Editorial: Roma school segregation continues today

By Ivan Ivanov

The 13th November 2007 judgment of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic constituted a major legal victory. In 2000, 18 Roma plaintiffs from the city of Ostrava filed a complaint at the European Court in Strasbourg, alleging the violation of: Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (prohibition against degrading treatment), Article 6 (right to fair trial), and Article 2 of Protocol 1 (right to education) together with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination). The Court declared that, as a result of their segregation in special schools for children with special needs, the plaintiffs, like many others in Czech Republic, had suffered severe educational, psychological and emotional harm. The Court highlighted that this is a systemic discriminatory treatment and has no justification. In reaching its conclusions, the Court went further noting that, despite its decision being legally binding only in Czech Republic, the problem is also of European importance.

Arriving to this verdict was not an easy task. During the research work, we have spoken with hundreds of Roma parents in the city of Ostrava, but only 18 agreed to join the complaint procedure. Another challenge concerned how to obtain data to support the claim. As there was no official policy to record ethnicity-related data, we put a lot of efforts in convincing school authorities to provide us with lists of students broken down by ethnicity. This intensive research demonstrated that 56% out of all the pupils placed in special schools in Ostrava were Roma, and that Roma children were 27 times more likely to be sent to special schools than non-Roma children. The biggest problem at that time, not only in the Czech Republic but in the entire former socialist block, was to challenge these discriminatory practices.

The D.H. and Others judgment of the Grand Chamber represents a revolutionary breakthrough within the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. It was expected to
influence the law in countries with segregated schooling. Although the education law in Czech Republic and in other countries of the region was slightly improved, 10 years later after the judgement, many Roma children still experience segregation in education and are attending segregated classes, where the curriculum is significantly inferior. In many EU member states, Roma children are physically cut off from the rest of society, channelled into separate schools or classes in which they are provided with poor quality education. It has been observed that school segregation of Roma migrant children is becoming an increasingly common practice in Western European primary education systems. Even if successful, this litigation was not able to bring a final and permanent solution. Nevertheless, D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic had its great importance in providing new impetus to be used in negotiations, especially when authorities deny their responsibilities. This case is a good example of indirect discrimination and of how prima facie discrimination can be established by using statistical data. We hope very much that, in addition to the litigation initiated mainly by civil society, the European Commission will use its tools - such as infringement procedures for the non-effective implementation of the Racial Equality Directive - against EU member states carrying out school segregation practices, which keep Roma at the margins of society and stuck in the vicious circle of poverty.

ERIO at CoE meeting on Roma entrepreneurship

ERIO participated in the Council of Europe 4th Dialogue meeting with Roma and Traveller civil society which took place on the 18-19 of September in Strasbourg. This year’s meeting focused on the issue of Roma youth employment and vocational education and training. Particular attention was given to ensure a bridge between education and employment for young Roma and Travellers. Initiatives, programs and projects in member states have been analysed, discussed and shared. Ivan Ivanov, ERIO’s executive director was an invited speaker for the panel “The challenge: Improving Access of Roma and Traveller youth to the labour market”. His intervention focused on entrepreneurship as a reliable solution for labour market exclusion of young Roma. He explained that “Roma entrepreneurship is one way to avoid discrimination against Roma in employment. The state should ensure conditions for start-up companies and motivate unemployed Roma to start their own business. This is in benefit for the Roma who will have the opportunity to improve their socio-economic status, as well as for the state with increasing the number of its tax payers”.

Logo of the CoE 4th Dialogue meeting with Roma and Traveller civil society
ERIO at Salvation Army event

On the 26th of September, ERIO attended a conference in Brussels co-organized by the European Economic and Social Committee and the Salvation Army EU Affairs Office titled “Social enterprise as part of an integrated approach to Roma inclusion”. The event tackled the topic of social enterprise - by highlighting its potential - as part of an integrated approach to Roma inclusion. It shed light on the bond between Roma inclusion and social enterprise and social economy.

As an invited speaker, ERIO’s executive director, Ivan Ivanov shared the organization’s expertise during a panel discussion dealing with barriers and potential of social enterprise in the light of Roma inclusion. He highlighted that "the state should ensure conditions for social entrepreneurship development in Roma communities. It should have a leading role and come with appropriate supportive measures, connect private sector with education and promote equality and diversity in the work place. Discrimination against Roma in employment is a widespread practice and to fight against it, it is necessary that state, the business sector and Roma come together.”

Workshop with equality bodies

On the 29 September, in close cooperation with EQUINET and UNIA, ERIO organized its 6th workshop with Equality Bodies entitled "Workshop with equality bodies: "Discrimination against Roma in employment is widespread."

The aims of the workshop were to: a) assist the work of Equality Bodies and anti-discrimination experts to end discrimination of Roma in employment, b) discuss the main challenges faced by Equality Bodies in eliminating employment discrimination and any possible solutions/good practices they use to address them, c) improve cooperation between Equality Bodies, Roma and civil society to end employment discrimination of Roma. Present at the workshop were representatives of Equality Bodies from member states, the European Commission, the European Economic Social Committee, the United Nations Human Rights Office, Roma and non-Roma civil society, as well as anti-discrimination experts.

The workshop was opened by Ivan Ivanov (ERIO’s Executive Director) who said that the need to discuss a topic such as school discrimination becomes more relevant given the current European Commission infringement procedures against Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic.

Reporting from national equality bodies at the workshop
Anne Gaspard (EQUINET’S Executive Director) mentioned an upcoming paper on discrimination based on race and ethnic origin, which looks at different challenges faced by Equality Bodies such as lack of equality data and under-reporting. Els Keytsman (UNIA’s Co-Director) condemned the special education system in Belgium and urged the government to fulfil its responsibility and address this situation since equal opportunities should be given to all. Dora Husz (Non-discrimination policies and Roma coordination Unit, European Commission) explained how the European Commission is fighting employment discrimination and shared the key employment findings of the EC’s midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies. Madi Sharma (EESC) stressed the need to involve Roma in the decision-making process.

Claude Cahn (OHCHR) highlighted the role of Equality Bodies in pressuring the state to involve Roma communities in their public services and enter their structures both directly and indirectly.

The workshop was followed by two thematic workshops addressing different questions. The first one focussed on the challenges on combating employment discrimination against Roma. The second thematic workshop focused on the possible solutions in tackling employment discrimination against Roma. The thematic workshops were followed by a session where Equality Bodies and civil society exchanged their positive experiences and good practices more in depth.

The workshop was concluded by Tamás Kádár (EQUINET) and Ronald Lucardie (ERIO). Tamás Kádár highlighted the importance of reliable data gathering, of acting pro-actively building awareness and trust to raise reporting rates, of engaging in alliances and partnerships and of facing discrimination of Roma with a holistic and win-win approach. Ronald Lucardie stressed the need for more collaborations such as EQUINET and ERIO in fighting for a common goal and helping Roma to have the right place in Europe.
SERCo training on social entrepreneurship

As part of our project SERCo we organised a training for Roma mediators on social entrepreneurship between June-July 2017. The aim of the training was to provide Roma mediators with the necessary skills to plan, create and sustain social enterprises within the Roma community. The training was delivered by RES - Réseau d’Entreprises Sociales.

The training included four different modules:

1) Roma and social enterprises;
2) The role of the Roma mediator;
3) Overcoming obstacles to social entrepreneurship;
4) Planning, establishing and sustaining a social enterprise in practice.

The SERCo project is financed by the European Commission under the EU Rights, Equality & Citizenship Programme and it aims to address the problem of social and economic inclusion of Roma by applying the concept of social economy as an innovative solution to reducing the risk of poverty and to enhancing entrepreneurship.

You can visit the project website here: www.serco-project.eu

Joint open letter to Juncker and Oettinger

ERIO co-signed an open letter with 28 European organisations to the President of the European Commission (Jean-Claude Juncker) and European Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources (Günther Oettinger) to express concerns with regard to the omission of racial, ethnic and religious minority staff as a target group in the European Commission's new diversity and inclusion strategy.

Read the letter here: https://tinyurl.com/yd2cnldj

Jean-Claude Juncker and Günther Oettinger
Source: www.express.co.uk on the 18/01/2017
The Roma Media Network was established two years ago in Brussels. The purpose is to gather the various stakeholders in order to counter hate speech against Roma in Europe. Roma and non-Roma organisations, activists and media experts working or interested in the field could therefore work together and coordinate efforts to encounter any anti-Roma racist statements by providing correct information on mainstream media for instance. The large scope and in-depth monitoring of the international media ensure to detect hate speech against Roma in Europe. A parallel objective shared by members of the network is to support each other in order to address the relevant authorities at national level when a case of hate speech occurs.

As an example, radio “Patrin” is a regional radio based in Amsterdam. In its daily broadcasting, it raises awareness on hate speech against Roma and anti-Gypsyism highlighting how it affects this community’s daily life. Programs of radio “Patrin” tell stories of discrimination by giving a voice to Roma victims of racial discrimination. The Equal Opportunities Foundation initiated public debate on the case of Mitko a young boy from Bulgaria who was verbally and physically attacked by a member of an extreme right-wing nationalistic group. The offender uploaded a shocking video of the incident on YouTube. This footage was used by civil society organizations to launch legal procedure against the perpetrator. There were many reactions coming from media network members in various countries as Bulgaria, Italy and Greece where the story came up on mainstream media.

On social media, hate speech is widespread. Media network members are working on a strategy to encounter racist statements on platforms like facebook. The EU Commissioner of Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Ms. Věra Jourová recently stated that an agreement was found with Facebook to stop racial comments and hate speech. It is maybe the right time for the media network members to join efforts with the European Commission on this initiative and work for the eradication of anti-Roma racist rhetoric in social media.

A Network for Roma social economy has been created based on the experience and feedback stemming from the SERCo project’s public roundtables and policy forums. The main aim of this project is to increase awareness among all Roma communities and professional groups working with and for Roma at all levels. To this end, the Network will liaise with organizations with similar objectives at all levels.

You can become member of SERCo Network, by filling in this Membership Form.

The benefits of being member of the SERCo Network are:
- Direct access to SERCo project outputs;
- Opportunities for networking and interaction with the project target groups and with other organisations and stakeholders who participate in the SERCo Network;
- Exchange of good practices which may be used to develop new project ideas and to improve future projects in related fields.

More information can be found here: www.serco-project.eu/network

SERCo network invitation

European Roma media network
ERIO social media campaign

We have launched on our social media campaign- online in October- on Roma entrepreneurship which aims to enhance Roma integration and to combat prejudices and stereotypes of Roma by using the entrepreneurship field. This campaign covers three themes: empowerment, youth, and gender. For each theme, an informative digital flyer and a poster have being created. The posters include Roma entrepreneurs to act as role models for young Roma and women. These include: Rosa Redondo Buzón (businesswoman of a catering service and ham slicing plant, Spain), Gerebenes Lencsi (owner of a construction company, Romania) and sisters Erika and Helena Varga (fashion designers and owners of Romani design, Hungary).

You can find all the information relating to our campaign:
on our website: www.erionet.eu/campaign-roma-entrepreneurship
on facebook: www.facebook.com/erionet.eu
on twitter: #RomaEnt #RomaEntrepreneur

It is now two months and a half that I am working at ERIO as an intern. The Roma issues weren’t a completely new topic for me when I arrived here, since I have written my master degree thesis on peaceful police-minority conflict resolution researching Roma people’s condition in Hungary. However, there are many new things to learn every day when

Inside view of ERIO: Clara Csilla Romano

Poster Rosa Redondo Buzón (Spain)

Poster Gerebenes Lencsi (Romania)
it comes to a new culture, or more correctly said cultures, and to Europe's largest ethnic minority’s socio-economic situation(s). At ERIO, I am broadening my knowledge on Roma, realizing how many issues and lack of efficient responses present in Hungary are shared by wider communities all around Europe. I am learning more about the difficulties faced by Roma at different stages of life, from the very beginning with territorial and school segregation, to exclusion from the labour market, housing, public services. Discrimination and stereotypes are accompanying Roma throughout their lives; I did not know that also their names, together with their skin colour, are visible markers affecting their chances to be hired, access proper health services, be chosen as tenants, be accepted as neighbours and equal citizens.

It is becoming clearer and clearer to me how all of these aspects are interrelated and how Roma people’s condition in Europe is in need of a multidimensional approach to produce concrete positive outcomes. I am becoming aware of the existence of many key projects in this field, covering various areas and topics. If while I was studying and writing my thesis I was just reading of their existence, now I am attending conferences and meeting people having run or still running projects. I have been also asked to work on some tasks related to a project developing a police course on hate crime and sensitizing on minority cultures. I am having the chance to explore in practice what I based my thesis on and I feel really lucky and excited for this. I feel also inspired by the motivation people fighting for minority and human rights have. I have heard some strong speeches coming from personalities having the power to make sure the voice of Roma will be heard. I hope these words will be transposed in working measures.

What I have learnt is that unfortunately, a great number of projects are held in parallel to the states’ programmes and initiatives, failing in producing long-lasting effects where they are carried out. I have also noticed the too small presence of Roma in the events urging their participation and involvement in the changes to be done. Being in touch with the EU institutions is a whole new experience for me; I am looking forward to getting more knowledge also on how NGOs advocate and lobby.

I would recommend this internship for many reasons; it will give you the opportunity to practice and acquire various different skills, to put yourself out there and learn more about minority issues, the contrast between the grassroots and the political level responses and about yourself, your abilities and limits and your future aspirations.