements reconstruits. Cependant, malgré les promesses de certaines organisations internationales, ils n'ont toujours pas de travail et survivent avec quelques donations humanitaires. Discussion avec trois femmes du quartier, heureuses de leur retour, mais inquiètes pour l'avenir.

Les politiciens qui rendent visite aux Roms dans leur quartier assurent que le Kosovo sera bientôt indépendant. Le Premier ministre du Kosovo, Agim Çeku, en visite dans le quartier rrom de Mitrovica, a ajouté que le Kosovo indépendant représenterait un progrès pour toutes ses communautés et que personne ne devrait redouter cette option. « Nous attendons que tous ceux qui ont quitté le pays reviendront dans le Kosovo indépendant » a-t-il ajouté.

« Notre vie à Kragujevac était très difficile. Mon arrière grand-père vivait dans ce quartier, et nous voici de retour. Il n'est pas bon que nous restions sous la protection des soldats internationaux, nous voudrions être libres. Ces soldats rentreront un jour chez eux, et nous ne

savons pas ce qui se passera alors. Nous souhaitons que nos enfants aillent à l'école, car c'est là qu'il s'éveilleront et prépareront leur avenir » - nous ont dit quelques femmes rroms de Mitrovica.

Milikia, une femme de soixante-trois ans, est revenue de Subotica en Voïvodine, avec son mari et ses six enfants. Avant-guerre, sa maison se trouvait dans ce quartier. Maintenant, elle va commencer une vie nouvelle dans son vieux quartier. Nous avons discuté dans sa nouvelle maison.

Nevipe Kosov@ (NK) : Te voilà dans ta nouvelle maison, comment te sens-tu ?

Milikia : Comment dire, après la guerre du Kosovo, pris de peur, nous avons abandonné nos maisons. Et voilà, huit ans après, nous sommes revenus. Nos anciennes maisons n'existent plus. Maintenant, on nous a offert cet appartement. Je peux vous dire que nous avons un peu peur d'y rester, on a peur qu'il nous arrive quelque chose. Je prie Dieu qu'il ne se passe rien que nous oblige à repartir d'ici. Nous avons eu ces logements, ce n'est pas si mal, ça va.

NK : Es-tu contente de revenir dans ton quartier au bout de huit ans ?

Milikia : Je suis très heureuse. Avant, nous n'avions pas d'abri, nous vivions dans des camps. Voilà, grâce à Dieu, maintenant on est bien. Mon arrière grand-père vivait ici, et nous sommes revenus chez nous.

NK : Comment s'organise la vie ?

Milikia : Difficilement, très difficilement. Il est vrai qu'on nous a offert ce logement, mais que faire sans travail ? Moi, par exemple, j'aurais besoin d'une machine à coudre, pour travailler et gagner ma vie. On nous a promis des aides régulières, mais pour l'instant nous ne voyons rien de tout ça. Quoi qu'il en soit, ce qu'il nous faut avant tout, c'est la liberté, rien d'autre.

NK : On a entendu dire que l'organisation NCA financerait l'ouverture de locaux professionnels pour ceux qui ont un métier...

Milikia : Oui, c'est vrai. Mon mari leur a dit qu'il est boucher. Nous attendons maintenant de l'aide, parce que sans travail, il n'y a rien, ni ici, ni ailleurs.

NK : Est-ce que vos enfants sont scolarisés ?

Milikia : Sur ce point, la situation n'est pas bonne. Tant que nous étions à Subotica, je n'ai pas inscrit les enfants à l'école. J'avais peur, c'était un endroit inconnu pour nous. Maintenant, il faut absolument que je les inscrive ici à l'école. Nos enfants doivent s'instruire, ce n'est qu'ainsi qu'ils pourront avoir un avenir.

A un moment une autre femme s'approche de nous pour entendre la discussion avec Milikia.

NK : Nous discutons avec Milikia sur sa vie, maintenant et auparavant... Qu'est-ce que tu peux nous dire de la tienne ?

Xhanxhia : J'ai 63 ans. Que dire ? C'était très difficile pour nous en Serbie. Ce n'était pas une vie. Je remercie l'organisation qui a construit ces appartements pour nous et nous a organisé notre retour dans notre quartier rrom. Ici, j'ai de la famille.

NK : Vous avez encore des enfants dans des camps en Serbie. Quand reviendront-ils ?

Xhanxhia : J'ai deux fils ici, et deux autres sont mariés. Nous attendons la construction de nouveaux logements, et eux aussi rentreront vivre avec nous.

NK : Quels sont vos plans pour l'avenir ? Aucun de vous ne travaille.

Xhanxhia : C'est vrai. Quand nous avons été relogés dans ces nouveaux appartements, on nous a promis trois mois d'aide alimentaire. Cette promesse n'a pas été tenue. Comment vivrons nous, vu que nous n'avons pas de travail ? Il est vrai qu'on nous a donné des cuisinières à bois et à l'électricité, mais nous ne savons pas ce que nous ferons dans l'avenir. Nous ne touchons plus nos pensions, et maintenant on n'a rien.

NK : Vous touchiez vos pensions à Belgrade ?

Xhanxhia : J'ai touché ma pension seulement pendant un an, ensuite elle a été coupée. Nous ne savons pas quoi faire, on a commencé à ramasser des choses dans les ordures, dans les poubelles, parce que nous avons faim et nous n'avons rien à manger. C'est pour cela que j'implore Dieu pour qu'il nous donne la liberté au Kosovo, et qu'on n'ait plus jamais de guerre. Nous sommes tous pareil, faits de chair et de sang.

En ce moment, Aïchia approche. Elle aussi vient de rentrer dans son quartier de Mitrovica après huit années passés à Kragujevac.

NK : *Après Kragujevac, vous êtes de retour dans le vieux quartier de Mitrovica. Etes-vous contentes de ce retour ?*

Aïchia : Bien sûr ! Je suis très contente. Notre vie à Kragujevac était très difficile. L'organisation DRC nous a donné des cuisinières et d'autres aides. Malgré tout, je voudrais dire que nous sommes habitués à vivre dans des maisons avec une cour, nous ne sommes pas habitués à ces immeubles à étages. Aussi, il nous faudrait un meilleur accès à la santé, pour qu'on ne soit pas obligés à aller au nord de Mitrovica pour voir le médecin, c'est trop loin pour les malades.

NK : Comment faites vous pour la nourriture, puisque personne ne travaille ?

Aïchia : Quand on est venus ici, on nous a dit qu'on obtiendrait des aides alimentaires. Parfois, on nous donne de la nourriture. Nous faisons des listes de ce dont nous avons besoin un jour auparavant. Après cela, même pas la moitié de ce que nous avons demandé parvient vraiment jusqu'à nous. De ce point de vue, on ne peut pas dire que les choses vont bien. Apparemment, quelqu'un s'enrichit sur notre dos. Parfois nous n'avons pas d'électricité ni d'eau.

NK : Quelle est la situation sécuritaire dans le quartier ?

Aïchia : Notre maison est au fond du quartier. La police du Kosovo et d'autres responsables de la sécurité sont dans le quartier 24 heures sur 24. Les soldats français et danois de la KFOR sont là aussi. Cependant, il n'est pas bon qu'on soit protégé tout le temps par des soldats, nous voulons être libres. Les soldats rentreront chez eux un jour ou l'autre, et nous ne savons pas ce que nous deviendrons ensuite.

Sebiha Bajrami

Source : Nevipe Kosov@/Le courrier des Balkans

<http://balkans.courriers.info/article8372.html>

Los gitanos son el grupo social mas rechazado en España

España, 24/05/07- El caso de María Luisa Muñoz saltó a la prensa hace pocas semanas. El Tribunal Constitucional denegaba la pensión de viudedad a esta mujer que se casó en 1971 por el rito gitano y cuyo marido cotizó durante 19 años. Los medios han recogido también en los últimos días la situación de 14 personas, en su mayoría gitanos y extranjeros, que han puesto quejas ante el Consejo General del Poder Judicial contra un registro civil de Toledo por un supuesto trato discriminatorio y arbitrario. Sus casos son un ejemplo del trato marginatorio que esta minoría sufre en España según los últimos informes presentados por la Fundación Secretariado Gitano y el Observatorio Europeo contra el Racismo y la Xenofobia. El año 2007 ha sido declarado Año Internacional por la Igualdad de Oportunidades.

Los gitanos españoles constituyen un grupo étnico formado por más de medio millón de personas, que se asentaron en España hace más de 500 años. Su cultura ha ido ligada a circunstancias de marginación histórica e, incluso, de persecución legal que, desde hace unos años, se pretenden reparar y combatir con iniciativas como la firma del Manifiesto del Defensor del Pueblo de España y los Comisionados Parlamentarios Autonómicos en apoyo del pueblo gitano de 1999 o las recientes puestas en marcha del Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano y del Instituto de Cultura Gitana.

A nivel autonómico también se han dado pasos en este sentido incluyendo menciones a la comunidad gitana en los nuevos Estatutos de Autonomía y a nivel europeo se ha promovido una directiva que apela a la aplicación del principio de igualdad de trato de las personas independientemente de su origen racial o étnico. Aún así, de acuerdo a todos los estudios de opinión, los gitanos constituyen uno de los grupos peor valorados socialmente, y ese rechazo deriva en numerosas prácticas discriminatorias que frenan el ejercicio de sus derechos ciudadanos. Sentencias como las de María Luisa Muñoz significan, pues, para muchos, un auténtico retroceso en el camino hacia la igualdad real.

Trato discriminatorio y agravio comparativo

María Luisa y su marido, Mariano Dual, se casaron en 1971 por el rito ancestral de los gitanos y tenían seis hijos, reconocidos por la Administración en un libro de familia. Aún así el Tribunal constitucional le negó el amparo con el voto particular en contra del magistrado Jorge Rodríguez-Zapata, quien alegó trato discriminatorio y agravio comparativo hacia esta comunidad. Pero los tribunales no son el único espacio en el que la que la comunidad gitana considera que el trato dispensado a estas personas "no respeta la igualdad de trato, es discriminatorio y puede vulnerar el ordenamiento".

El informe 'Discriminación y Comunidad Gitana 2006' del área de Igualdad de Trato y No discriminación de la Fundación Secretariado Gitano, establece un mapa general de los ámbitos en los que se producen prácticas discriminatorias hacia la comunidad gitana. Destaca el mundo del mercado laboral, donde existen prejuicios por parte de los empresarios: "Se piensa que son unos vagos, que no les gusta trabajar, piensan que si los contratan luego faltarán al trabajo". En el sector de la hostelería el panorama es aún más desolador, ya que en varios estudios de opinión una gran mayoría de empresarios ha explicado que no quiere contratar a gitanos porque temen que se les vaya a llenar el bar de personas de esta etnia, cosa que, según ellos, conllevaría la pérdida de su clientela habitual.

También se han documentado prácticas discriminatorias en el ámbito de la vivienda: según el informe, los propietarios o agencias inmobiliarias se niegan a alquilar pisos a los miembros de la comunidad gitana porque piensan que no van a pagar el alquiler todos los meses, porque

creen que meterán a toda la familia en la vivienda o que montarán jaleo hasta altas horas de la madrugada. También se alega, en muchas ocasiones, que por el carácter de los gitanos es muy fácil que surjan enfrentamientos con el resto de vecinos, como amenazas o episodios de violencia. Otros prejuicios hacen referencia a que los gitanos no van a respetar las normas de convivencia o que van a dejarlo todo sucio.

La educación es otro de los ámbitos en los que más denuncias por comportamientos racistas se han presentado. En primer lugar, se constata la falta de garantías para un acceso igualitario del alumnado gitano a los centros educativos privados y concertados, además, de la existencia de una importante segregación y concentración de dichos alumnos en determinados centros públicos o clases especiales, que determina una educación de menor calidad y con menos recursos, incrementando el riesgo de marginalización y la creación de guetos en relación con las minorías étnicas. Por otro lado, algunas normas educativas, aparentemente neutras en su origen, pueden llevar implícita una discriminación indirecta, especialmente cuando se desarrollan teniendo sólo en cuenta las características sociales de la población mayoritaria. Más aún, existe una omisión de la realidad y la cultura gitanas en los materiales pedagógicos, currículos educativos y libros de texto, cuando no una transmisión de una imagen negativa de dicha comunidad.

Además, sostienen que se observa un trato discriminatorio por parte de la Policía. Son los propios agentes quienes patrullan en determinadas zonas donde vive abundante población gitana ya que esperan encontrar mayor número de delitos como robos, tráfico de drogas o violencia. Además, se puede observar un trato discriminatorio por parte de la Policía en el mayor número de paradas a personas de etnia gitana para solicitarles la documentación, los permisos de venta ambulante, registrarles los vehículos, cachearles en comparación con el resto de población no gitana.

La Fundación Secretariado Gitano ha documentado e intervenido, también, casos de discriminación en el ámbito de acceso a bienes y servicios. Se han dado situaciones en las que la población gitana ha recibido la negativa, por parte de los agentes de seguridad o propietarios de pubs y discotecas, a dejarles entrar en los locales, ya que piensan que habrá peleas, jaleo o se consumirán drogas y temen que el resto de los clientes se puedan marchar por la presencia de los mismos. Los profesionales de los servicios sanitarios tampoco quedan libres de las actitudes prejuiciosas, ya que se ha observado que cuando tienen que comunicar alguna noticia sobre una enfermedad grave o un fallecimiento de una persona gitana, suelen siempre hacerlo a través de los guardas de seguridad del centro por temor a amenazas o reacciones violentas de los miembros de la comunidad.

La sinrazón de los prejuicios

Pero no solamente son las instituciones o las entidades las que se dejan llevar por ideas preconcebidas y generalizaciones. Según los datos del último Barómetro del CIS, la comunidad gitana continúa siendo el grupo social más rechazado en España. Entre las conclusiones que se desprenden del estudio, una de las más preocupantes es la que muestra como a más del 40 por ciento de los españoles les molestaría “mucho o bastante” tener como vecinos a gitanos y como a uno de cada cuatro españoles no les gustaría que sus hijos estuvieran en la misma clase que niños de familias gitanas. De las dos preguntas específicas que recaban la opinión de los españoles sobre la comunidad gitana y su percepción con respecto a otros grupos sociales en el estudio se desprende que la comunidad gitana continúa siendo el grupo social más rechazado, no sólo con respecto a la población inmigrante, sino también con respecto a otros grupos como “personas que hayan estado en la cárcel”, “personas alcohólicas”, “personas de extrema derecha” o “personas con problemas psíquicos”.

Todas estas situaciones se dan a diario tanto en el ámbito público como en el privado, y afectan seriamente a sus víctimas, lo que demuestra que existe todavía un enorme camino por

recorrer para combatir la discriminación étnica de manera real y efectiva. En 2007, año de la Igualdad de Oportunidades, desde las Administraciones se han puesto en marcha una serie de actividades e iniciativas que buscan formar y sensibilizar a las organizaciones sociales, la ciudadanía y otros agentes clave en materia de lucha contra la discriminación. El Secretariado Gitano también continúa con sus campañas periódicas para concienciar a la población de la sinrazón de los prejuicios hacia otros ciudadanos y ciudadanas por motivos de etnia o raza.

Aída Sánchez/Canal Solidario

Fuente : glocalia.com

http://www.glocalia.com/detalles_noticias.php?id=20070524014331_55a4b287d99ae635e3bc03ea2e9e1fb1

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