



Amalipe Newsletter

Issue #2, 2008

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Delay of technical supplies and miss-communication with Ministry of Health Care disturb seriously a Phare project

The Steering Committee of multiannual Phare program approved the first quarterly report about the implementation of “**Health Promotion & Preventive Maternal and Child Health Care**” - Europeaid/122909/D/SER, BG project. This happened during the

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Steering Committee session on February 26. The project is implemented by Consortium led by Open Society Institute – Sofia with ICON Institute – Germany,

FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE

The delegated school budgets and the education of Roma children

It is clear already what will define the main trends in the education of Roma children and the educational integration in Bulgaria during 2008 and the next several years. It will be neither the Strategy for Educational Integration approved by the Ministry of Education in 2004 nor the Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion approved by the Council of Ministers in 2005; it won't be the efforts of Roma Educational Fund and OSI to promote desegregation of the so-called “Gipsy” schools situated in the biggest towns; it won't be the efforts of Roma NGOs to apply intercultural education. The education of Roma children and the educational integration will depend on the introduction of the so-called “delegated school budgets”.

The Decision of Council of Ministers 20/21.01.2008 and the Instruction of Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Finance from February 8, 2008 accomplish the normative basis for applying the system of the delegated budgets for all school in Bulgaria. The process has begun with the National Program for Development of School Education and with the Law for the National Budget 2008 (art. 70-72).

The system of the delegated school budgets is based on defining the so-called “unified expense standard”, i.e. annual allowance for the education of one student that includes all possible expenses and is not divided into type of expenses. This means that the annual allowance should cover teachers' salaries, maintenance of school buildings, utility expenses study-halls (the so-called zanimalni), lessons in free-elective subjects, salaries for non-pedagogical staff, and so on. The budget of every school is compiled only on the basis of the

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The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCCEDI) at the Council of Ministers announced its new members for 2008 with an order R-14/07.02.2008 of the Chair of NCCEDI and Vice-Prime-Minister Mrs. Emel Etem from 07.02.2008, the new members of the Council were approved. 47 NGOs are members of the Councils in 2008, 25 out of them are Roma organizations. Center "Amalipe" is one of the Roma NGOs approved for a NCCEDI member for 2008. The deadline for accepting of applications for membership was 15 January. The first session of NCCEDI this year is expected in March.

Regional network of NGOs was established on February 28th, 2008 in Kyustendil. The network is called L.A.R.G.O (Liberal alternative for development of civil society.)

Major focus in the work of the network with the health and social status of Romani women in Bulgaria; empowerment of Romani women and their participation in all spheres of public life. An Administrative and consultative center in Iztok neighbourhood in Kyustendil was opened together with the establishment of the network. The Center is financed by the Public Health Program of Open Society Institute – Budapest. Maria Metodieva, Director of Roma program (Open Society Institute – Sofia), Teodora Krumova (Center Amalipe) and Milena Ilieva (World without borders and Integro Association) were present at the opening.

The intensive journalist course for young Roma starts for fourth time. It is organized by Access foundation - Sofia. Due to the limited financing only six Roma will be enrolled in the course this year. The training will take part in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The participants will have lectures within a three-month program which will be followed by a two-month practice.

The Stagiare Program for Roma youths in Bulgarian Parliament organized by the National Democratic Institute – Bulgaria and by the Roma Program of Open Society Institute – Sofia has started for a third year. More than 70 young Roma activists applied to the Program. Ten of them have been selected. Their practice has started on March 5th. Visiting the Parliament once a week in a period of 8 weeks and taking part in the work of the Parliamentary Commissions form the core of the Stagiare Program.

During the first visit in the Parliament the participants were welcomed by Mr. Philip Dimitrov, ex-Prime-minister and Deputy-chair of the Parliament at present. Mr. Dimitrov expressed his satisfaction that he had the opportunity for third time to supervise the Program as a mentor. He hold a short speech about the main values of democracy and about the core competencies of Bulgarian Parliament as legislative power.

The participants expressed their willingness to participate in the work of different parliamentary commissions. High interest was expressed for the work of the Education and Science Commission and of the Citizen's Complaints and Petitions Commission. The participants will also observe a plenary session as well as a parliamentary control session as part of the Program.

Maria Metodieva, director of Roma Program of OSI - Sofia, explained that within the frames of the Program meetings with popular Roma politics as well as with experts who worked on Roma issues in different institutions would be organized. „We hope that in the end of this program you will already produce results” Mrs. Sevdalina Voynova, director of NDI-Bulgaria told to the participants. Atanas Stoyanov, one of Amalipe's staff members was approved for the Stagiare Program. He will take part in the work of the Parliamentary Commission on Education and Science.

On February 15 the Parliamentarian Commission on Education and Science approved the draft Law for the modification of the Public Education Act.

Statements facilitating the school-leaving examinations, the introduction of the delegated school budgets and establishment of the so-called "protected schools" are the main accent in the Draft law. During the discussion the Minister on Education announced that in three months completely new Public Education Act would be prepared.

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DELAY OF TECHNICAL SUPPLIES ...

TEODORA KRUMOVA PARTICIPATED IN A MEETING WITH THE COMMISSIONER ON HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Teodora Krumova, Deputy Chair of Center Amalipe, took part in a meeting with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Thomas Hammarberg. The meeting took place in the Information

Center of the Council of Europe in Sofia on February 14, 2008. Representatives of several human rights organizations and organizations working on minority and Roma issues took part in it: Center Amalipe, ARK – Bulgaria, Bulgarian Lawyers for Human Rights, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Romani Baht Foundation, International Social Services, Justice Federation and Center for Independent life.

One of the key issues raised at the meeting were the problems of Roma in Bulgaria still pending: evictions, discrimination, the impact of the changes in the Law for Social benefits. Some of the most serious problems regarding Roma however still are the problems of education: the existence of segregated schools, the enrollment of Roma children without disabilities in the schools for mentally retarded children, often with the support of the regional structures of the Ministry of Education. Teodora Krumova pointed that at the moment the Ministry of Education is in the process of elaborating a new Public Education Act which would negatively affect the Roma educational integration. She appealed the draft of the Act to be put a subject of a broad public discussion. Mihail Georgiev from Romani Baht Foundation stressed that the Ministry of Education should develop a straightforward policy for introducing Romani mother tongue languages.

A focus of the discussion was also the fate of children in institutions. Vessela Banova underlined that the present deinstitutionalization policy is practically a policy of re-institutionalization. Laura Parker from ARK – Bulgaria added that unfortunately the institutions in Bulgaria still try to find rather technocratic solution of these problems instead of attacking the core reason which sometimes is that human rights violation is still not treated as a problem in Bulgaria. The people with disabilities face similar problems.

At the end of the meeting Mr. Hammarberg stressed that it was not by accident that his two-day visit in Bulgaria started with a meeting with NGOs. Now he would be prepared what questions to pose to the Bulgarian institutions in order to foster them to take the political responsibility regarding the vulnerable groups in Bulgaria.

Bulgarian Association for Family Planning and Ethnic Minorities Health Problems Foundation as partners. The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues acts as Project Implementation Unite. Prof. Tarnev – Team leader of the project – presented the activities implemented during the first three months: appointing 25 non-key experts and holding regional meetings with public officials and Roma activists in all project regions. He emphasized the active behaviour of the Consultant in searching cooperation of local Roma NGOs and experts and their inclusion in the project implementation: 5 Roma are included as short-term experts; local committees with participation of Roma activists are formed in every project region for monitoring and steering the project implementation, and so on.

Mr. Tarnev pointed the delay of technical supplies that has crucial importance for the ... implementation of almost all project activities and the lack of communication with Ministry of Health Care as main problems that disturb the fluent project implementation. The mobile technique should be supplied before the project beginning according to a tender organized by Central Financing and Contracting Unite within the Ministry of Finance. The most optimistic expectations now are that it would be supplied in August. At the same time the project should end in November. This makes the efficient implementation of the core project activities impossible, Prof. Tarnev explained.

The communication between Consultant and Ministry of Health Care deteriorated after December 2007 when the Ministry prepare indicative list of municipalities in which “health care mediators” would be financed during 2008. This list missed municipalities with significant concentration of Roma and with Roma health care mediators trained within previous Phare projects (such as Lom, Valchidrum, etc.). They had been replaced by

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municipalities without trained health-care mediators and without Roma population (such as Djebel, etc.). After this list was prepared in December 2007 the Consortium reacted sharply asking for support Roma NGOs as well as the Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Mr. Baki Huseinov and managed to turn the “Roma” municipalities back to the list.

The representatives of Roma NGOs members of the Steering Committee raised several questions. George Bogdanov advised the Consortium to prepare request for extension of the project implementation. Representatives of Ministry of Finance replied that this would depend on the European Commission and that the probability for such an agreement is not high. Deyan Kolev raised the question about the future of the expensive mobile technique after the project end about the guarantees that it would not be taken in other regions (with less Roma population) or in the capital. It was replied that this is completely possible and only the minister of health care decides the future of the technique supplied after the project end. The Steering Committee decided to ask Minister Gaidarski to explain his plans about the future of this technique. Deyan Kolev also raised the question how could be avoided problems with defining municipalities for financing health-care mediators by Ministry of Health Care in December 2008. Answering the question Prof. Tarnev pointed the participation of the National Association of Health-care Mediators and Roma NGOs in the working group within the Ministry of Health Care that will prepare the list for 2009 as possible guarantee.

Roma folklore groups will be formed in the schools. Boyan Zahariev expressed his agreement with these suggestions.

Deyan Kolev expressed doubts about the efficiency of the way Ministry of Education and Science had chosen the municipalities to be included in the project. According to him this happened without following inner logic and without asking the municipalities and the school principals for their agreement. This could create serious problems if school principals feel themselves “obligated” to implement a project in which they do not want to participate. It is necessary to follow the opposite approach during the next Phare projects: to rely on the desire of teachers and school principals to take part in the project, explained Devan Kolev

ROMA REPRESENTATIVES REQUIRED BROADER ROMA PARTICIPATION IN PHARE PROJECTS FOR EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION



During the same meeting the Steering committee approved also the first quarterly report about the implementation of “Beyond the differences – Improvement of the

the situation and inclusion of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with a special focus on Roma – Component Education” project EuropeAid/ 122908/ D/ SER/ BG. The project is implemented by Consortium led by GET German Education and Training GmbH in partnership with Open Society Institute – Sofia.

Boyan Zahariev from OSI – Sofia presented the main activities implemented during the first three months explaining, mainly preparatory ones. The implementation of the core project activities – such as training of 310 teachers to work in multiethnic environment, free preparatory courses for Roma secondary school graduates to become university students, training of administration and police to work with Roma, and so on – will start during the next three months.

The representatives of Roma NGOs – members of the Steering Committee raised several recommendations. Petar Georgiev and George Bogdanov raised the question for subcontracting Roma NGOs in the project implementation and for appointing Roma experts in the project team. Boyan Zahariev agreed with these suggestions but explained that the Terms of Reference did not leave a space for subcontracting NGOs that was a weakness and should be changed for the next ToRs.

Deyan Kolev expressed his concern that Roma community and the local communities were left unengaged with the project implementation. He proposed establishment of Roma public (consultative) council as well as local councils in the project regions as form (although limited in its essence) for empowerment. He also proposed the project to be advertised in the Roma media and in the educational media (Az Buki Newspaper and Uchitelsklo delo Newspaper). Another concern expressed was about the teacher training. It is necessary to find proper and sustainable mechanisms for engaging the teachers trained in activities for applying intercultural education. He proposed the Consultant (and MoE) to prepare contracts with the principals of all schools in which the project will be implemented for applying various forms for intercultural education.



ROMA ACTIVISTS FROM VELIKO TURNOVO REGION MET THE POLICY OFFICER OF THE U.S. EMBASSY

On February 20 and 21 Mrs Joslyn Mack Wilson, Policy Officer of U.S.Embassy visited Veliko Turnovo together with Mrs Radostina Mihalkova. Within the frames of their visit Mrs. Mack Wilson and Mrs. Mihalkova had three meetings organized by Center "Amalipe"

The Policy Officer of U.S. Embassy in Sofia Ms. Joslyn Mack Wilson took part in a discussion of Roma activists from Veliko Turnovo region. The meeting was organized by Center Amalipe on February 20 in Veliko Turnovo Municipality Hall. More than 20 Roma activists (city councilors, village mayors, civil servants and businessmen) discussed the main problems before the integration of Roma in the municipalities in Veliko Turnovo region, the necessary measures at local and national levels, the new draft versions of the Framework Program for Roma Integration and of the Public Education Act.

The participants required flexible mechanisms for life-long learning that would allow Roma without primary and secondary degree to obtain them together with professional qualification as well as mechanisms for legitimation of professional skills acquired outside of the school system. They appealed also for special measures for preserving the schools in rural areas which would be threatened after the introducing of the so-called "delegated school budgets". Antoaneta Todorova – mayor of Vodoley village (Veliko Turnovo Municipality) – outlined that there was a need for preserving the village schools but there was also a need for diversifying the teaching process and for making it more interesting, modern and closer to the culture of all ethnic groups. According to her Roma folklore classes and extraclass activities connected with them appeared as good solutions in this direction but they would be left out because of the delegated budgets. She also raised the question about the prejudices against Roma shared by many teachers and explained that the school often formed a feeling for being inferior among Roma children.

Strong prejudices against Roma shared by many employers and lack of professional degree and motivation among many unemployed Roma were defined as major problems in the field of employment and social integration. Ivanka Ivanova – mayor of Vinograd – insisted that more than 20 Roma youngsters with secondary degree were unemployed in her village and that Roma issue was not only educational and social issues but



also ethnic one.

Participants raised the question about the opportunities for engagement of Roma youth from the rural areas with public and cultural activities. Mita Hristova from Zlataritzta raised the question about the non-implementation of the Strategies for Roma Integration approved by different Municipal City Councils. Julian Nikolov – Deputy Chair of Strajitzta City Council – explained that these documents have real implementation if the Roma community is active and if Roma take part in the local government. As an example for engaging Roma at all levels of the municipal strategy implementation he provided the common initiative of Strajitzta Municipality and Center "Amalipe" for assigning Roma mediators within the frames of "From social benefits to employment" program of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The initiative has started with 2 people in 2007 and now it includes 10 Roma mediators who work in all villages in Strajitzta municipality. They have special agenda, collect information about the educational, social, health and living status of Roma families, assist schools, social and health services to reach Roma and provide municipal administration with ideas for projects. "In some other municipalities Roma mediators are used as cleaners but in our villages they are real deputy mayors" – explained Mr. Ivanov.

The participants prepared a list with suggestions for the new Framework Program and of the new Public Education Act. They mandated Center Amalipe to present and advocate for them. Ms. Mack Wilson expressed her satisfaction from the meeting as well as the support of the U.S.Embassy

**ROMA-AMERICAN
MARTENITZA**

At the end of the meetings organized by Center Amalipe Joslyn Mack Wilson met the Roma children leaving in the ghetto on Aleko Konstantinov Str. In Veliko Turnovo who keep successfully integrating in the mainstream schools of the city. Center Amalipe together with the Center for Social Rehabilitation and Integration has been working with the children on weekly basis for more than two years. Ms. Mack Wilson joined the children in preparing martenitsa (an old Bulgarian symbol of health and happiness given to friends on March 1st). The children shared with her what stands behind this old Bulgarian custom and what its symbolic was. "I am surprised that these kids used to visit a special school, they have no mental disabilities – Ms. Mack Wilson shared. The kids are great. And now I already have three martenitsa I made myself".

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number of students who attend the given school not taking into account any other factors; the opportunities of municipalities (that are owners of the schools) to support the schools with fewer number of students distributing amounts from the schools with higher number of students decrease to minimum.

According to the scheme for the delegated budgets the municipalities should distribute among the schools at least 80 % of the amounts for education following the principle "number of students in a certain school". The other 20 % (at most) should be distributed by the municipalities among the schools answering additional criteria that reflect the local specifics and the municipal policy for education: such as distance from the municipal center, and so on. The "unified expense standard" for 2008 differs in 4 types of municipalities; the average case (the so-called "group 2") is 1051 BGN (nearly 540 euro) for a student.

The delegated budgets introduction is part of the real start of the long postponed structural reform of Bulgarian educational system. This step will have four important consequences for the overall educational system. First, the school principals will be fostered to become managers. Receiving strictly defined annual amount that is not divided into types of expenses, the school principal will have the opportunity to prioritize the activities to be backed up, s/he will have the real stimula to search for sponsors and partners, to establish public-private partnerships, to work for attracting more children in the school, and so on. The management skills

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of the school principal will define the survival and the future of the certain school. Unfortunately, this could manage the existence of many schools since most of the school principals in Bulgaria now do not have such skills and have never been trained in them.

Second, the system of delegated budgets will affect seriously the small schools, especially in the rural areas, and it will lead to the closing of many of them. Rough calculations show that for the normal existence of a school 250 000 BGN (i.e. 250 students) per year are necessary. Because of demographic reasons the vast majority of village schools do not have this number of pupils. Up to now most of the municipalities used the opportunity to re-allocate funds and to finance additionally the schools in their villages because they realised the importance of their existence not only for the education of the children who lived in the village but also for the existence of the village itself. The delegated budgets eliminate this opportunity and will push the municipalities to close most of their village schools – from September 2008 or at last from September 2009. The other way is to preserve the school but with formal and poor educational process in them: low paid and not-motivated teachers, absence of groups for study-halls and lessons in free-elective subjects, and so on. Most probably many municipalities will apply the second option and will try to

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preserve their schools but the shortage of money will destroy completely the quality of education in them that is far from sufficient even now.

Third, the delegated budgets will strengthen the elite schools with big number of students, situated in the biggest cities: they will receive bigger budgets, their principals are much advanced in terms of managing skills and this will help them to meet the challenges of the structural reform, etc. I.e. the delegated budgets means less financing for the poorer and less populated schools and more financing for the richer and more populated schools.

Fourth, the delegated budgets will affect in a significant degree the quality of educational process unless special measures for providing this quality are initiated. It is possible many school principals to give up all free-elective classes and all study-hall groups in order to save money although it is clear that these are the lessons that make the school process interesting and their impact on children's education is obvious. It is possible many school principals to expand the teacher horarium¹ in order to save money which means that teachers will have more lessons for the same payment. This will make the teachers unmotivated. If additional measures are not initiated now, the structural reform would deteriorate the quality of education although its long-term positive impact on the quality of education is obvious.

Affecting the overall educational system, the delegated budgets will have many consequences for the education of Roma children and for the educational integration as a whole. First, the closing of many village schools will decrease sharply the educational level of rural Roma that is too low even now. Vast part of Roma children from villages with closed schools would not continue their education in another settlement because of cultural and social reasons even if free bus transportation is provided. The culturally determined frustration of many Roma parents to allow their children (especially their girls) to attend a school in another village or town could seem unserious in the eyes of public officials who have no knowledge about Roma culture. But this frustration is real and it would lead to many drop-outs among Roma children from the rural areas. There is also a serious problem with the parents whose children study in the accepting schools (the so-called "focal point schools"): the latter are not



ready to accept the Roma children. At this stage no one envisages serious work with parents (both in villages with closed schools and in the focal point schools) in order to make them prepared for the change. And no one envisages funds for such a work.

Second, the delegated budgets will strengthen the segregated "Gipsy" schools situated in the Roma ghettos in the biggest Bulgarian towns and will completely enervate the weak efforts for desegregation. Since the segregated schools have big number of students (some of them are the biggest schools in the country in terms of number of students) they will receive the biggest subsidy although (this is a public secret) the quality of education in them often is questionable. At this stage the structural reform is based only on the number of students and does not take into account the quality of the pedagogical work; the desegregation of the ethnically segregated schools is not part of the structural reform.

Third, the delegated budgets could lead to full disband of all existing forms of intercultural education and in this way to leave Roma children without any opportunity to learn about themselves at school. Up to now "Folklore of the ethnoi – Roma folklore" and "Mother Romani tongue" are taught as free-elective subjects. The interest for some of them is huge and growing: for example "Folklore of the ethnoi – Roma folklore" is studied in more than 200 schools. Since the delegated budgets will decrease sharply all free-elective lessons (see above) it is normal to expect that they will decrease sharply the free-elective lessons in intercultural education although the interest of children and parents is huge and the need of them is obvious.

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COMMENTS:

The reforms in Bulgarian society since 1990 up to now occurred as a rule on the expenses of the poorest and most marginalized parts of the population; they hardly affected Roma. Is it possible this scheme to be changed now when the real reform in the education system is about to start? What is the winning strategy for us, the Roma activists and for the Roma community as a whole to avoid the manace the structural reform in the education to worsen the level of education of Roma that is too low even now? What should we do in order to make the reform supportive and not destructive for the Roma educational integration?

First, it would be a mistake to criticize the introduction of the delegated budgets as a whole and to require their abolishment. From one side such a requirement is unrealistic and would be waste of efforts. From the other side, the reform in Bulgarian education is undisputably necessary and the delegated budgets are part of this reform. In mid-term and long-term perspective the reform will result in raising the quality of education and will favour all Bulgarian citizens, including Roma. The problems appear now, in short-term perspective and they are linked not with the delegated budgets themselves but with the way they will be introduced. The low level of the “unified expense standard”, the unpreparedness of many schools and especially the lack of additional mechanisms for supporting and guaranteeing the most vulnerable schools and the quality of educational process in them and others form the main short-term problems. The winning strategy is not to attack the educational reform itself but to advocate for its enrichment and complementation with additional mechanisms that will guarantee that the reform would support the Roma educational integration.

Second, Roma activists, together with teachers, school principals, trade-unions, municipal officials and representatives of the Ministry of Education and its regional structures should prepare clear criteria for distinguishing between village schools that could not be preserved and maintained schools that could be preserved. The issue of closing a school is always painful; it often means closing the village itself. But it is clear that there are schools that can not be maintained because the number of students in them is too small and the quality of education is too low. It is difficult to have a quality education in schools with 30-40 students and they should be closed despite the sentiments. At the same time there are village schools with more children, with

good level of educational process and with the real perspective – because of demographic reasons – to grow up and to have more pupils during the forthcoming years. Obviously these schools could and should receive special support in order to be strategically preserved. It is necessary both types of schools to be differentiated on the basis of clear criteria. After this, serious work with the parents from the first group of schools (that can not be preserved) is necessary in order to convince them that their childrens’ education in another settlement is necessary and they should support it. Serious work for raising the quality of education in the second group of village schools (that can be preserved) is necessary as well.

Increasing the amount of the “unified expense standard” is good mechanism for distinguishing both types of schools. The present amount of around 1051 BGN is unrealistically low and will bring to the abolishment of almost all village schools. Advocacy efforts for negotiating new amount of at least 1300 BGN are necessary. Such an amount will show which schools could survive in a natural way in the rural areas.

It is necessary also to make the criteria for defining the so-called “protected schools” more precise.² The idea of the Ministry of Education to provide certain schools that can not be completely maintained but that can not be integrated in focal-point schools because of geographic reasons with “protected” status should be wellcomed. At the same time advocacy efforts for incorporating more factors (including culturally and ethnic sensitive factors) in the criteria for proclaiming a school for “protected” are necessary. In this way – as a temporary step – many village schools with Roma students could be saved. Meanwhile a serious work with Roma and non-Roma parents to convince them that schooling in another settlement is necessary should be carried out.

Third, the Roma activists could do their best to convince the Ministry of Education to include mechanisms that bind structural reform in education with the educational integration of Roma children. Roma activists should prepare such mechanisms – together with all other stakeholders – and to negotiate with the Ministry of education about their approval. The incorporation of “work for integration of Roma children” as additional component in the formula for distributing the subsidy for the schools provided by the municipalities within the “unified expense standard” is a good example for such a mechanism. The Instructions of the Ministry of Education

¹ According to Bulgarian legislation Ministry of Education defines the horarium-minimum. The horarium-maximum is defined by the school principal

SCHOOL



DISCUSSION ON ROMA EDUCATION

School principals, teachers and municipal officials from Veliko Turnovo and Gorna Oryahovitz discussed the current problems and challenges before the education of Roma children after the introducing of the so-called “delegated school budgets”. The meeting was organized by Center “Amalipe” on February 20. It was attended by Ms. Joslyn Mack Wilson, Policy Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Sofia.

The delegated school budgets with the present financial amounts for maintenance allocated for one pupil combined with the expected transformation of the 8th grade into the secondary schools will deteriorate significantly the quality of education of Roma children in both municipalities – all participants declared. This would make the municipal administrations to close almost all village schools from September 2008 and many Roma kids would not continue their education although free bus transportation would be provided. No elective subjects and study-hall activities would be maintained and many teachers would be left jobless. This will deteriorate significantly the quality of education.

The participants explained that these problems will affect negatively Roma educational integration. They outlined that most of the useful tools for making the school process interesting for the students and for raising the quality of education for Roma pupils would be abandoned: Roma folklore elective classes, study-hall activities, Roma teaching assistants, etc.

The participants agreed that an educational reform is necessary but certain additional efforts should be undertaken to guarantee that the reform would not deteriorate the educational integration and the quality of education of Roma pupils. Programs for work with parents and for additional support of intercultural education were pointed as possible solutions.

FOCUS

Center Amalipe

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from February 8 allows the incorporation of additional component “work with students from the ethnic minorities” and many municipalities now use it in order to reallocate more funds for the village schools that integrate Roma students. In this respect, serious work should be done in two direction. From one side the component should be “integration of Roma students” and not just “work with Roma students” to insist that additional amount is provided for the integration of Roma kids in ethnically mixed city schools and in village schools in the way envisaged by the Strategy for Educational Integration approved by the Ministry of Education in 2004. If the component is just “work with Roma students” it would stigmatize the Roma children as children with special educational needs (i.e. children with mental disabilities) and would support additionally the segregated “Gipsy” schools. From the other side, work for introduction of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the way schools spend the additional amounts for Roma integration is necessary.

Fourth, advocacy efforts for convincing the Ministry of Education to establish National program for support of intercultural education (similar to the other national programs steered by the Ministry) should be carried out. The schools could finance their free-elective subjects in intercultural education as well as similar activities within this Program. The same Program could finance also work with Roma parents in settlements with schools that should be closed as well as work with parents in the accepting schools. Such a Program will not duplicate the work of the Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities since the last is established as a structure for raising funds from foreign donors. A National program for support of intercultural education could be financed by the state budget as well as by Human Resources Development Operational Program in which intercultural education is priority.

These four directions for advocacy work are not the only possible: they could be complemented with many others proposed by all Roma and non-Roma NGOs that work for Roma educational integration. But it is necessary urgent actions to be initiated since the start of the structural reform is a fact now and its outcomes for the Roma educational integration (if no additional mechanisms are incorporated) seem disturbing.



DANCE WITH ME !

A casting for young talents took part in the village of Kamen, Veliko Tarnovo region. The possibility to go there and to show your dancing and singing skills took up 200 children and young people. The competition was called "Sing with me!" and "Dance with me!". From the early morning the local chitalishte was full of children of different age groups.

"The idea is to make the children feel like at a real professional casting; to make them believe they are important and talented" said the main organizer of the casting Atanas Stoyanov from Roma Youth Club "Vrastiri" – Kamen. Professional jury was provided for the children. "My daughter is very glad that she has been chosen at the casting. Yesterday she slept with the number you gave her!" one of the mothers shared.

15 children to participate in the new dance group and to make rehearsals every week with a professional choreographer were chosen at the end of the casting. The first dance was decided to be on Indian thematic.

The casting was organized with the cooperation of Center Amalipe and the financial support of project "Empowerment of the powerless" of Open Society Institute – Sofia.



Veliko Tarnovo municipality, the old Bulgarian capital. The event was opened by Mrs Rossitsa Dimitrova, Director of "Socials activities" directorate and D-r Ivo Naydenov, Deputy- mayor of Veliko Tarnovo municipality. The exhibition was prepared by socials workers, psychologists, pedagogues and volunteers from both centers. The charity campaign included hand-made souvenirs such as hearts, clay objects, tiny paper skillful souvenirs with funny and amusing wishes for love and friendships .Organizers' idea was not only to show creativity and creative objects; one of the goals of the campaign was also to accumulate resource about the children and the young people the organizations work with.

BRIGHT RUG

2 FEBRUARY: ROOSTER'S DAY



Ihtimya, or Bashnuv Day (Rooster's Day) is celebrated by *Drandari* Roma (musicians). Ihtimya is celebrated on February 2nd. Ihtimya is celebrated as the Boy's Day. The feast is completely deprived of any religious decoration, and if there is any, it is implicit. The core of the feast is the slaughtering of a rooster for the health of the boy in the

house. A separate rooster is slaughtered for each boy in the house. A dot is made on the boy's forehead with the rooster's blood. The head of the rooster is hanged on the door, "to remind that the rooster has saved the Romani lineage."



14 February...



The Center for social rehabilitation and integration together with Center Amalipe and other organizations were inspired to organize a charity exhibition in

CENTER FOR INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE „AMALIPE”

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