Editorial: A Different European Platform for Roma Inclusion

By Ivan Ivanov

The European Platform for Roma Inclusion, an event organised by the European Commission aims to discuss key issues related to Roma integration and to contribute to a more effective implementation of Roma related policies and strategies at national level. The 9th Platform which took place on 16-17 March 2015 was attended by Věra Jourová, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, other officials from the European Commission, European Parliament and high level governmental representatives.

This year’s Platform, organised in a different format, provided more time for discussion and interaction among participants. Going beyond the traditional format of ceremonial speeches followed by questions from the audience, the Platform included two interactive workshops.

Preparations of the Platform, for the first time, were carried out in close cooperation with civil society who was actively involved in the design of its structure as well as in the selection of speakers, rapporteurs and panel moderators. ERIO was asked by the European Commission to coordinate the workshop on multi-stakeholder cooperation. One of the speakers in this workshop Dimitrina Petrova, Director of the Equal Rights Trust in UK stated: “Roma are key stakeholders in the process of integration, but they must be the key players, something we don’t see so far”. The difference between equality and anti-discrimination was stressed and participants agreed legislation authorities should adopt equality policies aiming at prevention of discrimination rather than adopt instruments to fight discrimination after it takes place. Some recommendations highlighted the importance of the role of local authorities and the need of coordination and structured dialogue among relevant stakeholders. There was a wide recognition that anti-Gypsyism is a strong barrier to the process of Roma integration and that promoting equal rights and opportunities for Roma is the way forward. At the end of the event, the need for member states to make full use of the possibilities to use EU funding for Roma integration was highlighted. The EU Permanent Represent-
The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) welcomes the new Presidency of the Council of the European Union taken over by Latvia between January and June 2015. ERIO, as an international advocacy organisation working to combat racist discrimination against Roma, would like to take this opportunity to urge the Latvian Presidency to prioritise the following issues in the next six months:

1. **Ensure Roma participation**

ERIO is pleased to see that one of the priorities of the Presidency is involvement. ERIO urges the Presidency to focus efforts on the need to promote and ensure access to full participation of Roma, including women, at all levels of decision and policy making processes at local, national and European levels. This will support the aims of the 2013 Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states (point 2.8) which states that the active citizenship of Roma should be supported together with their social, economic, political and cultural participation in society. Participation of Roma should specifically be guaranteed in the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) in order to ensure its effectiveness. Capacity building of Roma civil society should also be promoted as a way to empower Roma to become fully engaged in securing the effective implementation of the NRIS, anti-discrimination and social exclusion policies at the national and local levels. Trainings should improve the advocacy skills of Roma, ensure they are more active with local authorities and include information on EU funding, project management and EU anti-discrimination legislation.

2. **Increase effectiveness of the Europe 2020 Strategy**

ERIO welcomes the Presidency’s commitment to achieve the Europe 2020 Strategy targets. The efficiency of the Strategy and the achievement of its social targets are increased if its implementation is complemented with the NRIS. A smooth implementation of the EU 2020 Strategy should include a balanced level of a social and economic dimension.

3. **Increase Roma children’s access to early childhood education**

ERIO welcomes the Presidency’s focus on early childhood education. Roma children continue to be in a disadvantaged position in education systems across the EU due to discrimination and poverty. Inequality starts early in life. Early childhood interventions are crucial to success in primary and secondary education. We ask the Presidency to pressure member states to ensure that all children have access to preschool by adding facilities and classes as necessary to accommodate them all, and by eliminating or subsidising the school fees and transportation costs that exclude disadvantaged children.
JOINT PRESS RELEASE - International Holocaust Remembrance Day - Call for stronger commitment to fighting racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination and xenophobia

Brussels, 27 January 2015

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 70 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, civil society organisations working on anti-racism and anti-discrimination issues are joining forces to raise awareness about this dark period of history and commemorate the victims of the genocide perpetrated by the Nazi regime against Jews, Roma, people with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people and other groups that have been persecuted and deprived of their rights and dignity because they did not fit the Nazi ideology.

This Remembrance Day should not only commemorate those who died in this tragedy. The current rise of fear and hatred of others, far-right and xenophobic trends translating into anti-Gypsyism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia and other discriminatory behaviours, are jeopardising the efforts undertaken to promote an inclusive and equal Europe. This is why we must continue to remember the devastating consequences of discrimination and continue to promote equality.

Taking a stand together to protect the rights of all citizens, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender expression and/or gender identity is a daily struggle that we must continue to lead hand in hand. We therefore call on national governments as well as inter-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and individuals to join this struggle, to act and react to defend human rights and the values of democracy. It is the states’ responsibility to protect our societies, to ensure protection of the human rights and the security of all citizens.

We call for a stronger commitment and action of the European Union, member states, institutions and civil society to fight racism, discrimination, far-right and xenophobic movements. It is imperative that decision-makers do everything possible to prevent such destruction and inhumanity from ever happening again.

1 European Roma Information Office (ERIO), European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe (CEJI), Union of Jewish Students (EUJS), Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, Inclusion Europe, European Disability Forum (EDF), International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO), European Network Against Racism (ENAR), International Roma Youth Network (TernYpe), European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe), René Cassin, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and Roma Virtual Network (RVN)
Conference “Anti-Gypsyism and the Holocaust: Remembering the past and shaping the future”

As the coordinating partner of the MemoROM project which aims to raise awareness about the Roma and Sinti Holocaust, ERIO organised a conference “Anti-Gypsyism and the Holocaust: Remembering the past and shaping the future” which took place on 30 January 2015 at the European Economic Social Committee in Brussels. The conference gathered different stakeholders such as representatives of the European institutions, EU Permanent Representations, Roma and non-Roma civil society organisations, history teachers, students, Equality Bodies, diplomats and media.

The opening session included interventions by Henri Malosse (EESC President), Salla Saastamoinen (European Commission, DG Justice, Director for Equality) and Soraya Post (MEP). Panel 1 included testimonies of Rita Prigmore (Sinti survivor) and Lydia Chagoll (Jewish survivor). The conference also explored what institutions, experts and civil society can do to fight anti-Gypsyism and anti-Roma sentiments.

If you wish to find out more, you can find the conference report at: www.erionet.eu/event-300115

ERIO at the EESC conference on a better inclusion of the Roma community through civil society initiatives

ERIO was invited to participate in a final conference of the European Economic and Social Committee’s (EESC) project “Better inclusion of the Roma community through civil society initiatives” held on 3 February 2015 in Brussels. The objective of the event was to present the final report and recommendation of the EESC’s project. The conference was attended by representatives of civil society, international organisations, local authorities, European Parliament and different Directorate Generals of the Commission.

During the event Ivan Ivanov, the executive director of ERIO, expressed his comments and recommendations on the final recommendation, particularly the importance of institutional
ERIO at the 9th Roma Platform meeting

On 16-17 March 2015, ERIO attended the 9th European Platform for Roma Inclusion organised by the European Commission in Brussels. The meeting gathered more than 200 participants including representatives from Roma civil society, international organisations, academics, local and regional authorities, government officials and EU representatives. The focus of the 2015 Platform was on three topics: a) fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism, b) enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation and c) debating the way forward for the European Platform for Roma Inclusion.

The meeting aimed to provide a space for reflection on how to make better use of existing tools to improve the daily lives of Roma on the ground and how multi-stakeholder cooperation at local, national and European level can be improved. The first day included two thematic workshops: “Fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism” and “Enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation”. The second day included a political debate with ministers, deputy ministers, MEPs and Roma civil society representatives.

Commissioner for Justice and Gender Equality, Věra Jourová focused on anti-Gypsyism highlighting the fact, that this phenomenon is not shared only by individuals but in many cases by local and national authorities. She expressed her view on the Platform, which should bring possible solutions to problems faced by Roma. Commissioner Jourová emphasised the need to work on the grassroots level by implementing the Roma policies on the local level. She mentioned the budget problem linked with the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS), but pointed out that the framework for European Structural and Investment funds has never before been so favourable to Roma integration and member states should use these allocated funds.

In the workshop “Fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism” participants identified anti-Gypsyism as a root cause of Roma marginalisation and expressed the view that unless it will be institutionally recognised there will be no improvement on the ground. In the workshop “Enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation” participants stressed the need to link legal and policy measures addressing social exclusion and discrimination as well as to set up multi-stakeholder cooperation platforms gathering local and national actors and establishing recognition of anti-Gypsyism, the necessity of independence for Equality Bodies and the need of discussion between Member States and civil society. He welcomed the existence of the document (e.g. the provision related to the important role of churches in stamping out personal and institutional segregation), but voiced his concerns about the special contribution of the document distinguishing it from others as well as about the obstacles in implementation. Good practices of visited Member States (Finland, Romania, Spain and Bulgaria) in the field of education, housing, employment and health were also introduced and promoted during the conference. The suggestions made by participants will be taken into account by EESC before submitting the document.
connections to the European level. The key conclusions of the Platform were:

- There is a need to overcome the lack of trust between the different stakeholders by establishing National Platforms holding debates on more frequent basis; the role of National Roma Contact Points strengthening the debate;
- National Roma Platforms should be more thematic;
- Importance of the shadow reporting on the situation on the ground;
- The involvement of the Equality Bodies and trade unions was highlighted.

**ERIO, AMALIPE and SASTIPEN hearing “EU Funds for Roma health integration”**

On Monday 16 March 2015, ERIO organized a hearing “EU funds for Roma health integration” together with AMALIPE Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance and Roma Centre for Public Health Policies SASTIPEN in the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. The event was attended by MEP Damian Draghici; representatives of the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee; managing authorities of ESF, ERDF and EAFRD funded programmes in member states; representatives of Norwegian FM, Swiss Contribution and several NGOs.

The aim of the hearing was to draw attention to the healthcare as an integral part of Roma integration policy and to discuss the possible financing of a health integration via EU funds (ESF, ERDF and EAFRD), Norwegian FM / EEA FM and Swiss Contribution. During the event the practice in Spain, Bulgaria and Romania drafted into the concept paper about the usage of EU funds for Roma health integration was presented and followed by the reflection of participants’ views towards these matters.

Ivan Ivanov, ERIO’s Executive Director, opened the hearing by pointing out the success based on the adoption of an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, which was further transformed into National Roma Integration Strategies. Mr Ivanov does not prioritize among

Mr Ivanov shared also his own experience; during his visit of a local hospital in Czech Republic he saw a sign hanging on a door, which stated “Do not approach Roma people or people who are coughing in order to lower the risk of tuberculosis”.

EU Funds for Roma health integration
On this example he demonstrated the presence of racism, which has been leading to the health exclusion of Roma. In order to improve the health status of Roma as well as their access to healthcare we need to combat racism and co-operate with all the stakeholders on European, national, regional and local level.

**ERIO paper “Implementing National Roma Integration Strategies: challenges and solutions for local authorities”**

We have published a paper which outlines the key findings of conferences organised by ERIO with local authorities, of roundtables and networking meetings done in 2014. The paper comprises the key challenges and some potential solutions for local and regional authorities when implementing the National Roma Integration Strategies. It also provides recommendations to the European Commission, member states, local authorities and Roma civil society. Finally, good practices of local authorities are also included.

Download the Romanes version here: www.erionet.eu/doc-paper-las_2014_rom


We have published a paper which this paper outlines the key findings of workshops organised by ERIO with Equality Bodies during the course of three years. It outlines the main challenges and some potential solutions for Equality Bodies in ensuring the effective implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and the Racial Equality Directive. The paper also provides a set of recommendations to the European Commission, member states, Equality Bodies and Roma civil society. Finally, good practices of Equality Bodies in effectively addressing Roma discrimination are also included in the paper.


**ERIO Advocacy handbook for Roma activists**

We have prepared a handbook which provides guidelines on how to advocate for Roma inclusion at the local, national and European level. The handbook has been developed with the view that Roma community-based advocacy needs to be better promoted, especially at the level of grassroots groups, networks, and organisations with the necessary information and advocacy skills to demand that Roma community needs and priorities need to be addressed. The aim of this handbook is to offer advice to Roma activists to plan and design effective and efficient advocacy actions, making their voice heard and ensuring the advancement of the integration of Roma across Europe.
My five months journey with ERIO began in February 2015. As a person, who has been living in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the countries with bigger Roma population, I was already aware of many problems Roma have to face. Segregated education, forced sterilizations of Roma women, discrimination in housing, services, employment, hate speech and hate crime against them are many faces of anti-Gypsyism, which has been present in the countries where I lived. During my law studies in the Czech Republic I have been focusing on human rights, particularly discrimination of Roma, LGBT and women. After being engaged on national level, I have decided to look for an internship opportunity on EU level, what brought me to ERIO.

With previous mostly legal experience on national level I came to ERIO with expectations to extend my knowledge about the situation of Roma in different EU countries and learn more about EU policies on this matter. As a law student I was only familiar with the Racial Equality Directive and the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia, but not with other documents such as the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, 2013 Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures or European Parliament Resolutions. Within my first weeks at ERIO I have learned about the development of EU policies on Roma socio-economic integration and anti-discrimination as well as about the monitoring mechanism of the European Commission.

The strategic location of ERIO in the heart of the European Union allowed me to experience the life within the “EU bubble”. I attended conferences and meetings organised by EU Institutions and other NGOs and saw how civil society can reach EU officials and lobby for different causes. This made me realise how strong, important but also vulnerable their position is (NGOs play the role of a watchdog and are able to influence decision makers and executive bodies but at the same time are dependent on their “good will” represented by funding).

As a part of the ERIO team I was involved in advocacy activities on European level. This allowed me to view the problems of Roma from a policy perspective, what was extremely beneficial to me as a person with mostly legal background. I realised that the problems Roma have to face in Eastern Europe are similar all over the continent. During my internship I also experienced the organisation of an event – our hate speech in media conference. Considering all the tasks I conducted I cannot say I had only one, which I liked the most. Therefore, I would like to encourage others to apply. Internships at ERIO are a great opportunity for students or young professionals, who would like to enter the world of European affairs and contribute to fight against anti-Gypsyism.