Roma deportations continue

By Ivan Ivanov, ERIO’s executive director

Despite the European Commission’s strong language few years ago in warning old Member States to follow strictly the rules of the Free Movement Directive 2004/38, to respect the basic right of Roma to travel around Europe as equal EU citizens, some Member States continue to forcibly send many Roma back to their home countries.

According to the Guardian, France keeps on grappling with the influx of Romani people from Bulgaria and Romania in recent years. Both the previous government of Nicolas Sarkozy and the current government of François Hollande have been liquidating illegal Romani campsites and returning some of their inhabitants back to their countries of origin. This has been repeatedly criticized by both NGOs and the European Commission, which declared such treatment of EU citizens to be discriminatory.

The recently published census by the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme (LDH) and ERRC on forced evictions of Roma in France shows that a total of 5,482 people were forcibly evicted by the authorities in the second quarter of 2013, compared to 2,883 in the first three months of the year. The census also proves that forced evictions continued at a high rate without any credible social support or proposals for relocation.

Dale Farm, an active civil society group in the UK, provides facts showing that Britain has adopted the same cold-blooded tactics as France, Germany and Italy, namely breaking up camps, arresting, rearresting, and carrying out so-called voluntary returns of EU citizens. Neither allowed to work nor to receive benefits. The legal excuse for their forcible expulsion is that they can’t support themselves.

Western EU Member States should stop violating existing European laws and international treaties. Returning Roma to their countries of origin will not solve the problem. Being EU citizens, they have the right to free movement and to choose freely the country to live in.
The return of Roma to the country they have been deported from is a matter of time. Hosting Member States should rather take strategic measures to integrate Roma in their own societies on the principle of mutual respect and benefit.

ERIO welcomes the Lithuanian Presidency which is taking place at a crucial time for Roma inclusion. We encourage the Presidency to build on this momentum by taking the EU agenda forward for Roma inclusion. Here are some of our key recommendations to the Presidency.

1. National Roma Integration Strategies

In order to accelerate the process and to ensure an effective implementation of the NRIS, ERIO calls on the Lithuanian Presidency to:

- Support and pressure member states to adopt the Commission’s proposal for a Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states at the EPSCO Council in December.
- Ensure that member states allocate appropriate and sufficient funds (i.e. EU and national funds) for the implementation of the strategies and to meet the EU 2020 Strategy social targets. An effective implementation of the strategies will not be possible without the support of appropriate financial means at EU and member state level.

2. Eradicating anti-Gypsyism and discrimination

All forms of racism and discrimination need to be eradicated. To achieve this, ERIO calls on the Lithuanian Presidency to:

- Urge member states to take all necessary measures against the increasing anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech from political parties. These worryingly racist manifestations should be challenged and publicly condemned. The Commission should ensure that the Race Equality Directive 2000/43/EC is effectively implemented and transposed in the member states and persuade politicians to use their national anti-discrimination legislation.
- Ensure that NRIS contain measures to fight discrimination against Roma, including the most vulnerable groups such as women, children, youth and older Roma who face multiple forms of discrimination.

3. Inclusive economic growth

Economic growth should be pursued in an inclusive way and tackled with special emphasis on the most disadvantaged, such as the Roma who in times of financial crises are always the most affected, economically and socially, finding themselves trapped
in a cycle of poverty. ERIO calls on the Lithuanian Presidency to:

- Urge member states to end discrimination in the labour market and to implement measures to ensure equal treatment and to close the gap between Roma and non-Roma employees. Guaranteeing Roma access to equal and to fair employment and payment is vital to promote their inclusion and to fight their high poverty rates.

- Urge member states to develop, improve and implement desegregation policies including the non-placement of Roma children in special needs schools. Stopping this practice will improve the quality of education for Roma. Investing in inclusive quality education is vital to lift Roma out of poverty and to reach EU 2020 Strategy targets.

4. Roma empowerment and active participation

To act in the spirit of the European Year of Citizens and to ensure Roma voting turnout at the 2014 European elections, Roma active participation needs to be urgently promoted. To achieve this, ERIO calls on the Lithuanian Presidency to:

- Make sure that member states ensure Roma active civic participation in the political, social and economic spheres of the European Union. This can be done by organising awareness and outreach activities towards Roma communities to stimulate their involvement. Full participation of especially Roma women and girls, on an equal basis with others, in society and policy making must also be ensured. Equal treatment, equal opportunities and equal participation are essential to achieve this.

5. Migration

A large number of Roma migrants, both EU citizens and third country nationals, live in very low standard conditions, surrounded by poverty where they face regular exclusion and discrimination. ERIO calls on the Lithuanian Presidency to:

- Make sure member states implement the principle of equal treatment to ensure that all EU migrants are treated equally and their fundamental rights respected at all times. Member states need to guarantee access to decent employment to Roma migrants, especially those from Romania and Bulgaria in order to protect them from potential black market exploitation.

6. Western Balkans

There is an urgent need to guarantee decent living conditions and protection of fundamental rights to Roma communities in the region. To achieve this, ERIO calls on the Lithuanian Presidency to:

- Encourage EU enlargement and candidate countries to efficiently and swiftly transpose and implement the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 at national and local level and implement the changes and improvements to their Strategies recommended in the Commission’s assessment in May 2012 and the Council Recommendation in June 2013.

- Ensure that available funds, especially the financial Instrument Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), are effectively used for the benefit of Roma by promoting their inclusion.

Read the full recommendations here: http://www. erionet.eu/doc-erio-recommendations-lithuanian-presidency
“Protecting Roma Against Discrimination: The Role of Equality Bodies”

On 27 September, ERIO hosted its second workshop with Equality Bodies on “Protecting Roma Against Discrimination: The Role of Equality Bodies”, to identify the challenges they face in combating discrimination of Roma. The workshop was held at the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (Belgian Equality Body) in Brussels and was attended by Equality Bodies from ten EU states. In addition, representatives from the European Commission, EQUINET, Roma representatives and a number of NGOs attended.

The workshop was opened by Ivan Ivanov, Executive Director of ERIO, who noted the specific work needed to address the particular discrimination of Roma, and emphasised the importance of Equality Bodies and civil society working together. Anne Gaspard, Director of EQUINET, then explained the role and work of EQUINET in addressing the discrimination of Roma. François Sant’Angelo, Lawyer for the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism followed by drawing attention to the significant challenges facing Roma, particularly widespread prejudice and denial of full access to their rights as EU citizens. Finally, Jana Balazova from the European Commission spoke about the need for EU member states to appropriately implement both the National Roma Integration Strategies and other anti-discrimination legislation in order to convincingly fight discrimination of Roma.

Two rounds of discussion with the Equality Bodies then identified a number of key challenges that they face in the fight against discrimination of Roma. Underreporting of experiences of discrimination was identified as a significant issue. A range of reasons for this trend were identified, including lack of trust in authorities and Equality Bodies, and a lack of knowledge and awareness amongst Roma communities of their rights. In addition, a number of Equality Bodies reported that the economic crisis and subsequent budget cuts have placed constraints on their work. Further, widespread austerity measures have left majority society in a number of states hostile towards the prospect of money being used in programs aimed at the integration of a minority group. Finally, a vigorous discussion took place on the singularity of Roma racism and discrimination. It was observed that in many states, racism towards Roma is freely expressed as a socially legitimate phenomenon, and that a change in attitudes must be the first step in achieving equality.

In conclusion, the need for Equality Bodies and civil society to work together and exchange information was stressed, as was the vital need for Roma to be involved as active participants in the process of combating their discrimination.
ERIO’s training
“Develop Key Competences in Social Skills for Roma Women to increase their participation in the service sector”

ERIO is organising a 30-hour training course for Roma women as part of the KeyRoma project which aims to develop social and communication skills. The project’s objective is to increase the chances of Roma women to enter the labour market by providing them with appropriate training.

What is the content of the training?

The training should improve the access of Roma women in the service sector. It assists Roma women to seek employment and to:
- learn about the expectations of employers about employees;
- apply for a job (writing the CV and cover letter for an interview);
- inform them about existing resources in Belgium for unemployed people (newspapers with job advertisements in employment centres).

The training consists of a series of seminars of 30 hours in total, provided by professionals.

Find out more here: www.erionet.eu/event-060913-181013keyroma
International Holocaust Remembrance Day

The 27 January marks the International Holocaust Remembrance Day; a time for people all over the world to remember the millions of victims and survivors of the Nazi regime. Less than 70 years ago, Nazi Germany was orchestrating the mass internment, hard labour and execution of millions of people deemed unfit to populate Europe. Hundreds of thousands of those who died were Roma, killed solely because of their ethnicity.

ERIO, as an organization devoted to fight all sort of racism and intolerance against Roma people in today’s Europe, is forthright in amplifying the importance of remembering the Roma victims of the Holocaust. Whilst Europe has moved on from the days of violent conflict and mass murder, the anti-Roma prejudice and anti-Gypsyism that fomented their attempted genocide still persists in the minds of many today. Roma remain largely disconnected from mainstream society and encounter institutional racism in accessing housing, education, employment and welfare. The increasing success of far-right political parties, often promoting overtly anti-Roma policies and discourses, is particularly worrying. ERIO calls on all political leaders to fight all forms of racism and discrimination.

ERIO’s Executive Director, Ivan Ivanov, said:

“The world should recognise that the Roma were a serious victim of the ethnic cleansing of the Nazi regime during WWII. Being blind to one of the darkest periods of history is not in the benefit of both Roma and non-Roma. Only by recognising this can we all accept that what the Roma experienced during the Holocaust was based on false perceptions and that we must never allow it to happen again, as unfortunately these perceptions still exist today”.

THE INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY
On 8th April, the Catalan Parliament marked the International Roma Day with an official ceremony. Prior to the keynote speeches, the President of the Catalan Parliament, Núria de Gispert, received ERIO representatives and prominent Roma leaders from Catalonia. ERIO was represented by its Executive Director Ivan Ivanov, and by the board member Pedro Aguilera.

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The meeting with the leaders was preceded by several panel presentations with an audience of more than 100 civil society, governmental and media representatives. ERIO’s Executive Director was one of the keynote speakers. He presented the current situation of Roma in Europe, the policy developments at European level, as well as the advocacy actions taken by ERIO. Ivan Ivanov stressed the growing anti-Roma sentiments in Europe, the difficulties of Roma moving from Eastern Europe to the old EU Member States, as well as the discrimination Roma are subjected to all over Europe. Núria de Gispert stated that, unfortunately, the processes in Europe also influence the situation of Roma in Catalonia. Although the Catalan Roma enjoy more attention by their political leaders and institutions than Roma in other countries, and although there are numerous policies and programs for Roma integration, there remains a lot to be done, as many Roma are unemployed, suffer poverty and discrimination also in Catalonia.

The official speeches in the Parliament were followed by the ‘Flowers Ceremony’, an old tradition of the Catalan Roma. People of different generations threw flowers in the river, as a symbol of love, tolerance and peace among all people in Catalonia. Another gesture by the Municipality of Barcelona for the 8th April is the ceremony of coloured light fountains in the centre of the city.
ERIO’s latest publications

You can consult our website and download our two latest publications.

Human rights abuses and discrimination against Roma: July-September 2013

This publication includes snapshots that are illustrations of human rights abuses and discrimination against Roma in EU member states and candidate countries. The period covered is July-September 2013.

Download the paper here: www.erionet.eu/doc-snapshot_2013_jul-sep

Paper “Discrimination against Roma in the EU in 2012”

This paper, developed by Catherine Boyd, Marta Pinto and Ivan Ivanov takes a general look at the degree to which the Roma are discriminated against in contravention of the Directive in the EU countries in 2012.

Download the paper here: www.erionet.eu/doc-discrimination-against-roma-2012_erio_300113