**Editorial: Measures to fight Anti-Gypsyism**

*By Ivan Ivanov*

There is no doubt that the first step in fighting anti-Gypsyism is the institutional recognition of the problem. When there are public expressions of anti-Gypsyism, public officials at all levels should take the lead in recognizing the racist nature of such expressions and in condemning them. To some extent this is already done by international organizations such as the EU, CoE, and OSCE, but it needs to be done at the level of national governments and local authorities. Racial discrimination against Roma needs to be tackled in all sectors of life if long-term effects and sustainable progress are to be made in the Roma rights situation.

Most stakeholders agree that the current National Roma Integration Strategies will be insufficient to address anti-Gypsyism if they continue to treat the problems Roma face (such as low rates of employment and low levels of education) as exclusively social or cultural problems, and do not seek to remedy discriminatory factors in laws, policies, regulations and practices.

It is also very important to ensure equality of opportunities for Roma through actions taken to compensate for past discrimination. Historical discrimination and racism experienced by Roma has a dramatic impact in terms of segregation, disadvantage and marginalization. Desegregation measures should be taken in all areas in which Roma experience segregation, most notably in housing and education. In some member states such measures will also be required in the health and social services sector. In redressing past discrimination the most effective approach will be if authorities adopt positive measures. The National Roma Integration Strategies could be considered a type of positive measure, although member states are hesitant to use such terminology due to the wrong perception that positive measures are illegal and discriminatory towards the non-Roma. According to the principle of non-discrimination, positive measures are required and can take a range of forms depending on what is most appropriate to a given situation. This ensures that they do not negatively affect the rest of society but at the same time guarantee *de facto* equality for those in a disadvantaged position.

Fighting anti-Gypsyism should not be limited solely to its institutional...
recognition and governmental measures to eradicate current and past discrimination. This should be a fight involving a broad coalition of stakeholders addressing the issue from the respective perspectives of their workplace and environment. An ongoing campaign of people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, people with different ages and professions condemning discrimination against Roma, is essential. Anti-Gypsyism is a severe form of racism and human rights abuse. It is an offence and threat not only to Roma communities but to the whole of society.

ERIO at the EESC hearing on Roma women’s participation in public life

On the 2nd of September, ERIO took part in a public hearing titled “Roma women’s participation in public life”, organised by the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. Participants included members of the European Parliament, representatives of the Council of Europe, European Commission, European Economic and Social Committee, and other key civil society organisations were present at the event.

The hearing highlighted the need to develop ideas on how to improve the participation of Roma women in public life as this being considered to be the key element that could lead to their inclusion in society.

ERIO’s senior policy officer, Marta Pinto, stressed the need to empower Roma women and ensure their full active participation in society. “Roma women’s participation in the social, cultural and political fields is part of democracy and essential for the successful inclusion of Roma communities and for achieving an equal society.”, she said. Roma women “encounter more serious obstacles than Roma men and non-Roma women due to the everyday multiple discrimination they face, fuelled by widespread stereotypes and anti-Gypsyism which affect the possibilities for their participation in society.”, she added. She then presented the main factors that causes Roma women’s exclusion from public life such as gender and racial discrimination; high level of poverty; segregated settlements; low levels of education, high unemployment rates, human rights violation, non-compliance of EU anti-discrimination legislation, inadequate investment in measures targeting Roma women, and lack of demographic data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity.

During the hearing, our KeyRoma project was presented as a positive practice. Daniela Novac, one of the participants in the project training organised by ERIO explained how the project helped Roma women to develop skills to participate in society. You can find more information here: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-romani-women-public-life
ERIO’s Recommendations to the Slovak EU Presidency

Slovakia assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union between July-December 2016. ERIO calls on the Slovak Presidency to commit to Roma’s rights and equal treatment and ensure that their rights are guaranteed and respected by taking into consideration the following recommendations:

1. Ensure stronger political will to promote Roma integration and equal treatment
We welcome the fact that the Presidency will focus on Roma integration. We ask the Presidency, through the proposed Council conclusions, to urge member states to adopt horizontally anti-discrimination legislation in the different fields (i.e. education, health, housing and employment) of their national system and implement their anti-discrimination legislation at national level. Additionally, all necessary measures should be taken to combat increased levels of hate speech and anti-Gypsyism, the latter being the main cause of discrimination and marginalisation of Roma.

2. Strengthen the social dimension in employment policies to ensure racism-free labour markets
We ask the Presidency to use the opportunity of the proposed Council conclusions on the Youth Guarantee to ensure that such measure does not reproduce the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion of disadvantaged youth, such as the Roma. To ensure that the Youth Guarantee is inclusive and targets all youth, some key challenges need to be overcome: tackle discrimination and stereotypes of employment services and employers by providing cultural sensitivity training; provide assistance for registration process by facilitating access and providing mediation services to assist those who need; and promote ethnic data collection.

In light of its commitment to focus on the European pillar of social rights, the Presidency should ensure that the Pillar includes social key principles and values addressing people in disadvantaged situations such as the Roma.

3. Make sure the refugee situation does not push Roma issues to the side-line
The current refugee situation is having a strong impact on Roma inclusion at different levels. It is spreading panic and a feeling of insecurity which is fuelled by extreme right nationalist and populist parties resulting in increased hate speech and racism towards Roma. Moreover, Roma inclusion slipped down the political agenda as many officials are using the refugee situation as an excuse to stop or delay the implementation of the 2013 Council recommendation on effective Roma integration measures. We ask the Presidency to urge member states and local authorities to strengthen their commitment to Roma inclusion which should be considered as a priority in their political agenda and not as in competition with the refugee situation.

4. Ensure greater efforts from enlargement countries on Roma integration
As a consequence of the current migration crisis and Brexit, EU enlargement will most probably be delayed and will not take place soon. Since a large Roma population lives in many of the EU candidate countries and their situation is worse than in the rest of Europe, this community will be greatly affected by current developments. Thus, we urge the Presidency to ensure the commitment of candidate countries to meet the EU acquis communautaire of promoting Roma integration and to pressure them to transpose and implement the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies at national level or to adapt existing national strategies to European Commission’s and Council Recommendation’s requirements as well as the Race Equality Directive 2000/43 and the Framework Directive 2000/78. The transposition of the EU Framework and anti-discrimination legislation would be facilitated with their EU membership where they would directly benefit from opportunities to EU funds to effectively implement their Roma national strategies.
Human rights situation of Roma in the EU

Reports from credible media outlets and NGOs attest to ongoing human rights abuses of Roma and anti-Gypsyism in member states in the first half of 2016.

The forced eviction of Roma communities, often accompanied with the destruction of their homes, remains a widespread practice in many EU member states and represents a major abuse of human rights. While French and Italian authorities remain the key perpetrators of forced evictions, cases have also been noted in Romania and Poland, among other countries.

In Italy there have been multiple instances of authorities evicting Roma communities from settlements without providing them suitable housing alternatives. Roma often end up relocated in dilapidated camps segregated from the mainstream community, impeding access to public services and posing a number of health risks (for instance the toxic environment of the Masseria del Pozzo camp on the outskirts of Naples).

The European Court of Human Rights has been involved in a number of cases in Rome in 2016, taking emergency measures to prevent the discriminatory relocation of particularly vulnerable Roma (such as children and the elderly). It has also interfered in proceedings in Romania (Eforie) and Poland (Wroclaw), both concerning the forced eviction of Roma communities and their relocation in untenable living conditions. This case-by-case approach, however, has not been sufficient in tackling the systemic relocation of Roma and the destruction of their property in a number of member states.

In Bulgaria, the racially motivated assault of Roma youth Mitko Yonkov in April for claiming to be equal to a local non-Roma (Angel Kaleev) received particularly broad coverage. Kaleev uploaded a video of his attack online, and was later given an 11-month sentence (deferred for a probation period of three years). This was the first time a court ruling had acknowledged a racially motivated attack against an ethnic minority in Bulgaria.

Roma have taken legal action in a number of cases of discrimination in member states. In the Czech Republic, cases were brought against a dentist for refusing to register a man and his daughter for being Roma, while the Czech Trade Inspection Authority recognised a real estate agent guilty of discrimination for refusing to show an apartment in Brno to a young Roma couple. In Slovakia, the Constitutional Court has opened a new trial to process Viera Pompova’s claims that she was discriminated in her access to employment, a common circumstance for many Roma communities across the EU.

Member states have also been targets of legal action for discrimination against Roma. In Sweden, eleven Roma people (represented by the Civil Rights Defenders NGO) have decided to sue the state on the charge of ethnic profiling. This followed the revelation (in 2013) that the Skåne police held a register containing around 4700 Roma (and affiliated non-Roma), included minors, who had no criminal background. The Stockholm District Court ruled in favour of the prosecution. In April 2016, the European Court of Human Rights prosecuted the Hungarian state for inadequate investigation into the racist abuse of a Roma woman during an anti-Roma march in the village of Gyöngyös Pata.

These examples demonstrate the widespread and ongoing discrimination of Roma across a number of levels of society in different parts of Europe.
ERIO fact sheet on Roma political participation and representation

Back in 2007, the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) – along with the European Network against Racism (ENAR) – identified the need to promote the political participation of Roma. ERIO’s new fact sheet on Roma political participation and representation builds on this, raising awareness of the substantial underrepresentation of Roma in mainstream politics across the EU and sensitising key stakeholders to the importance of Roma’s political participation for the success of Roma-related policies and practices. The fact sheet outlines some of the underlying causes for the underrepresentation of Roma in mainstream politics, as well as providing a number of recommendations on how to ensure and promote the political participation and representation of Roma at different political levels across the EU.

By political participation, we mean running as candidates for political parties. It is our belief at ERIO that equal opportunities for Roma to participate in political structures and decision-making processes is key to countering their ongoing social exclusion, and would contribute significantly to the successful implementation of the EU’s National Roma Integration Strategies (in which Roma have so far been largely passive recipients of policies). Despite a significant demographic presence in the EU (estimated at approximately 6 million), Roma continue to be denied the right to be represented in political life at local, national and EU levels, and this has a profound effect on the safeguarding of their rights and the representation of their interests. This view is supported by the “Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States” (2013), which calls for the ‘empowerment’ of Roma through their active political participation in society.

The fact sheet is available on our website: www.erionet.eu/doc-fact-sheet_political-participation_2016

Reports mapping social entrepreneurship for Roma communities

As part of our SERCo project, partners have prepared national reports mapping social entrepreneurship for Roma communities in 6 countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Romania and Spain.

You can download them now!
Belgium: http://tinyurl.com/zze4jjv
(FR version: http://tinyurl.com/hbgjffu)
Bulgaria: http://tinyurl.com/hsytupp
Greece: http://tinyurl.com/zwgze5k
Italy: http://tinyurl.com/zh6q36
(EL version: http://tinyurl.com/hhg6q36)
Romania: http://tinyurl.com/jmy59x3
Spain: http://tinyurl.com/jndy24t

SERCo website: www.serco-project.eu
Social Entrepreneurship in the European Commission Assessment of the NRIS

Social entrepreneurship is explicitly mentioned in the Commission's 2016 Assessment as a means of improving Roma participation in the labour market. The Commission reports that, despite a number of initiatives in various EU Member States, “Roma participation in the labour market remains very weak.” They are, in fact, Europe’s most under-represented group in the labour market. This is attributed to a lack of measures that explicitly...
target Roma. The report explains that Member States have given priority to "mainstream measures" for the unemployed, as well as activation/public work and measures for people with a migrant background. There have also been a number of initiatives supporting on-the-job training and skills development for the unemployed. None of these, however, have had a "significant impact on Roma."

The various measures adopted by EU Member States have in general been insufficient in countering the "low levels of education and skills and widespread discrimination" that explain the under-representation of Roma in the labour market.

The Commission reports that "it is evident that all-encompassing, tailored approaches are needed." Such "innovative measures" include, among other things, an emphasis on promoting social enterprises and Roma entrepreneurship as an alternative to Roma employment. As well as providing job creation opportunities, social entrepreneurship is also understood to often be a means of preserving Roma culture and fighting stereotypes. Such measures are to be supported under the European Social Fund.

All this makes projects such as SERCo relevant and needed. The partnership of the SERCo project aims to promote social economy as an effective instrument for the development of the Roma communities.

You can find out more about the project here: www.serco-project.eu.

ERIO at the Belgian National Roma Platform meeting

On the 29 September, ERIO attended a meeting organised by the Belgian National Roma Platform, which was launched in May 2016. The topic of the meeting was Roma’s access to healthcare. The aim of the meeting was to formulate recommendations for policy makers and which can provide some input for the evaluation of the National Roma Integration Strategy.

During the meeting, ERIO stressed the need to ensure the participation of Roma in the full process related to the national strategies and any policy relevant for Roma which is currently non-existent in the Belgian context. Since the aim of the Belgian National Roma Platform is to trigger the dialogue with all stakeholders and Roma communities in Belgium, this is a requirement that needs to be improved and respected. Small interactive group discussions between participants took place to discuss what is currently working and missing in Belgium in terms of Roma’s access to healthcare and what can be done to improve the situation.

Other thematic meetings focusing on education, housing and employment will take place until the end of the year.

Inside view of ERIO: Rohan Varma

During my two and a half months internship at ERIO I was able to work on and learn about many issues, whether concerning directly Roma, or about the way NGOs and civil society organizations interact with European institutions. The latter was mainly permitted by the conferences we attended and the one we organized. By penetrating the buildings of the European Commission, the European Parliament, you get an inside look of how these institutions work and what room de manoeuvre advocacy organizations such as ERIO have when it comes to implementing and setting up projects. Moreover, meetings with representatives of other organizations were very much interesting in the sense that you could see how communication and cooperation between NGOs are carried out.

My tasks were very diverse and I was asked to do things that I never did before, or that I knew very little about, such as establishing contact lists, brainstorming for an online campaign, translating specific texts and even playing the role of an interpreter for a short moment.

Hence, I believe that my own goal of diversifying my skills and knowledge was attained and I now feel very enthusiast to have these experiences because they gave me confidence in my capacities, and in my ability to adapt to new and different situations.

I was also able to use skills I developed during my studies, as I had to do research on a lot of different subjects. This research aspect had focus on issues concerning the Roma and gave me a lot of details and information about the community and about new tools that could help to achieve a better integration of the Roma community in Europe, such as social entrepreneurship or education through arts and music. I also used and applied aspects of the anthropological method during this internship. Indeed, I had to conduct interviews, transcribe and analyse them, which I had done before and which is a major aspect of qualitative research in social sciences.

My knowledge about situations in countries or regions I knew little about was also enhanced and strengthened. I learned a lot about the political and social situations in Eastern and Central European countries, through the tasks I was asked to do and through my fellow interns who were half Polish and Slovenian.

Finally, I also perfected my use of Microsoft Office and the different applications it proposes, such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint, since I had to use these throughout the internship. Mastering these tools will be beneficial for any future work or studies I may have to do.