



European Roma and Travellers Forum
c/o Council of Europe
F - 67 075 Strasbourg
Tel.: + 33 3 90 21 53 50
Fax: + 33 3 90 21 44 34
e-mail: ertf@ertf.org
www.ertf.org

ERTF Update

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Political Developments

International Organisations

Council of Europe

Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General: Italy should take action to integrate Roma

Strasbourg, 14.08.2007 - "When a Roma child dies due to deplorable living conditions, the whole society bears the responsibility and not only the parents", said Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General Maud de Boer-Buquicchio today following the deaths of four Roma children in a fire on the outskirts of Livorno, central Italy.

"I invite the Italian authorities, both at State and local level, in coordination with each other , to take the necessary steps towards Roma integration by adopting comprehensive action plans including public information campaigns to combat discrimination and deep-rooted prejudices against Roma. There is a great need for people to understand who the Roma are, and especially, what they are not".

Established democracies like Italy have lessons to learn from the Council of Europe awareness-raising campaign Dosta! (Basta!) which was initially launched in five countries in the western Balkans in 2006 and will be extended to at least seven more countries in 2008.

Council of Europe, Press release - 545(2007)

News digest

Countries

Europe

Roma remain outsiders in Europe

The Roma are one of Europe's largest stateless communities. Estimates suggest up to eight and a half million people belong to the Roma.

They have no country to live in, and are consequently disadvantaged and marginalised. A significant number of Roma do not have citizenship of the countries they live in.

As part of Al Jazeera's special series on stateless people, Stephen Cole travelled to Bulgaria and Slovakia, home to nearly a million Roma.

Dreams of home buried under rubble. Europe's stateless and wandering tribe had, they thought, found a place to settle. But the diggers arrive to smash their dreams - all to make way for the Billa Supermarket.

The Roma don't shop at the supermarket - not because they don't want to, but because they are turned away. Security guards say they steal more than they buy.

When the bulldozers went away, the Roma moved into dirty rusting metal boxes - improvised homes made from old freight containers.

Squalid conditions are commonplace in Roma ghettos across eastern Europe. People's homes were destroyed in a damn demolition raid to make way for the new supermarket.

Disease endemic

Emily is 19 and believes she may have tuberculosis. In the ghetto the disease is endemic.

She is pregnant and her family has yet to build the wooden shack where she will give birth and live with her new-born child. The children we meet are undernourished and vulnerable to abuse and disease.

Monika Milanova has five children. Three have pneumonia. Little Lieubeeka, her youngest child, is clearly undernourished. Her health worker says she has rickets.

"The children get sick and we have no supplies to look after them - in the winter it freezes and in the summer we are fried like chickens - we can't stand it," Milanova says.

There have been efforts at re-housing but they came to nothing. The stateless continue to be homeless.

Housing scheme

We drove across Europe into Slovakia, where the government has launched schemes to try and integrate the Roma. Most have failed.

These people are living in physical danger - their homes are built on old mine workings which could collapse any day, and the ground is contaminated with dangerous chemicals.

Some have been given a chance- funded by charity money - to build their own homes.

Multi-coloured blocks of apartments at one Slovakian housing projects were only finished a few months ago.

They are different colours so the illiterate Roma can identify their address to officials and prove they have a home.

One of the conditions set by the leaders of the housing project was that the Roma had to physically help build the apartments.

Zdenko Pokutova's husband died laying the foundations of their first-ever home. She says it's a price which makes the house all the more valuable.

These are small beginnings for one group of Roma, but they are unlikely to impact on entrenched prejudices against people considered to be ethnic outsiders.

"I've had a lot of negative letters and feedback about all the work I've done here for the Roma, but just looking around me - at what we've achieved - I have a very good feeling and hope things will only get better," Miroslav Blistan, mayor of Rudnany, says.

Attitudes challenged

Hope at Stolipinovo, one of the biggest ghettos in Bulgaria, walks the streets in the shape of their mayor, Krasimir Kuzmov. Fifty thousand Roma live here in Soviet-era apartments.

When the Roma first arrived in Stolipinovo they took out all the glass in the windows, the wiring and pipeworks, and sold the lot.

The mayor says the rubbish was piled 20 feet high and his first job was to clear it all away. Only then could he start to build roads and a pavement.

"People's way of thinking is changing - many still hold opinions from the past, from communist times - when there were feelings against the ethnic minorities," Kuzmov says.

"Now Bulgaria is part of the European Union, people are starting to change."

The Mayor hopes efforts to rebuild this community will bring some Roma, the outcasts, back from the social margins - and out from the ghetto.

Source: Al Jazeera

<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/B771C6AA-93E5-4F6A-B737-CA54FC7173C9.htm>

Albania

Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania

12 August 2007

The Roma in Albania have always faced poverty and discrimination, but since the fall of communism in 1991, the situation for Roma women has worsened. Marriage ages have dropped and an increasing number of girl children never attend school at all.

Tirana -The trendy cafes of this colorful and resurgent city are a long way from Breju Lumi, a slum of muddy, rutted roads and metal shacks, where Nexhmije Daljani lives.

Once Europe's poorest and most isolated country, today Albania's economy is growing fast as the country makes the transition from communism to democracy and free market capitalism.

But in Breju Lumi--whose name means "river side" even though the only nearby water is a dry stream bed cluttered with rubbish--most houses lack running water, sanitation or electricity, and children race through the streets at midday when they should be in school.

The poorest families here, like the Daljanis, belong to the Roma, the term that members of the community prefer to the more derogatory "Gypsies."

"The two small ones and I go and beg," says Daljani, who at 22 has three small children and no husband or job. "It's the only way we can eat."

Daljani had her first child at 17. By 21, when her husband left her, she had three. Now she lives in a borrowed one-room metal shack and relies on begging--the only source of income for many Roma women--to keep her three small children fed and clothed.

The oldest child, who is mentally disabled, goes to a day-care center run a local nongovernmental organization called Children of the World.

Life Got Harder

For many Roma, especially women, life has gotten harder since the end of communism. Girls are marrying and having children younger, poverty and unemployment are rampant and access to health care and education has declined dramatically.

During communist times, Roma--like all other citizens--were given jobs and houses and forced to go to school. In those days, all Albanians were poor, but the Roma were not necessarily any poorer than other groups.

As social services have collapsed, though, the disparities over wealth and living standards between the Roma and other Albanians have increased. A recent study by the United Nations Development Fund found that the average income of Roma was less than half that of non-Roma living in the same communities.

"The quality of services has decreased," says Dr. Arlinda Ymeraj, a social policy officer with UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, in Albania. "There's more disparity in access to services than in the past and certain groups have suffered from this."

Today, 57 percent of Roma women in Albania--compared to 48 percent of Roma men--have never been to school, a decline from the communist era, according to data from the World Bank.

Since the end of communism, the average age of marriage for Roma women has fallen to levels that worry development experts.

Ages of Marriage, Childbirth Drop

In Albania, the average age of marriage for Roma women is now around 15, compared to an average of 23 across the country and 18 for Roma men. The average age of Roma women at the time of birth for a first child has fallen too. Before 1990, it was almost 19; today it is under 17. For Roma men it's 21.

The young age of marriage and childbirth among Roma women puts them at high risk for abuse and trafficking, limits their access to education and can lead to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality, the United Nations says.

Between 7 and 9 million Roma live in Central and Eastern Europe; Albania's Roma number around 95,000. As a group, they remain one of the poorest and most discriminated against groups on the continent and often live on the fringes of society. Over 70 percent of Roma families in the country are considered very poor and many, like Daljani and her children, live in slum-like conditions.

The causes of this social exclusion are in dispute. Many Roma blame discrimination, but others say they refuse to integrate into mainstream society. The Roma--traditionally nomadic, but now largely settled or semi-nomadic--are a distinct ethnic group with their own language and belief systems.

"The Roma families have a very different culture," said Marinela Cani, a social worker who works with families in Breju Lumi. "They don't think about tomorrow."

Jalldyz Ymeri, a 42-year-old grandmother who lives in a two-room house with eight family members and begs for a living, says life has gotten much harder since the fall of communism.

Fewer Years in School

She went to high school, but her daughters haven't. According to the World Bank, before the end of communism, Roma women had an average of 6.2 years of education. Today, they average less than four.

Roma women in Albania also say their access to health care has deteriorated. They say more Roma children are being born at home and many women have no prenatal care. Albania has no reliable statistics about maternal and infant mortality, but many experts believe that rates among Roma are much higher than the national average.

Public health care in Albania is supposed to be free, but many doctors demand bribes.

"They treat us this way because we are Roma. If we can't pay, they send us away," says Ymeri, whose 3-year-old grandson recently nearly died because she did not have enough money.

Conditions are so bad in Albania that many Roma have left the country and gone to neighboring Greece, which is part of the European Union. Although they face discrimination--as well as the risk of deportation--many say life there is better because it is easier to find odd jobs or to make money by begging or playing music for tourists. Ymeri and her family spent several years in Greece and say they regret returning to Albania.

But even in Greece--a promised land for many Albanian Roma--life is hard.

In a Roma settlement called Grthaios, in an industrial area of Athens, families live in wooden huts surrounded by piles of rubbish. The one-room house of Elena Zerollari, a 39-year-old mother of five, is neat and tidy. Magazine advertisements plaster the walls and the family's belongings are neatly stored away. Zerollari, who is originally from Albania, says many things are better in Greece: the doctors treat them better and jobs are easier to find. The children she has given birth to since moving to Greece were all born in hospitals.

But Zerollari says she'd like a house with running water and for her children to go to school. The schools accept Roma children, she says, but many drop out because they are teased for their ragged clothes and lack of shoes.

"Roma shouldn't live like this forever," she says. "We want to be like you."

Nicole Itano

Source: Women's eNews

<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>

Bulgaria

Bulgarian Social Min Seeks to Integrate Roma School Dropouts

1 August 2007

Bulgaria's Social Ministry demanded Wednesday changes in the education law, which will allow the Roma people, who have graduated from 5-month specialized courses to receive a diploma equalling the one of fourth graders.

The idea is to save the Roma people time and money as in the moment the law provides for them to go and take special exams to receive their education qualification.

The general education diploma is one of the demands the representatives of the Roma population voiced out at a Wednesday meeting in the Social Ministry. This will give them an opportunity to receive faster and easier a professional qualification and find employment.

Source: Novinite

http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=83706

Bulgaria Roma riots highlight discrimination-group

16 August 2007

Sofia - Recent riots in the capital by Bulgaria's Roma gypsies were the result of discrimination, a human rights group said on Thursday, but it played down the prospect of localised violence spreading across the country.

Police were patrolling a Sofia district bordering a Roma ghetto, where about 400 gypsies armed with knives, axes, sticks and spades went on the rampage late on Tuesday after rumours surfaced they were about to be attacked by skinheads.

The unrest began on Sunday, when a Roma gypsy was reportedly beaten by skinheads. A day later about 200 gypsies smashed a cafe and attacked four people they said looked like skinheads.

Human rights organisations said the incidents were symbolic of the plight of gypsies in Bulgaria, many of whom have spent their lives in poverty, are illiterate and have been marginalised by society.

"There are many elements in it -- ethnic tension, social problems, severe discrimination against the gypsy ghettos," said Emil Koen of the human rights watchdog Helsinki Committee.

"The ghettos are like powder kegs which need just a small incident to explode. I don't expect escalation of tension across the country ... Bulgarian gypsies lack the sense of solidarity which French rioters had two years ago," he added.

Police said the incidents did not indicate increasing ethnic tension and also rejected comparisons drawn by Bulgarian newspapers with riots in French suburbs in 2005 spurred by racism and discrimination against ethnic minorities.

Roma gypsies make up about 4.7 percent of Bulgaria's 7.8 million population.

Numerous initiatives have failed to address discrimination against them. They are often treated with suspicion by Bulgarians, who tend to stereotype Roma as dishonest and lazy.

Some gypsy organisations have said this week's unrest was deliberately provoked by political parties looking to win support ahead of October's municipal elections.

Police made no arrests on Tuesday, and local media quoted Interior Ministry Chief Secretary Ilia Iliev as saying they were afraid of being accused of discrimination had they done so.

Source: Reuters

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L16241089.htm>

Sofia Prosecutors Indict 4 for Inciting Roma Revolt

18 August 2007

Bulgarian prosecutors have formally charged four people for inciting the Roma revolt in Sofia's Krasna Polyana district earlier this week.

Three of them have remained in police custody, with the fourth one released on bail, Sofia prosecution spokesman Rusi Alexiev told Darik News on Saturday.

For two days police and gendarmerie have been guarding the neighbourhood to prevent the tension from escalating after a huge mob of Roma gathered there on Monday night.

At least 200 Roma, including children under ten, carrying axes, cudgels, pitchforks and stones, tried to retaliate against a group of skinheads, who injured a Roma teenager on Sunday.

With policemen afraid to intervene so as not to be accused of using excessive violence and watching from afar, the mob set fire to garbage bins and chanted "Death to Bulgarians."

The police are still investigating the circumstances of the brawl, but Roma witnesses claimed it was retaliation for a clash the previous night, when 30 skinheads reportedly attacked three Roma teenagers, one of whom was badly beaten.

Source: Novinite

http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=84325

Who caused Sofia's Krasna Polyana clashes? (ROUNDUP)

19 August 2007

Four people have been detained for having beaten the Roma girl in Sofia's Krasna Polyana residential district, it turned out at a press conference of Sofia police. Ivan Ts., 16 had broken the girl's jaw. According to the charges pressed against him he may lie in prison for up to 5 years. The other detainees are Lyubim D., 20, Georgi M. and Hilyal A., 20.

Another four have been arrested on the case with the beating at a Krasna Polyana pub on August 13. There is no evidence that they belong to the skinheads' group. 14 skinheads have been detained in a specialized police operation in the area of Sofia's National Palace of Culture, Sofia police has announced cited by FOCUS News Agency. The skinheads have been questioned about the Krasna Polyana clashes at a police office. It turned out they had not taken part in any of the beatings. 9 are under age. One of them had explained about their plans to assault minorities on the streets. Another 9 have been detained in another police operation. None of them had been involved in the clashes, too. 21 Roma people have been detained on the case. The police have not uncovered the reasons for the tensions. The case will be further investigated.

It also turned out that Bulgarian Minister of Interior Rumen Petkov will meet Monday with Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov to discuss the clashes at Sofia's Krasna Polyana residential district, it turned out at a press conference of Sofia's police. The hour of meeting has not been set yet.

Skinheads that were blamed for the commotions in capital's Krasna Polyana living district were detained on Saturday. They made full confessions, Evroroma leader Tsvetelin Kanchev announced. He was asked in reference to the accusations of the discussion club for social local politics that he is the most likely figure to have caused the Roma commotions in capital's Krasna Polyana living district.

Tsvetelin Kanchev is the most likely abettor of the Roma commotions in capital's Krasna Polyana living district, chairperson of the discussion club for social local politics Nikolay Belalov said at a press conference. Belalov explained that the main reason for the fight in Krasna Polyana is a rumour spread by a "person concerned". The fact that Tsvetelin Kanchev is the main negotiator during the commotions makes him the main suspect, Belalov commented.

Source: Focus News Agency

<http://www.focus-fen.net/index.php?id=n119799>

Bulgarian Nationalists to Form anti-Roma Guard

20 August 2007

Sofia. A minor Bulgarian nationalist group announced it would begin recruiting volunteers on Monday for so-called self-defence teams, following a spate of ethnically-motivated clashes with Roma in the capital, Sofia.

The teams of the nationalist Bulgarian National Union, BNS, will act "in extreme circumstances" in the event of disturbances and natural disasters, Boyan Rasate, the group's leader, said on Sunday.

The announcement followed last week's clashes between Roma and ethnic Bulgarians in the Krasna Polyana district, which is located near the overwhelmingly Roma Filipovtsi district.

On Wednesday, more than 200 Roma, including pregnant women and children, took to the

streets, armed with clubs, knives and shovels, following a brawl between Roma and ethnic Bulgarians.

"In the past 17 years we became witnesses to Gypsy terror," Rasate said on Sunday, blaming the various governments since the fall of communism in 1989 and the police for the phenomenon.

"The inactivity of the state and the police are the reasons which have pushed the BNS to begin the formation of the national guard," Rasate added. "This is the only solution for the defence of the life, property and families of citizens."

The national guard will be made up of young, physically fit men, "led by patriotism, courage and consistency," Rasate went on. Recruits will be trained by former military personnel, firemen and civil guards and financed on a voluntary basis with the help of NGOs and the private sector.

The police did not intervene directly during last week's clashes though its increased presence in the area later quietened the unrest. Police and government officials met with Roma representatives on Wednesday and stated their commitment to "better the dialogue and cooperation between citizens and the police," the Interior Ministry said.

Over the weekend, the Ministry announced that eight people had been detained in connection with the clashes.

On Monday, the Interior Minister, Rumen Petkov, condemned the BNS's plans, and said "there are no grounds for the creation of a national guard".

After meeting President Georgi Parvanov to discuss last week's violence, Petkov said: "Such actions are inadmissible." "You understand yourselves what it means for a political formation to create a paramilitary structure," he added.

The BNS was founded as a non-political organization in 2001. In 2006, some of its members formed a political movement. It has no parliamentary representation.

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network

<http://www.birn.eu.com/en/99/15/3888/>

Bulgaria's Interior Happy to Scold a Dozen over Roma Revolt

20 August 2007

Bulgaria's interior minister announced thirty-five people have received warnings and four have been formally charged for inciting the Roma revolt in Sofia's Krasna Polyana district last week.

Minister Rumen Petkov was summoned by President Georgi Parvanov to give an account of the actions of the interior in the wake of the Roma vendetta that led to an escalation of ethnic tension in Bulgaria.

"The Interior Ministry will conduct a policy of no compromise in dealing with those, who incite such conflicts," Minister Petkov pledged. He insured all the information about his department actions has been presented to the president, but declined to disclose any details.

For two days police and gendarmerie have been guarding the neighbourhood of Krasna Polyana after a huge mob of Roma gathered there on Monday night.

At least 200 Roma, including children under ten, carrying axes, cudgels, pitchforks and stones, tried to retaliate against a group of skinheads, who injured a Roma teenager on Sunday.

With policemen afraid to intervene so as not to be accused of using excessive violence and watching from afar, the mob set fire to garbage bins and chanted "Death to Bulgarians."

Roma witnesses claimed violence broke out in retaliation for a clash the previous night, when 30 skinheads reportedly attacked three Roma teenagers, one of whom was badly beaten.

Czech Republic

UN Criticises segregation of Romanis in Czech Schools

30 July 2007

In its latest report obtained by the CTK Friday, the UN Human Rights Committee criticises the Czech Republic for continuing latent segregation of Romanies at elementary schools and for not compensating unlawful sterilisation of women. The U.N. report was released in Geneva on Thursday evening and handed to CTK by the Czech Human Rights League.

The U.N. calls on the Czech Republic to establish an independent body that would deal with complaints against steps taken by the police. People mainly complained police dealt with them badly during their arrest and custody. The U.N. highlighted the problem already before, but the government has not established any such body. As for sterilisations, the committee recommends that legal assistance to its victims be provided.

The report indicates that special schools for slow pupils where Romanies were often sent were cancelled only formally and that Romany pupils continue to be segregated at Czech elementary schools.

The government should adopt measures to improve the unhappy situation, the report writes. It also criticises the use of caged beds in mental hospitals. Caged beds should be banned by law, it says. Moreover, Czech doctors and social workers should compulsorily undergo training on human rights of the patients.

The U.N. committee expressed concern about the fact that persons may be hospitalised against their will in the country only because they "demonstrate signs of a mental illness." The committee repeatedly pointed to the cases of Czechs who had been forced to leave the country and had acquired the citizenship of their new home country and Czech courts rejected their restitution claims. It says the Czech Republic discriminated against many of these people and should return their property or compensate them.

The Czech Human Rights League and the Lawyers' centre for mentally disabled will hold a press conference on the report and the situation in the country on Monday, July 30.

Source: Prague Daily Monitor

<http://www.praguemonitor.com/>

Hip-hop musician Gipsy appointed ambassador for minorities

1 August 2007

The singer for the popular Czech Roma band Gipsy.cz, which plays an explosive mixture of hip-hop and traditional Romany music, has taken on a new - for his fans perhaps somewhat surprising - role. This week the minister in charge of human rights, Džamila Stehliková, appointed Gipsy.cz's Radoslav "Gipsy" Banga ambassador for minorities as part of the European Year of Equal Opportunities.

Gipsy.cz are definitely at the height of their fame at the moment. After the launch of their debut album Romano Hip Hop last year, the group was voted best new band of the year in the Czech Republic. They were also the first Czech band to play at the famous Glastonbury Festival in Britain this summer and their song Romano Hip Hop was successful abroad, ranking among the top ten in the World Music Charts. But the band's singer, Radoslav Banga is about to find himself in a new role as ambassador for minorities. A little earlier I asked him what that meant.

"For me this means a big responsibility, of course, because I want to say I am not a politician, I am just a musician and I am just a man. But for me it's really a pleasure to represent minorities in the Czech Republic because I think this question has never been taken too seriously in this state. Primarily of course, the meaning of that action of the European Union is to represent all minorities, for example gender or religious minorities, so I am trying to represent all minorities."

As a musician does Gipsy think that music itself has the power to change things?

"I think I can't really help anyone practically. What I know is that I can make the majority to listen. So I would like to really say something to the majority to make people listen. And I know that I am able to do it. So this is what I am going to do. Just to say that minorities in the Czech Republic are here and they are not taken really seriously. I think that music is a universal language it is much more universal than a language of politics, so I believe that if I say something like Džamila Stehliková, I can say it in a completely different way. I can say the same thing but people are going to take it really in a different way."

With all the recent successes behind him, Gipsy certainly doesn't lack self-confidence and he is well aware that many young people, especially Roma, look up to him. There is little doubt that minorities in the Czech Republic have gained a strong voice to speak on their behalf:

"I can be a very good example for young Roma of course. For me, primarily, I know that I can help my nation to make it better here. And not only that of course. Young people are listening to our music. Gipsy.cz is one of the most popular groups in the Czech Republic today and that's a very good position of course."

Ruth Franková

Source: Radio Praha

<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/93981>

Czech senators inspect Romany settlement over racism

1 August 2007

Ostrava- Three senators for the Independents (SNK), visited Bedriská, a neighbourhood in Ostrava, notorious for conflicts between majority society and Romanies, to check whether racism exists there.

The issue came to the limelight as senator Liana Janacková (SNK) allegedly used racist rhetoric when describing the local Romanies.

"Unfortunately, I am a racist, I disagree with the integration of Gypsies so that they would live across the area. Unfortunately, we have chosen the (settlement) Bedriská and so they will stay there, with a high fence, with electricity," Janacková, who is also mayor of a district of the third largest Czech city of Ostrava, north Moravia, allegedly said.

She also allegedly spoke about Romanies having many children and about dynamite. After the visit to Bedriská, the senators told ČTK they had not seen any signs of racism against Romanies.

The senators met both the Romanies and representatives of the majority society.

"We were in their homes, cellars and attics, examining the problems of their co-existence," senator Josef Novotný said.

"They complained about some minor affairs, but never about Janacková," he added.

"After meeting the locals, I am convinced that the town hall did not make any racist gestures toward the Romany minority," Novotný said.

Novotný said the SNK senatorial group was not considering dismissing Janacková from the post of deputy chairman of human rights committee over what she had said.

"In Bedriská, I met some white residents who were exasperated at their co-existence with problematic Romanies. When speaking with this group of residents, one must concede that they are right more often than not," Novotný said.

"This was done by Janacková. She might have spoken too openly, this is true. But I do not think that her rhetoric was racist," he added.

A number of NGOs and individuals have lodged legal complaints against Janacková over her rhetoric.

Source: ČTK/Ceske Noviny

http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/index_view.php?id=264733

Czech teachers to learn about Romany families from manual

6 August 2007

Romany children cannot say "please" because there is no such equivalent in their native language, Iveta Pape, a university-educated Romany who has experience in teaching Romany children in east Slovakia, says in a manual for teachers she has compiled, the daily *Mlada fronta Dnes* (MfD) writes today. "The stumbling block for teachers is the lack of knowledge of

Romany values," says Pape in the manual called How to work with Romany pupils, which is to be distributed to Czech teachers in September.

Pape is trying to confute widespread myths about Romanies such as the idea that Romanies do not ascribe any value to education. She also explains how Romany children build their personal and national identity and how they use the Romany and Czech languages.

"A lot of Romanies consider school a facility of a rather repressive character. They used to get into conflicts with teachers or their Czech classmates almost daily. They were seldom praised and almost never experienced the feeling of success. Most of them were sooner or later labelled as problematic pupils," Pape says in the manual she posted on the internet.

"Teachers who want to educate Romany children should try to understand them. There lies a chance of success," Pape writes. According to Pape, the Romany chart of values is different from that of the majority society. Education is not among the first three, which are the family, health and luck, she says. Romany children are not used to say thanks in their families. Instead of saying thanks Romanies praise each other, Pape says.

When asking for something, Romanies cannot say "please" in Czech because they do not know any such equivalent in the Romany language. Instead, they say "Be so kind and do," Pape says.

Source: Prague Daily Monitor

<http://www.praguemonitor.com/>

State attorneys at war over outcome of Cunek case

10 August 2007

The decision of a Jihlava state attorney to halt a criminal investigation involving the Deputy Prime Minister Jiri Cunek earlier this week has not lifted the fog of suspicion hanging over one of the country's leading politicians. On the contrary, it seems to have made matters worse. The opposition is crying foul and state attorneys are engaged in a public war of words over the case.

When Jiri Cunek entered high politics some commentators labeled him the enfant terrible of the Czech government, but the waves he has made in cabinet have surpassed all expectations. Since taking office he has been accused of making racist remarks against the Roma minority, of having sexually harassed his former secretary when he was mayor of Vsetin and of having taken a half a million crown bribe from a private building company while he served as mayor. The investigation into possible corruption dragged on for six months. In June the Supreme State Attorney's Office unexpectedly replaced the Prerov state attorney on the case - citing procedural mistakes. The case went to Arif Salichov from Jihlava - who this week halted the investigation citing lack of evidence against Mr. Cunek. He moreover suggested that the Prerov state attorney's office had not given Jiri Cunek fair treatment : "I have never seen such a biased and one-sided investigation. The attorneys on the case worked with one goal in mind - to prove Jiri Cunek's guilt at any cost."

The accusations of bias have outraged the Prerov office. Jana Stankova, one of the attorneys who worked on the case said Salichov's statement was a blatant lie. "What doctor Salichov said at Monday's press conference was both untrue and unethical. It undermines public trust in our office and state attorneys in general and we are filing a complaint about it to his superior."

The justice ministry is watching developments with unease but has so far not stepped into the fray. Meanwhile the internet news server aktualne.cz says that the police are once again

looking into Jiri Cunek's finances since he had been unable to explain the source of two million crowns acquired in earlier years. Many questions remain open and public trust in the country's leading institutions has once again taken a beating. Political commentator Vladimira Dvorakova says all this could have been avoided had Jiri Cunek resigned in time.

"I think that for an independent investigation it would have been necessary for him to resign. If he had resigned and now the investigation had been halted I think the public would have accepted that readily. They would say: OK, this happened, he is clean so he can return to politics. But he did not resign and moreover the future of the government depended on his presence in cabinet - because it was clear that if the prime minister sacked him then the Christian Democrats would have walked out bringing on a government crisis. So of course it was clear to everyone that there would be strong political pressure for the investigation to be closed and for Mr. Cunek to be pronounced clean. And to tell you the truth I am rather afraid of such things. You know it is almost twenty years now since the fall of communism. That may seem like a long time but twenty years is really not enough to develop a strong political culture. For a stable democracy you need people to accept democratic values. And here people are saying "so this is democracy?"

Daniela Lazarova

Source: Radio Praha

<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/94307>

Roma Holocaust victims commemorated in South Moravia

19 August 2007

The Romany Holocaust victims were commemorated Sunday in Hodonin u Kunstatu where the Nazis set up a concentration and internment camp just like in Lety, south Bohemia. Many prisoners died in Hodonin in consequence of bad conditions right in the camp, the others were taken to the extermination camps at Auschwitz (Oswiecim) where a majority of them perished, Lucie Korinkova, from the Romany Culture Museum, told CTK Sunday.

The museum has regularly organised the commemorative action at the memorial it has had established at the mass graves near the camp. The action is always held in August to mark the second transport to Auschwitz that left Hodonin on August 21, 1943. "The camp in Hodonin was not an extermination one, yet a substantial part of all Romany men, women and particularly children held in the camp died there due to the inhuman conditions.

Yet, the history of the camp and the victims' fate are being overlooked," said Jana Horvathova, director of the Brno-based Romany Culture Museum. A total of 1396 people were imprisoned in Hodonin u Kunstatu from August 1942 until December 1, 1943 when the camp was closed. Of the total, 207 people died on the spot, most of them of pneumonia, tuberculosis, and typhoid.

The complex of the former camp now serves as a private-owned recreational facility. One of the original wooden buildings has been preserved to date. Only about one tenth of the original Romany population survived the Nazi terror in the Czech Lands.

Out of the total of about 5000 Romanies who were deported to Auschwitz, 583 people returned after the liberation. The commemorative action today was participated in by about 70 people, including Romany activists and Minister Džamila Stehlikova (Green Party).

Source: Prague Daily Monitor

<http://www.praguemonitor.com/>

Finland

Romanian peddlers test Finns' patience

1 August 2007

Finnish police told the Finnish News Agency (STT) on Wednesday that there were hundreds of Romanian peddlers plying their trade across the country.

"People have felt the peddling situations to be oppressive. Large groups of peddlers have gathered around people and the freedom to walk out of the situations has been restricted," said Senior Constable Ilkka Pernu of Oulu.

In Oulu alone, the police have issued dozens of fines to Romanian peddlers.

"Romanian gypsies are EU citizens, so turning them back is out of the question without solid grounds," CI Pernu said.

Throughout the summer the police have told motorists to be wary of Romanians who use any pretext to persuade people to pull over and then apply pressure and even threats and violence to sell their wares.

Superintendent Heikki Mansikka-Aho said he recalled an incident where peddlers had threatened a motorist with a knife.

Romanians have also been selling worthless jewellery and roses in city centres.

Source: STT

<http://newsroom.finland.fi/stt/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=16349&group=General>

Guide to Bridge Understanding Among Roma and Police

8 August 2007

The booklet reviews citizens' rights and responsibilities, explains the mandate of police authorities, and highlights aspects of Roma culture.

The guide is the product of collaboration among the Ministry of the Interior, the National Board of Education, and members of the Roma community. The booklet also aims to prepare citizens for changes to be brought on by new equality legislation.

The Finnish constitution guarantees the 10,000 Roma that call Finland home national minority status. However, many Roma feel they are not always given fair treatment, for example in police raids.

The guide for instance states that a car belonging to a Roma is typically searched closer, and more frequently, in comparison to the population at large.

YLE

Source: <http://www.yle.fi/news/id66822.html>

Expulsion de Roms d'un campement à Strasbourg: la préfecture déboutée

8 août 2007

La préfecture du Bas-Rhin qui réclamait l'expulsion sans délai d'une trentaine de Roms de Roumanie d'un campement de Strasbourg a été déboutée vendredi par le tribunal de grande instance pour vice de procédure.

Tout en se félicitant de cette décision, le collectif Rom-Alsace, qui soutient la quarantaine de personnes vivant dans des conditions sanitaires déplorables en contre-bas d'une autoroute, a réclamé à la préfecture une "réponse d'humanité, dans le respect des droits humains".

"Le logement est la première des choses à régler, ces personnes sont demandeuses. L'expulsion n'est pas la réponse appropriée", a insisté une porte-parole au nom du collectif qui regroupe la Ligue des droits de l'Homme, la Cimade, RESF 67 et Médecins du Monde.

Dans son délibéré, le juge des référés strasbourgeois a annulé la demande de la préfecture parce que l'administration n'avait pas signifié aux intéressés une "mise en demeure" de quitter les lieux en bonne et due forme.

Il a en outre estimé que les deux fonctionnaires de la Direction interrégionale des routes (DIR) Est, qui représentaient l'Etat à l'audience de mardi dernier, n'étaient pas habilités à agir en justice au nom de la préfecture.

Les arguments de la préfecture concernant l'insalubrité, les problèmes de sécurité et de santé publiques de ce campement situé dans le quartier de Koenigshoffen, en contrebas de l'autoroute A35 ont tous été rejetés, car ils s'appuyaient seulement sur des photos ou des preuves jugées insuffisantes.

La préfecture a été condamnée à verser 800 euros aux familles pour frais de procédure.

Le campement, qui existe depuis près de deux ans, accueille une dizaine de familles, dont un bébé d'un mois et demi et plusieurs enfants, dont certains suivis par les services sociaux.

L'avocate des familles, Me Sophie Kling, s'est félicitée du jugement, se disant "étonnée qu'il y ait eu autant d'irrégularités dans la plainte".

Selon elle, "ce n'est toutefois que partie remise car il est fort probable que le préfet formulera dans les jours qui viennent une mise en demeure".

Lors de l'audience de mardi, Me Kling avait déploré les "conditions humainement catastrophiques" dans lesquelles "tentent de survivre" les familles et l'absence de solution alternative offerte par la préfecture qui réclame leur expulsion après avoir "accepté pendant près de deux ans" cette situation.

Elle avait souligné que le "droit au logement était un droit constitutionnel, au même titre que celui à la propriété".

Interrogée par l'AFP, la préfecture a assuré vendredi qu'elle n'avait jamais cessé de se préoccuper du sort de ces Roms. "Parmi les trois familles les plus anciennes dans le campement, deux ont été relogées, une troisième est en cours de logement", a indiqué vendredi une porte-parole.

Elle a expliqué que pour les autres familles, en rotation, la Direction départementale des affaires sanitaires et sociales (DDASS) recensait les besoins et en était au "diagnostic".
20Minutes.fr avec AFP

<http://www.20minutes.fr/article/174481/France-Expulsion-de-Roms-d-un-campement-a-Strasbourg-la-prefecture-deboutee.php>

A Saint-Etienne, l'expulsion a cassé les projets d'avenir des Roms

11 août 2007

"Qu'est ce qu'on fait, est-ce qu'on s'installe ou est-ce qu'on va encore être expulsés bientôt?". Florin Flintache, jeune Rom en France depuis six ans, expulsé pour la cinquième fois d'un squat à Saint-Etienne, peine à faire des projets d'avenir.

En 48 heures, lui et 120 autres Roms de Roumanie, expulsés mercredi d'un bâtiment EDF qu'ils occupaient depuis un an, ont transformé les salles de classes de l'école désaffectée, où ils ont été provisoirement relogés avec l'accord de la mairie, en appartements spartiates et surpeuplés.

"On a trouvé quelques matelas et une télévision à la déchetterie, un peu d'électroménager chez Emmaüs, le reste dans les poubelles, dans la rue", explique-t-il. "Avec les enfants, on est obligés de se réinstaller vite", souligne Marga Sedlak, une de ses compagnes de chambre, balayant minutieusement la pièce divisée en trois par des tentures.

"Ici, on est onze personnes de trois familles dans la même pièce, on n'a pas d'électricité, pas de douches, et les toilettes ne fonctionnent pas toutes. C'est difficile", soupire-t-elle, en regrettant le confort du local EDF, équipé de douches, et progressivement meublé par ses occupants.

"On n'a rien eu le temps d'emporter, juste un sac avec des habits pour les enfants", indique la jeune maman.

Dans l'école désaffectée du quartier de Montplaisir, à Saint-Etienne, on s'organise pour trouver de quoi cuisiner et dormir, mais on hésite à s'installer pour de bon dans ces nouveaux locaux. "On ne sait pas quoi faire pour la rentrée: les enfants allaient à l'école dans notre ancien quartier, ils sont inscrits pour l'an prochain, mais elle est trop loin maintenant, et on ne sait pas où on sera en septembre", s'inquiète Marga.

La mairie a laissé l'école à disposition des Roms "provisoirement, pour une durée indéterminée". Le bâtiment doit être rasé et le terrain vendu à la Croix Rouge, qui doit y construire en 2008 une école d'infirmières.

"Il ne devrait pas y avoir d'expulsion avant trois mois", explique Martine Falduzzi, directrice de cabinet du maire, selon qui la municipalité veut "faire un diagnostic afin d'accompagner ceux qui le peuvent vers un emploi et aviser, pour les autres, en fonction de leur volonté d'intégration".

L'entrée de la Roumanie en Europe en 2007 permet à ces Roumains de séjourner légalement en France pour des durées de trois mois, mais ils doivent justifier de ressources pour pouvoir y rester plus longtemps. Pour travailler, il faut une autorisation, moyennant 900 euros environ et des démarches complexes. Deux Roms ont néanmoins trouvé un emploi de maçon près de Firminy (Loire) et un logement pour leur famille. Des négociations sont en cours pour plusieurs autres.

"Dans le précédent campement, un gros travail d'insertion avait été fait, tous les enfants allaient à l'école, il y avait un réseau social fort, mais tout a été cassé par l'expulsion", regrette Ana Pidoux, membre du comité de soutien des Roms.

Source : RTL Info

<http://www.20minutes.fr/article/174481/France-Expulsion-de-Roms-d-un-campement-a-Strasbourg-la-prefecture-deboutee.php>

Départ hier de 151 Roms de Lyon

13 août 2007

Expulsées il y a deux semaines du camp de la Soie à Villeurbanne, les familles roumaines ayant accepté "l' aide au retour volontaire" du ministère de l'Immigration, de l'identité nationale et du co-développement, ont quitté Lyon hier. Quatre bus ont été affrété pour les 151 personnes concernées pour un voyage long de 1500 kilomètres. Dès leur arrivée en Roumanie, l'aide au retour, qui s'élève à 153 euros par famille, leur sera versée.

Source : Lyon Capitale

<http://www.lyoncapitale.fr/index.php?menu=01&article=2285>

Hungary

MEP calls for law amendment to force local schools to admit Roma pupils

17 August 2007

Budapest - Roma pupils returning to school in September should start their terms in non-segregated classes. For this reason Parliament should convene an extraordinary session in order to amend legislation to ensure the Roma study within a legally defined environment, said MEP Viktoria Mohacsi (Free Democrat) on Friday.

"I will suggest that, in spite of the lack of time available, Parliament holds a special session to deal with this matter. This is the only path available for clearing up their circumstances," she said, referring to 29 Roma pupils in Csorog, C Hungary, who have been left stranded since schools in neighbouring districts refused to admit the pupils after their own school was closed down.

The minorities' ombudsman investigated the matter and found that the laws on public schooling and local government needed to be amended so as to make it mandatory for the schools in neighbouring districts to accept the children.

Mohacsi said that two days ago the leaders of the districts and the Roma minority government had come to an agreement to hold classes in a doctor's surgery for 10 nursery pupils while another 10 would be able to start their school year in a library building. It is not clear where the rest of them will study, she said.

Mohacsi insisted said this solution - effectively segregation -- was unacceptable.

Source MTI Daily Bulletin

<http://english.mti.hu/default.asp?menu=1&theme=2&cat=25&newsid=244578>

Italy/Romania

Fire at gypsy encampment in Italian port town kills 4 children

11 August 2007

ROME: A fire broke out early Saturday at a makeshift gypsy encampment in Tuscany, killing four children, authorities said.

The bodies of the victims, who were believed to be between ages 4 and 10, were discovered amid the charred remains of the encampment under a highway overpass near the Tuscan port town of Livorno, police said.

At least three of them were related; the parents of the children as well as other residents of the encampment were being questioned by police. They were gypsies, or Roma, believed to be from Romania.

Prosecutor Antonio Giaconi said authorities had received contradictory versions of events from the parents.

One hypothesis was that the blaze was set intentionally; the other was that it was sparked by a cooking fire and spread quickly because of the wooden huts in which the children lived.

"Both hypotheses obviously point to crimes of a certain seriousness," he told reporters, adding that the deaths pointed to a "serious lack of vigilance" over the children by the parents.

Charred metal bedframes and a shopping cart were all that remained intact from the encampment.

After the fire, Mayor Alessandro Cosimi of Livorno canceled an evening festival in the town's center and declared a day of mourning on the day of the children's funeral. Flags were flying at half-staff in Livorno.

"As a father first and then as mayor, I can only express my heart-rending grief for the death of four children," he said in a statement.

Source: AP/International Herald Tribune

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/08/11/europe/EU-GEN-Italy-Fire.php>

Death of Roma children sparks a debate in Italy

14 August 2007

Roma: The death of four Roma children in a fire over the weekend has sparked a national debate over the widespread discrimination against the ethnic minority population in Italy.

The tragedy also revealed Italy's social and political shortcomings in terms of integrating the Roma - who number about 120,000 here - according to activists.

"If we're to understand these deaths, we have to look at the policies that have created the housing conditions in which Roma are forced to live, as well as a more general political and institutional indifference," said Nazzareno Guarnieri, who is a Roma and part of a Gypsy association that groups various Roma and Sinti associations. "There is racial hatred. And no political will to support this minority and provide what's necessary to improve living conditions."

Piero Colacicchi, president of a group that monitors human rights in Italy and works with the European Roma Rights Center, which is based in Budapest, said: "Some 10 Roma have died in Italy during the last six months because of the terrible situations in which they've been forced to live. This is a massacre. Someone has to take responsibility."

Four children, aged 4, 6, 8 and 11, from two families were killed when the shacks in which they lived on the outskirts of Livorno burned to the ground late Friday night. Their parents, two couples originally from Romania, were arrested after the fire, and a judge is to rule Wednesday on whether they will be released. Police officials in Livorno said the cause of the fire was still under investigation.

Television images of the burned-out barracks under a concrete bridge, the anguish of the relatives, and the generally dismal conditions of the campsite shocked Italian commentators into soul-searching mode.

"Camps that one time were referred to as nomadic are being transformed into favelas, shantytowns for desperate people that bring to mind South America or African cities," wrote Vincezo Cerami in the Rome newspaper *Il Messaggero*. Only one law prevails, he wrote Sunday - that of survival.

Polemics were sparked after Social Solidarity Minister Paolo Ferrero accused local administrations of not doing more to provide adequate assistance to the Roma.

Then Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the Roma question was a "political problem" that had not been worked out at a European level.

"Europe has resolved many inter-ethnic problems, but the question of the Roma is a terrible complication," Prodi said, according to various newspaper accounts. "Italy is less prepared because the phenomenon is more recent here."

About half of Italy's Roma are also Italian citizens.

"Prodi says that it's an EU problem," Guarnieri said. "The fact is that the EU has passed a series of rules that Italy had not applied or respected. Many times Roma organizations have protested these failings.

"It's not a question of whether the government was on the left or the right. All political parties have tended to ignore questions that affect us."

Last June, the European Commission sent a formal request to Italy - as well 13 other member states - to fully implement EU rules banning discrimination on the basis of race or ethnic origin. Italy has until the end of September to respond.

"We have seen that the integration of Roma is a problem in several member states, not just in Italy," said Katharina von Schnurbein, the EU's spokeswoman on employment, social affairs and equal rights.

A Council of Europe report on the protection of national minorities in Italy recommended in 2005 that Italy recognize the Roma, Sinti and Travelers as historical linguistic minorities. It has not done so yet.

The report also said that these minorities faced widespread discrimination in Italy in terms of education, health care, employment and housing, and chided Italy for isolating Roma in camps with deplorable living conditions.

It also pressed the government to develop "a long-term comprehensive strategy of integration with particular emphasis on education."

Michael Guet, head of the Roma and Travelers Division at the Council of Europe, said, "Many policies are done at a regional or local level, and that is problematic. With no national legislation for better integration, you get a very confusing situation, with different norms, different rules in different cities and no comprehensive approach or framework to work within."

Activists point out that the social policies that have been implemented at a local and national level - the construction of camps away from the city centers - have been ineffectual and have worsened the lives of those forced to stay there.

"The ghettoization of part of the population is not acceptable to Council of Europe standards," Guet said.

Others note that the camps reinforce negative images.

"The image of Roma is terrible in part because of ancient prejudices but also because they are forced to live in camps," said Colacicchi, the human rights activist.

"These are people who have rights as European citizens, but governments continue to discriminate."

Elisabetta Povoledo

Source: International Herald Tribune

<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/08/14/news/italy.php>

Livorno: il 'Gruppo armato pulizia etnica' rivendica il rogo al campo Rom

18 Agosto 2007

Con un'inquietante lettera al quotidiano Il Tirreno un sedicente 'Gruppo armato pulizia etnica' ha rivendicato ieri l'incendio al campo rom. Potrebbe essere stato un agguato di origine razzista la causa del rogo nel quale sono morti nei giorni scorsi i quattro bambini Rom? Sulla questione si danno risposte emotive, influenzati in questo anche dalla comunicazione. Consiglieri e assessori regionali hanno dedicato un minuto di silenzio per ricordare i quattro bambini rom morti, mentre Azione Giovani, movimento giovanile di Alleanza Nazionale, annuncia la mobilitazione contro l'invasione.

A Firenze una donna rom con regolare passaporto e' stata fermata venerdi' sera dagli agenti della polizia municipale mentre chiedeva l'elemosina tenendo in braccio la figlia, di appena di 40 giorni. La giovane e' stata denunciata per il reato di uso di minori nell'accattonaggio. Gli agenti hanno notato la diciannovenne che chiedeva l'elemosina ai passanti, reggendo la neonata tra le braccia e con in mano un bicchierino in plastica. La donna è stata denunciata in stato di liberta'. La bambina, in buone condizioni di salute, e' nata il 7 luglio scorso.

«I Rom non sono indiani pellerossa ma, come cittadini comunitari, devono sottostare alle norme che valgono per tutti gli altri residenti nell'Unione europea». È quanto ha dichiarato il consigliere di Forza Italia Massimo Pieri. «Il decreto legislativo del 6 febbraio 2007 numero 30 - ricorda l'esponente di centrodestra - disciplina il diritto di soggiorno per un periodo superiore a tre mesi vincolandolo alla certezza di un'attività lavorativa autonoma o subordinata e alla disponibilità per se stesso e per i propri familiari di risorse economiche sufficienti per non diventare un onere a carico dell'assistenza sociale dello Stato durante il periodo di soggiorno.

Di un'assicurazione sanitaria o di altro titolo idoneo comunque denominato che copra tutti i rischi nel territorio nazionale, oppure, riconosce il diritto di soggiorno a familiari che accompagnano o raggiungono un cittadino dell'Unione che ha diritto di soggiornare». «L'Unione europea - ha spiegato Pieri - ha stanziato un ingente fondo al quale è possibile attingere per agevolare il rimpatrio dei clandestini, già utilizzato in più riprese dal premier spagnolo Zapatero, che consentirebbe di attuare con certezza i provvedimenti di espulsione dal territorio italiano degli ospiti irregolari in base al decreto legislativo 30/2007 che recepisce l'apposita direttiva europea». «Invece di chiedere, con delibere o mozioni, l'istituzione di inutili commissioni sul fenomeno rom - ha concluso il consigliere di Forza Italia - sarebbe più semplice, e a costo zero per il contribuente, applicare, come giusto e doveroso, la normativa esistente. Come ha ricordato il vicecommissario europeo Franco Frattini».

Fonte: Nove da Firenze

<http://www.nove.firenze.it/vediarticolo.asp?id=a7.08.19.00.51>

Romanii din Italia nu se lasa sperati de extremisti

21 August 2007

Scrisoarea de amenintare la adresa rromilor de origine romana din Italia nu a impresionat autoritatile italiene, care tind sa creada ca amenintarile mentionate in mesajul transmis presei nu se vor concretiza.

„Pana ieri, politia nu a gasit indicii despre existenta acestei grupari (GAPE, presupusii autori ai scrisorii - n.r.)”, a precizat consulul general al Romaniei la Milano, Mugurel Tiberiu Dinu.

Expeditorii, presupusa grupare extremista GAPE (Grupul armat pentru epurare etnica), revendicau responsabilitatea pentru incendiul din Livorno, in care au murit patru copii rromi romani. In plus, in aceeasi scrisoare, extremistii acordau rromilor un termen de 20 de zile, incepand cu 25 august, ca sa paraseasca Italia si sa evacueze taberele de nomazi de pe tot teritoriul tarii.

Nu exista o amenintare reala

Un accident de pe urma caruia o mana de extremisti italieni vor sa-si joace cartea, asa arata revendicarea „Grupului armat pentru epurare etnica” pentru Valeriu Vasiliu, responsabilul Partidului Identitatea Romaneasca (PIR) pentru regiunea Toscana, in care traiesc aproximativ 40.000 de cetateni romani. „Au facut totul numai pentru a-i intimida pe cetatenii romani de etnie roma.

Adversitatea italienilor fata de romani se manifesta aici numai in masura in care ii cunosc pe acestia. Italienii nu cred in stereotipuri, pana si cei din Liga Nordului (formatiune politica nationalistă - n.r.) au spus ca romanii sunt si cei care vin la furat, si cei care lucreaza”, considera Vasiliu. In ceea ce priveste diferentierea etnica - „ne pun pe toti in aceeasi oala”.

La randul sau, Iulian Manta, lider sindical si fost presedinte al Ligii Romanilor din Italia, considera ca situatia este putin tensionata in momentul de fata, insa nu exista o amenintare reala pentru comunitatea romaneasca.

Despre felul in care ii privesc italienii pe etnicii rromi, sindicalistul spune ca se creeaza de multe ori confuzii: „Tigani sunt numai romani pentru unii dintre ei. De fiecare data cand se intampla ceva, sunt voci care ies in fata si in primul moment spun asta. Dupa aceea se lamuresc daca au fost din alta tara sau chiar au fost tigani italieni, pentru ca exista si la ei o astfel de comunitate”.

O problema spinoasa

Cu sau fara interventia unor extremisti locali, problemele legate de convietuirea rromilor cu localnicii din orasele in care se stabilesc sunt, in orice caz, dificile. Ieri, scrie cotidianul „Il Giornale”, preluat de Hotnews, oficialii din Milano au solicitat ajutorul guvernului italian pentru a rezolva problema invaziei nomazilor stabiliti la periferia orasului.

Guvernul si-a recunoscut insa propria neputinta in urma cu doar zece zile, dupa incendiul de la Livorno, cand premierul Romano Prodi a admis ca Italia nu este pregatita pentru a aborda problemele de integrare a rromilor in societate.

Tabere de rromi exista la periferia celor mai multe orase din Italia, in special a celor importante, numarul exact al rromilor care locuiesc in peninsula este insa neclar. „Autoritatile italiene apreciaza ca este vorba despre aproximativ 150.000 de rromi, dintre care 60.000 ar fi de nationalitate romana”, a precizat consulul general Tiberiu Dinu.

In lipsa unui permis de rezidenta, orice cetatean strain poate fi repatriat dupa 90 de zile petrecute in Italia, insa stilul nomad de viata al rromilor face ca aceasta lege sa se aplice cu greutate.

Adrian Cochino, Vlad Odobescu

Izvor: Evenimentul Zilei

<http://www.evz.ro/article.php?artid=319213>

Romania

Romanian flower sellers protest new rules they say will stop them plying their trade

20 August 2007

Bucharest: Clutching small bunches of bright chrysanthemums, about 300 flower sellers marched through Bucharest on Monday to protest new regulations that will stop them selling flowers from outdoor stands.

Most of the sellers were Roma, or Gypsies, whose families have been street florists for generations, and who fear unemployment.

Since Romania joined the European Union on Jan. 1, there have been moves to regulate street trade. Newspapers are no longer sold from stalls on the street, but from special kiosks and the same rules are randomly being applied to florists.

Waving blue, green, mauve and yellow chrysanthemums outside the city hall, florists yelled: "We want to sell a flower, not discrimination!" A group of Roma from the Association of Florists went into the city hall to register a formal complaint calling on authorities to reverse a decision to close stalls down.

Florists called on President Traian Basescu to come to their aid. Basescu was formerly Bucharest mayor and had allowed them to sell their flowers in the streets.

A Bucharest district mayor, Liviu Negoita, said he wants to limit flower selling to six months a year, and says that flower sellers will be obliged to sell their wares from special kiosks, available in three models. Florists say their association purchased special kiosks, but authorities have not been to inspect them, as required.

There are an estimated 700 florists in Bucharest, a city of 2 million. Many of them are Roma, selling flowers from street stalls as they have done for decades.

Several florists who were interviewed on Monday said they had begun their trade when they were children following the trade of parents and grandparents.

"This is a nightmare," said Mariana Ionita, 36 who has been selling flowers since she was eight. "I have three children and my father is ill. There are 10 people in my family, and from today we are illegal." She said her stall was shut down by authorities early Monday, in sector three, one of the city's six districts.

"They won't let us work," said Maria Costache, 19. "We don't know how to do anything else and we don't want to beg."

Local authorities said they had removed outdoor flower stalls and unauthorized kiosks because flower selling had become "a source of discomfort (for residents)" In a statement, authorities from sector three said they had offered alternative places for the floral trade.

However, many of the protesters were not convinced.

"We are born with flowers, and we die with flowers. Our trade makes the city beautiful," said Radu Paul, an adviser in the Association of Florists.

Source: AP/International Herald Tribune

<http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/08/20/europe/EU-GEN-Romania-Florists-Protest.php>

Serbia

Roma lawmaker satisfied with parliament

11 August 2007

Belgrade -- The leader of the Roma Party says the parliament is taking good steps to legislate laws relevant to this ethnic minority.

Srđan Šajn told Beta he was satisfied that his party's amendment to the Serbian budget was recently adopted, securing EUR 150,000 to help fund the Decade of the Roma campaign activities.

He added another amendment, that to the Law on State Employees was also adopted.

The change in the law provides for proportional representation of ethnic minorities and disabled persons in state bodies, according to their numbers in a given area, and also prevents gender discrimination.

Šajn says his party's amendment on the recently adopted parliament's Kosovo resolution was also a success. Belgrade's negotiating team in the Kosovo status talks will thus officially represent not only the Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), but also the interests of all non-Albanians in the province.

Šajn said that as far as his role of a lawmaker in the Serbian parliament went, he never experienced any form of ethnic discrimination, and added he had a good working relationship with his colleagues from different parties.

However, he criticized the chief of the Human and Minority Rights Service, Petar Ladjević, accusing him of nepotism.

"Lađević employed his cousins in the service, while there is not a single Roma in the staff that numbers 37," Šajin said.

Source: Beta/B92

http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2007&mm=08&dd=11&nav_category=93&nav_id=42962

Roma man beaten up in Belgrade

17 August 2007

BELGRADE -- A member of the Roma community, Femija Bajrami, 45, was assaulted Thursday night in the Belgrade suburb of Zemun.

According to eyewitness reports, the incident occurred at 10 p.m. last night, when three men knocked Bajrami to the ground and began hitting him with chains.

He sustained light injuries and was immediately transferred to the Clinical Center in Bežanijska Kosa to receive treatment.

Bajrami's neighbors say that assaults on the Roma community in Zemun are frequent occurrences.

Belgrade police recorded five attacks on the Roma last week alone.

Earlier on Thursday, police identified persons suspected of attacking a group of Roma youths in New Belgrade on August 11.

Police have filed criminal complaints against Dobrica L., 21, Dalibor V., 21, Milan J., 18, Aca S., 19, and a minor G.M., 17, on suspicion of inflicting grievous bodily harm and stirring ethnic, racial and religious hatred and intolerance.

On the night between August 10 and 11, the suspects, after getting drunk in a New Belgrade park, went over to a local Roma settlement where Dobrica L. set fire to a nylon sheet covering Sava I.'s hut.

They then moved to a nearby building from where they started hurling insults at Roma appearing at the scene.

According to a police report, a group of Roma, including Sava I., began to chase the suspects. Having caught up with them, a brawl broke out during which Sava I. suffered life-threatening injuries.

http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society-article.php?yyyy=2007&mm=08&dd=17&nav_category=113&nav_id=43078

Slovakia

Slovak threatens with more fires over Romany settlement

13 August 2007

Slovak citizen claimed responsibility for a recently extinguished big fire and threatened to start new fires if the construction of a Romany settlement near Letanovce, east Slovakia, is not stopped, the TA3 news TV reported today. The anonymous person said he/she started the fire that burnt 11 days in the Slovensky raj national park, spreading over 16 hectares of forests.

Slovak police are examining the anonymous letter, addressed to the management of the national park, the TA3 said. But according to preliminary investigation, the fire broke out after lightning struck. In February, an anonymous author threatened to poison drinking water reservoirs in Slovensky raj unless the construction of the Romany settlement is stopped, the television recalled.

Some 1000 Romanies are to move from the shanty village near Letanovce closer to some villages and towns whose residents oppose the plan. The local people fear increased crime and inhibited development of tourism in the area will be consequences of the step. Letanovce mayor received death threats in the past over the construction of the Romany settlement. The settlement on the edge of Letanovce near Spisska Nova Ves became a symbol of Slovak Romanies' poverty. According to estimates, some 400,000 Romanies live in the five-million Slovakia. Their living conditions are the worst in east Slovakia.

Source: Romano vodi

<http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php>

Search for victims of Kysucké Nové Mesto fire ends

Police and firefighters have completed their search for the victims of a blaze that broke out in a two-storey boarding house in Kysucké Nové Mesto (Žilina region) in the early hours of Friday, August 3. They said the final death toll is almost certainly nine.

The fire started at about 2:00 Friday. According to Žilina Regional Police Chief František Posluch, out of the 11 people initially reported as missing, the bodies of seven were found on Friday, and two more on the following day.

"We've located nine charred bodies, meaning two people are still unaccounted for," he said. "The inspection of the scene has been completed, however, and it is impossible that the missing people could be inside."

Police identified two men and two women among the victims. Forensic experts will carry out autopsies next week, and will attempt to identify the remaining five bodies from their DNA. Nine people were injured by the fire.

Žilina regional police launched an investigation into the cause of the fire, Posluch said. Žilina Police spokesperson Jana Balogová reported that 64 people were evacuated during the blaze and provided emergency housing.

The boarding house was built by the town's authorities to house low-income families, most of whom were Roma. According to a list, 80 people lived there.

Source: The Slovak Spectator

Spain

La Fundación Secretariado Gitano reclama la garantía efectiva para la igualdad de trato y no discriminación

2 de agosto 2007

En relación con el caso de una madre y su hija -inmigrantes ecuatorianas- detenidas en Bélgica en condiciones cuanto menos infamantes, la Fundación Secretariado Gitano hizo una llamada de atención sobre un aspecto que a su juicio reviste “especial gravedad”: al parecer, la detención de estas mujeres se produjo tras ser denunciadas por un ciudadano que dijo a la policía que se trataba de “dos gitanas sospechosas de ser ladronas por el color de su piel”, según reza el informe policial, citado por numerosos medios de comunicación.

“Que una actuación policial pueda estar basada en sospechas racistas de este tipo, es un claro síntoma de la existencia de prácticas discriminatorias por razones étnicas de las que es objeto la minoría gitana en todo el territorio europeo”, afirma el secretariado.

“Asociar la pertenencia étnica a comportamientos delictivos debe llamar la atención de todos los poderes públicos sobre la urgente aplicación práctica de la normativa antidiscriminatoria, las políticas de igualdad de trato y, como también pone en evidencia este caso, la protección de las víctimas de abusos policiales”.

Según el secretariado Gitano, la realidad discriminatoria hacia su comunidad “continúa siendo un grave problema en Europa, al que tampoco es ajeno nuestro país”, como vienen mostrando recientes informes de las más relevantes instituciones de este ámbito:

- El Observatorio Europeo del Racismo y la Xenofobia (desde el 1º de marzo, Agencia Europea de Derechos Fundamentales, FRA) alertó en su último informe de 2006, que en España los inmigrantes y la comunidad gitana continúan sufriendo discriminación. En particular, el informe presenta que los gitanos siguen sufriendo una clara discriminación en todos los ámbitos sociales, por parte de agentes públicos y privados, sin que muchas veces se atrevan a denunciarlo.

- El tercer informe sobre España de la Comisión Europea contra el Racismo y la Intolerancia (ECRI - Consejo de Europa) coincide, asimismo, en que algunos grupos sociales, incluyendo los gitanos, siguen sufriendo una discriminación racial cotidiana en muy diversos ámbitos, “y que se ven particularmente afectados por la práctica habitual de la policía de establecer perfiles étnicos, lo que incrementa sus posibilidades de ser objeto de mala conducta policial”, indica el informe.

También, recientes informes como el de Amnistía Internacional sobre el estado de los derechos humanos en el mundo (2007) recoge numerosos casos de discriminación hacia la comunidad gitana en Europa o, con mayor perspectiva cronológica, el Informe de la Agencia Europea de Derechos Fundamentales (FRA) presentado hace unos días, sobre la lucha contra la discriminación racial en la Unión Europea en los años 1997-2005, da cuenta de los progresos realizados y las iniciativas de los Estados miembros, pero constata también la persistencia de una grave discriminación hacia las personas gitanas.

Dado que en el caso específico de la discriminación que sufre la comunidad gitana existe una importante ausencia de datos estadísticos e investigaciones sobre la materia, la Fundación Secretariado Gitano inició en el año 2005 la publicación de un Informe Anual FSG sobre Discriminación y Comunidad Gitana, cuyo objetivo es mostrar la existencia cotidiana de la

discriminación que sufre la comunidad gitana en todos los ámbitos sociales. De estos informes se desprenden las recomendaciones que la FSG realiza de cara a los poderes públicos “para que se garantice la promoción del principio de igualdad de trato”.

Fuente: Madrid Digital

http://madriddigital.info/detalle_noticia.php?seccion=0&id=20070802182020_7363b99cbe9423bbc5c41b0c94d63c7a

Miles de gitanos del Este eligen como destino España al huir de la pobreza

20 de agosto de 2007

San Sebastián - Edificios abandonados o campamentos improvisados en las afueras de varios municipios cobijan, casi siempre en condiciones precarias, a muchos de los miles de gitanos del Este que han llegado a España para huir de la pobreza, migración que aumentó desde que Rumanía y Bulgaria dieron sus primeros pasos hacia la Unión Europea.

Se les puede ver en las calles de Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Murcia, Sevilla o San Sebastián y, aunque muchos han conseguido asentarse, todavía son demasiados los que viven en naves industriales vacías, casas deshabitadas o en campamentos levantados mientras recorren el país como temporeros.

También son obreros, se dedican a recoger chatarra y algunos a la mendicidad, por eso son más visibles que los inmigrantes de otras procedencias.

"No hay trabajo, es todo muy difícil. Si tuviéramos trabajo y casa no estaríamos en la calle", confesó un gitano búlgaro que, tras un periplo de tres años por tierras catalanas y manchegas, vive ahora en un instituto abandonado del barrio donostiarra de Martutene. En Martutene conviven más de cien gitanos, la mayoría de la ciudad rumana de Blaj, que recogen plásticos y metales de la basura y los venden a peso en las chatarrerías de los alrededores, con lo que algunos pueden llegar a ganar cerca de mil euros al mes.

Se trata de mujeres y hombres que en ocasiones llevan a sus hijos consigo porque la de los gitanos del Este es una inmigración en familia que a veces reúne hasta tres generaciones en el mismo peregrinaje, así que, con frecuencia, se pueden encontrar niños que desempeñan las mismas labores que los adultos.

Nuria Fernández

Fuente: Diario de Avisos

<http://www.diariodeavisos.com/content/216354/>

United Kingdom

I'm no racist, says politician under fire over gypsy tirade

16 August 2007

A politician who accused gypsy travellers of "environmental terrorism" insisted last night that he wasn't racist.

The comments by Neil Cooney, a Labour councillor, sparked calls for him to be sacked.

At an Aberdeen City Council meeting discussing the establishment of official temporary sites for travelling people, Mr Cooney used the term as he described the condition in which some areas had been left.

Alfie Kefford, the chairman of the Gypsy Council, said Mr Cooney's remarks were "highly offensive" and called for him to be removed from office.

He said: "We are extremely angry at what this man has said and want him sacked.

"He would not be allowed to use terminology like that against any other ethnic minority, but because we are gypsies he thinks he can get away with it."

Kate Dean, the Liberal Democrat council leader, told Mr Cooney she was disappointed that "racist, xenophobic and discriminatory language" was rife in the council chamber.

Mr Cooney said he felt the response to his comments had been "extreme".

"It is quite over the top," he said. "In no way am I a racist and I am not xenophobic or discriminatory.

"I suggested that, on some occasions, travellers were environmental vandals and on one or two occasions you could call it environmental terrorism."

He added that he had been referring to a minority of travellers who left rubbish at the sites.

"I am totally in agreement with having settled sites for travellers, but they should not be given preferential treatment and allowed to flout the law," he said.

The local authority is considering setting up a number of "halting sites" where travellers could stay legally. It is hoped this will help reduce the number of unauthorised camps on private and council-owned land in and around Aberdeen.

Under Scottish law, gypsy travellers are classed as an ethnic minority and they cannot be moved from an unauthorised site if the local authority has not provided an adequate number of spaces.

The Commission for Racial Equality also raised concerns yesterday about Mr Cooney's comments.

A spokeswoman said: "Travellers are an integral part of our communities and have as much right to receive services as anybody else.

"There is a great tendency to draw stereotypes on the basis of the behaviour of a minority of individuals.

"It is unacceptable to stereotype any group in this way."

Nina Giles, the director of Edinburgh and Lothians Racial Equality Council, told The Scotsman: "There were problems a few years ago in Edinburgh over sites for gypsies, but I don't remember this sort of language being used.

"It is not helpful to race relations to label a particular ethnic group like that. There is also no evidence to base the statement on."

There are believed to be between 200,000 and 300,000 gypsy travellers in the United Kingdom.

Shan Ross

Source: The Scotsman

<http://news.scotsman.com/aberdeen.cfm?id=1300412007>

Vacancies

Internships at the ERTF Secretariat

The European Roma and Travellers Forum is looking for paid interns to assist the Secretariat of the Forum in the preparation of the Plenary Assembly 2007 and following EU conference (26 - 29 November 2007).

Tasks include:

- assisting in the preparation and mailing of conference documents;
- assisting in the organisation of travels and accommodations;
- answering correspondence and phone calls;
- filing and managing databases.
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Person specification:

- University degree or commensurate professional experience working with an NGO;
- Professional proficiency of English and/or French written and spoken and of Romani (compulsory);
- Computer literacy;
- Good communication skills;
- High motivation and flexibility.

Interested candidates should send their CV and letter of motivation stating their period of availability to the Secretariat of the European Roma and Travellers Forum:

European Roma and Travellers Forum
c/o Council of Europe
Bâtiment G
1 quai Jacoutot
F - 67 075 Strasbourg
e-mail: ertf@ertf.org or ertf@coe.int

ERTF

Established in 2004, the European Roma and Travellers Forum is the European Romani interest representation 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.

ERTF Update is 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 and comments please write to ertf@ertf.org.