



Center Amalipe

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OBSERVER

SECOND MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR ROMA INCLUSION

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September 15th: A New Beginning

The second meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion took place in Brussels on September 28th. It was co-organized by the Swedish Presidency of the EU (under the patronage of the Swedish Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality) and the European Commission (DG Employment, Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination). The EU Commissioner for Education Jan Figel, the EU Commissioner for Employment Vladimir Spidla, MEPs, representatives of different EU institutions, national governments, international and national Roma

NGOs took part in the meeting.

Education of Roma was the main topic of the meeting. In his statement Commissioner Figel outlined that the educational problems faced by Roma were similar in all European countries: low enrollment in pre-school education, school

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BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT DISBANDED THE ETHNIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES DIRECTORATE

During its session on September 8 the Council of Ministers decided to transform the Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate. It will be replaced by a smaller structure as Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues. The other responsibilities of EDID will be transferred to the two existing directorates within the MLSP.

FOCUS OF THE ISSUE

A Roma Health Advocacy Training



A seven-day training with Roma medical students took place during the last warm autumn days. The training is a part of the bigger OSI/REF scholarship program for medical students of Roma origin. Center Amalipe and Diverse and Equal Associatio are partners of OSI – Sofia in implementing the program. Center Amalipe is responsible about implementing the advocacy component of the program. The training started from Veliko Turnovo and continued with field work in Sliven and Stara Zagora.

The intensive work of the training started immediately after the official opening honored by Milen Milanov (National coordinator of the Decade of Roma inclusion), Maria Metodieva (Director of OSI Roma program), etc. Within the following week the Roma students from the medical universities and colleges in Sofia, Stara Zagora, Vratsa and Pleven got more and more

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SECOND MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR ROMA INCLUSION

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segregation, and early school leaving (high percentage of Roma dropouts). Trust is the crucial ingredient of education: trust and confidence between parents and school, between parents from different ethnic groups, etc.; significant efforts for building trust are necessary, explained Commissioner Figel. He insisted that Roma educational integration should not be assimilation but closely linked with preserving Roma culture and identity. That is why intercultural education is crucial for integration.

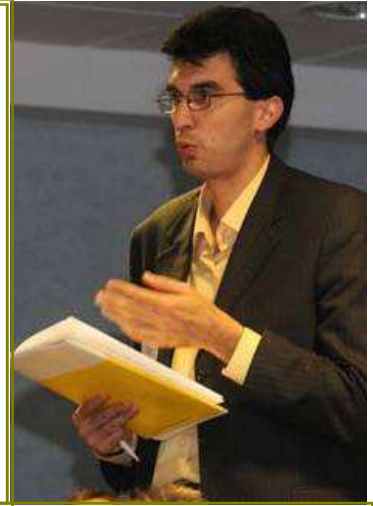
In his Closing statement Commissioner Spidla pointed that specific measures and approaches were necessary and they should aim at getting Roma into mainstream job, mainstream housing and mainstream education. We need both: a specific approach to overcome particular difficulties of very disadvantaged Roma communities and individuals – and a clear focus on providing them with access to the mainstream of our societies, Commissioner Spidla stressed. A holistic approach is necessary. This means that all actors – national governments, NGOs and Roma individuals themselves should be involved in designing and implementing Roma related policies. This also means that policies in the area of education can not be separated from those in employment, housing and social affairs. All these things are task of the national governments but European Commission would support their efforts through 4 means: political commitment and leadership, modern non-discrimination legislation, significant financial support through the Structural funds and analytical support in the development of evidence-based policies, Spidla explained.

Mihai Surdu (Roma Education Fund) presented the main problems Roma face in education and the accents in REF work. Andor Urmosh, Margareta Wiman and Letitia Mark showed good practices for Roma educational integration from Hungary, Sweden and Romania. The participants agreed on the necessity of comprehensive policy for overcoming segregation, improving access to education (decreasing dropout rate, enrolling in pre-school education, etc) and introducing intercultural education.

During the discussion certain disputable questions also appeared. Roma activists stated that the European platform for Roma inclusion in this shape (as a process of good practices exchange) could not contribute significantly for Roma inclusion. Stronger structure with its own secretariat, assigning Roma experts in it and incorporating national Roma organizations in the process are important necessary steps but the Commission does not undertake them at present, insisted Roma activists. These were also the main points in the Statement of the European Roma Policy Coalition distributed during the forum.

Bulgarian government did not send its representatives to the meeting.

Deyan Kolev, Amalipe chairman, was the only representative of national Roma NGO from Bulgaria (and one of the few representatives of national Roma NGOs). In his statement he insisted the necessity of introducing intercultural perspective in the educational systems of European countries. It is not enough only to think about facilitating access of Roma children to schools with good



education; it is necessary also to guarantee that school environment would change, accept and integrate Roma children together with the majority students. Intercultural education is the reliable basis for this process, Kolev pointed. He also stressed the necessity of introducing financial stimuli for the process of Roma educational integration and their institutionalization in the member-states of EU.

MILEN MILANOV IS THE NEW NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION

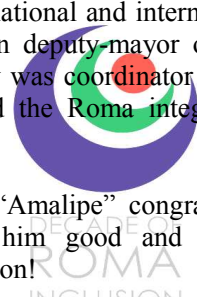


During its session on September 23rd the Council of Ministers appointed Milen Milanov for a new National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. According to the governmental decision he will have “representative, coordinating, organizational and controlling functions that require transparent implementation not only in

favor of Roma communities but also in favor of building modern society in Bulgaria”

Milen Milanov holds a BA in International Economic Relations. For several years he has been activist of Roma civic movement and has taken part in advocacy activities before national and international institutions. Since 2007 he has been deputy-mayor of Slatina region of Sofia. Milen Milanov was coordinator of the group of Roma NGOs that prepared the Roma integration platform of GERB ruling party.

Center “Amalipe” congratulates its long-term partner and wishes him good and hard work for fostering Roma integration!



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “HEALTH AND ROMA COMMUNITY”



International conference “Health and Roma community” took place in Madrid on October 1st and 2nd. It was organized by Fundacion Secretariado Gitano and the Spanish Ministry of Health. Governmental representatives of Spain, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, Roma activists and European Commission officials took part in it.

During the conference a special survey about the health status of Roma in the 7 countries mentioned above was presented. It has been carried out by Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, Roma organizations from each included country and prominent scholars. The survey is published into each of the national languages and its presentation in every country will be organized soon.

In Bulgaria the survey was implemented by Health of Roma Foundation – Sliven. The Bulgarian survey team includes Prof. Ilona Tomova, MD Stefan Panayotov, MD Jeliazgo Manolov, Gancho Iliev, etc. They took part in the conference together with representatives of Ministry of Health, Center “Amalipe” and other Roma NGOs.

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING “CONTRIBUTION OF EU FUNDS TO THE INTEGRATION OF ROMA”



High-level meeting “Contribution of EU funds to the integration of Roma” took place on October 13, 14 and 15 in Hungary. It was organized by DG Employment, Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination of the European Commission and the Government of Hungary. The meeting brought together representatives of European Commission, national governments of the member states and Roma NGOs. Bulgaria was represented by Valentina Simeonova (deputy minister of labour and social policy), Milen Milanov (national coordinator of the Decade of Roma inclusion), officials from the MLSP and Deyan Kolev (Center “Amalipe”)

THE CONFERENCE IN BUDAPEST

The conference in Budapest

There is no doubt that Roma inclusion is one of the major tasks and it is of common interest of Roma and non-Roma citizens, Lazslo Solyom, the President of Hungary said in his opening statement. Roma want their integration as well as they want to preserve and further

develop their culture and identity and this should be respected. Until now the efforts for Roma integration have not achieved their intended results. One of the main reasons for this was that one and the same approach has been applied to diverse groups that have different needs. It is clear that integration could not happen without desegregation in all fields, without better education and employment and this should be realized through diverse ways and measures. We need funds but we also need charismatic persons to manage them and effective institutions – Solyom explained.

The situation of Roma is desperate and many plans have failed – Vladimir Spidla, EU Commissioner on Employment, Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination, stated. The European Union could not solve this problem alone. The Union will help the efforts of the national governments through political engagement, anti-discrimination legislation, analytical support and financial support through EU funds. The European Social Fund, the European Fund for Regional Development and the Rural Development Fund will support efforts for Roma inclusion in important fields such as: education, employment and residential support (housing and infrastructure). Multiple projects that cover these fields are necessary. To use EU funds for Roma – this is an imperative! Roma integration is for the entire society, it is not an issue of cost but of benefit – Spidla said.

Deep poverty is not a Roma matter and Roma question is not only a poverty question – Livia Jaroka, the only Roma MEP, stated. The situation with Roma integration is desperate in many small villages where schools have been closed, the institutions do not function and the infrastructure is missing. Unfortunately, the European funds seldom reach these villages. From the other side people from the poorest micro-regions (both institutions and Roma NGOs) lack

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING “CONTRIBUTION OF EU FUNDS TO THE INTEGRATION OF ROMA”



skills, staff and budget to handle EU projects. The EU monitoring system should be extended in order to cope with these problems. Mapping the most vulnerable micro-regions is necessary; special money for mapping should be included within the funds. Roma NGOs participation is of crucial importance, Jaroka insisted.

The Hungarian Minister for Social Affairs and Labor Laszlo Herszog, the Czech Minister for Human Rights Kosab Michael, MEPs, MPs, governmental officials and Roma NGO activists took part in the discussion. Good practices in the fields of education, employment, rural development, infrastructure and urban development were presented. The main problems in fund absorption were also discussed: delays in payment, complicated reporting requirements, complicated application procedure, lack of sustainability.

In his statement Deyan Kolev (Center Amalipe) pointed that under the conditions of economic crisis the national governments try to orient the EU funds mainly to preserving the jobs of employed people. The most vulnerable groups (and many Roma) fall aside the scope of EU funds in this way and their situation will deteriorate additionally. It is a time for European Commission to interfere and to pursue the national government to allocate EU funds for the inclusion of the most excluded groups – this is the long-term investment we need. Deyan Kolev also pointed that the operational programs should include vulnerable groups (and Roma) targeted measures.

VISIT IN PECS, MISKOLCS, DEBRECEN AND SZEGED

On October 14 and 15 the participants split into groups and visited Pecs, Miskolcs, Debrecen and Szeged to see on the field how EU funds help Roma integration. It was not a surprise that the picture in countryside appeared much different that the one in Budapest. Representatives of Roma self-government in Pecs assured that the EU funds had not changed the situation of Roma Usually

Roma are approached only as partners in different projects but this partnership is rather formal. Pecs municipality has approved an anti-segregation plan – this is a requirement for EU funds absorption in Hungary – but until now this document is just a paper tiger without implementation. The Roma self-government could not be a beneficiary of EU projects and meets permanent financial problems, explained Dr. Istvan Kosztics, President of Roma self-governance in Pecs. The discrepancy between expectations and real responsibilities is huge and until now EU funds are not used for overcoming this discrepancy – insisted Dr. Kosztics.

His words were fully proved during the visit in Gilvanfa, Ormansag micro-region. In this village populated 100 % by Roma from Beashi group the unemployment rate reaches 90 %. No EU project has been implemented there. The village mayor explained that this is because of lack of capacity for preparing EU applications and because municipalities (not villages!) are beneficiaries. “We do not have educated people, I graduated only primary school. The other villages have better links to municipality authorities and that is why the EU funds go only to the surrounding Hungarian-populated villages” – pointed the mayor.

An EU project has still not been implemented in the prominent Ghandy Secondary Grammar School. Perhaps this will change soon since the school have prepared and submitted an EU applications. Ghandy Gymnasium does not meet serious financial problems because it has many students and receive additional amount as minority school. The teachers (most of them - Roma) are highly motivated to fulfill their task, namely forming Roma elite. They are proud that 76 % of their graduated students are enrolled in Hungarian universities. “Most of the teachers have skills for preparing project applications and we did prepare our first EU application. It is for publishing school materials in Roma and Beashi languages. We expect the project approved until the end of this year” – explained the school master.



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A ROMA HEALTH ADVOCACY TRAINING



familiar with Roma culture and history, stereotypes about Roma and how one could face them and overcome them. They learned about the health legislation in Bulgaria and abroad, about the health problems of Roma in Bulgaria, what advocacy is and how they could be successful advocates for Roma health rights. The challenge for us, the organizers, however, was to awake their enthusiasm. Don't think that the participants brought this enthusiasm from their university environment or home places. Some of the young people arrived a little bit bored, a little bit annoyed: the school year had already started and they were supposed to waste a week from their lives to pass an advocacy training!!! And what does this "advocacy" means? Is it so important to leave your colleagues, family, children, work for a whole week!!! They did not understand either why the participation in the training was a requirement for participating in the scholarship program. And last but not least, is it necessary at all to announce loudly that they had been involved in a Roma scholarship program; would not this make their fellow colleagues isolate them for being Roma... So we had the difficult task to convince these young people that this would be a vivid and a reasonable week of their lives.

If you think that life for students nowadays is an endless party you won't be much wrong. But not really in the sense you would first think of. This group of young people has proved that studying and having fun could go hand in hand... but only if you know what you really



want and what your goals are. So you can turn everything into a pleasant event. We would not deny that the sense of humor never left sessions. The lecturers (Deyan Kolev and Teodora Krumova) took the participants through Roma history, Roma origin and all the legends and stories related to it. All the students actively participated in the discussion sharing about their own groups and cultural specifics. Finally they came up with the idea that no matter how different we were, we were all children of the same world. Nevertheless how beautifully all this sounds reality is sometimes a little bit different. And although the general rules of democracy are nicely written on paper, everyday life shows us another side. Therefore, we devoted special sessions where the students could share their fears. In regard to this one of the participants, Sabi Nikolov, shared: "You know, a Roma turns into a Gypsy once s/he gets out of the room." It turned out however that this hidden (ad not always hidden) racism in the academic health field could only additionally stimulate the students. In this sense the training aimed at first, developing leadership skills and second, training the students to be good Roma health advocates.



The first part of the training focused on topics such as identity and ethnic self-identification. The students were provoked to think who they were and how they could stand up for their individuality. The second modul of the training addressed the problems of Roma health issues, conflict management, Roma health rights with the help of prof. Tanya Dronzina, Daniela Mihaylova, Gancho Iliev, Milena Ilieva and Prof. Shosheva.

A number of interactive games accompanied the lectures. They made us think about and better see the other people around us. Within a week the students planned together campaigns, learned how to manage conflicts, found decisions for different problematic situations, discovered how they could use the opportunities of internet and modern technologies to fill

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SEVEN PROJECT PROPOSALS WITHIN THE PROGRAM FOR RURAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT

the niche provided by the virtual space in order to build a more positive public image of Roma. All these things have turned the students who had not known each other before not just into a united team but into a team of friends who clearly realize that they could make a change only if they are together. Funny and amusing events followed the lectures including walks to the vicinities around: the Monastery of St. Peter and Paul, Arbanasi, the medieval fortress of Tsarevets at Veliko Turnovo, the old capital of the second Bulgarian Kingdom, and last but not least a dinner in an almost medieval restaurant. The icing of the cake however was the evening before leaving to Sliven and Stara Zagora when the boys in our team decided to make a fabulous dinner. Leaving aside all courtesy we must frankly and warmly thank our splendid cooks Marin and Sabi. After Veliko Turnovo where the students found so many new things about themselves and their fellows, all

the group left to Sliven and Stara Zagora where they experienced the harshness of their future work on the field. For two days the young people worked in the Roma neighbourhoods in Sliven and Stara Zagora facing all the positive and negative sides of this work.



The best evaluation of our work during this one week however came from the words of the students themselves at the end of the training: "When I first came here I had been so much worried that I would have trouble when my university colleagues understood about my Roma origin; now I am not afraid any more: I just want to help with whatever I could. Finally I am Roma and I should not hide it. I did not use to tell it before. I simply did not dare to stand up in front of the people and openly say I was Roma; because I knew I was alone. Now it has changed. After I have understood about you and I have been part of this training I will do my best to defend as much people as possible." – one of the participants shared. "I've never been ashamed for being Roma – another participant shared. – However, now I can proudly say this because now I know where we come from and what we Roma are."

GOOD LUCK!

Seven project proposals within the Program for Rural Areas Development (measure "Acquiring skills and raising public awareness for potential Local initiative groups in the rural areas" were consulted by PLATFORM project. These proposals are submitted by municipalities with high percentage of Roma population. They include not only the activities required by Ministry of Agriculture but also activities for raising the awareness of local Roma communities. Roma experts will be further included as key experts.

Overall 157532 people live in the seven consulted municipalities; 25287 of them (more than 16 %) are Roma according to the census from 2001. The real number of Roma in the consulted municipalities exceeds 40 000 according to expert estimations.

The measure "Acquiring skills and raising public awareness for potential Local initiative groups in the rural areas" aims at establishing and registering Local Initiative Groups (LIG) within the LEADER approach of the Program for Rural Areas Development. LIG is form of public-private partnership among municipal administration, local business and NGOs in certain municipality (or group of municipalities). The registered LIGs will prepare their own strategies for local development that will be backed up with 2 million euro by the Program for Rural Areas Development. These strategies should improve the quality of life in rural areas.

Within the previous call Ministry of Agriculture approved projects for establishing 70 LIGs. None of them contained activities for raising the awareness of local Roma communities and no expert from Roma origin was included as key expert in them. Having in mind the importance of Roma participation and NGO participation in LIG formation and preparing strategies for local development the Steering Committee of PLATFORM project decided to support 6 key municipalities within the present call for proposals.

As partner within PLATFORM project Center Amalipe took active part in motivating and consulting two municipalities; Amalipe experts will be included as key experts if the projects are approved by Ministry of Agriculture.

The project "Platform for Project Generation "Structural Funds as Mean for Equal Integration of Roma" (PLATFORM) is coordinated by a Consortium with leading organization OSI – Sofia. Center "Amalipe", is one of the partners. The overall project objective is to support NGOs, municipalities and other institutions to prepare projects for Roma integration financed by EU funds and state budget. The project is financed by Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (LGI) at Open Society Institute – Budanest.



**TRAINING OF TEACHERS OF
ROMA FOLKLORE AND CULTURE CLASSES**



Center Amalipe organized a training for teachers of Roma folklore and culture classes from October 31st to November 2nd. The training was financed by America for Bulgaria Foundation. Around 40 teachers from more than 20 schools took part in the training. Within the three days together the participants got acquainted with Roma culture

include children of different ethnic background. This is the only way to teach tolerance. As usual the training combined a lot of interactive techniques, team work, and team building exercises.

Besides the work the training did not lack fun: there was a lot of dancing in the evenings, visiting the historical sites around, and so on. Just before leaving one of our participants, Luis Ayetola, a teacher in English and French in Omurtag shared: "You do not even know how much you are doing for Bulgarian education and what you give to the participants in your seminars."

and history, with the specifics of Roma groups and subgroups and so on. Special focus was put on the work with Roma parents and the methods used in keeping Roma children at school. One of them is exactly Roma folklore and culture classes. It was stressed that successful integration does not mean assimilation but preserving ethnic culture, traditions, and identity. The most important thing, the lecturers stressed, was to make the child feel comfortable with where s/he was and who s/he was. Therefore it is important that the Roma culture classes



SEPTEMBER 15th: A NEW BEGINNING

Hundreds of children entered the schools on September 15 all over Bulgaria with the start of the new school year. For many students in Veliko Turnovo municipality the school year has started owing to the work of Center Amalipe and Veliko Turnovo Municipality within the project "Introducing intercultural education and equal access to quality education" financed by the European Social Fund through Human Resources Development Operational Program. Eight children from Malki Chiflik (a village situated 5 km from Veliko Turnovo) started the new school year in Vela Blagoeva School in Veliko Turnovo. Dressed in new cloths, with flowers in hands and smiles on faces, accompanied by their parents they timidly entered the school. Their fears that Bulgarian children would not accept them did not come true. The teachers quickly

helped the children feel comfortable and relaxing giving: they had prepared for each student a star with her/his name and made sure that each of the new fellows quickly found friends in the new class. Parents' fears that their children would be refused "because we are from minority origin" also turned to be wrong. Dispersed not more than two or three kids in a class they promptly manage to adapt and to find new friends. The school director Angel Yanchev had prepared in advance the teachers in whose classes the Roma children had been enrolled. The teachers found this rather as a challenge that would make children, school and themselves better. They expect the training for work in multicultural environment Center Amalipe would organize especially for them. It was not easy to achieve all these. We have worked with the mayor of Malki Chiflik, with the informal leaders of the local community, with the parents as well as with the principal of Vela Blagoeva School: otherwise achieving anything would have been impossible. The school principal clearly realized that education of all children – Bulgarian and Roma – is important and although his school had 99 % Bulgarian kids he decided not only to enrol Roma children but also to pay from the delegated school budget their bussing to the school. During the numerous parent meetings we had organized parents understood that education of their children was important



SEPTEMBER 15th: A NEW BEGINNING



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*Център-Амалипе -
Откриване на учебната
година в СОУ "Вела Благоева"*

and choosing the best school in Veliko Turnovo was a key for the success of their kids. They were convinced that in this school their children would be at a safe place and would not be discriminated as "gypsies". Once we have managed to gain their confidence they became the biggest supporters for the education of their kids.

The first school day was also a big challenge for 19 children from Vodoley. Ledenik and Balvan who have graduated primary schools in June and now continue their education in high schools in Veliko Turnovo. Achieving this was also a difficult task. Secondary education was quite an exception for the Roma communities in these villages and no parents intended to support it. We've been through numerous parent meetings, visits and conversations with every parent and finally we organized – together with the Education Directorate of Veliko Turnovo Municipality a trip to all professional gymnasiums in Veliko Turnovo. But the biggest merit was of the children themselves. That is why we organized a celebration for them in the school of Vodoley.

We decided to do it in Vodoley because these children were the first kids who (eight years ago) have started to study Roma folklore classed within the program of Center Amalipe. Eight years ago they were small first-graders but they gave credit to our idea to discover page by page the wealth of Roma folklore. Together with them we have developed manuals and school materials for creating a school environment sensitive to the needs of all children. Now, 8 years later all of them (with exception of only one kid) will continue their education in high schools in Veliko Turnovo which is the biggest proof for our common success.

Many villagers of Vodoley came to the celebration to support the eighth-graders: the school principal of Vodoley, the mavor of Voidoley, the chair of the



*Център-Амалипе
с. Водолей*

Education Directorate of Veliko Turnovo municipality, dozens of parents and many other friends who have supported during these 8 years our efforts to introduce Roma folklore subject. The spirit was really festive and the celebration seemed as a graduation ball. In our stile of course: with Djelem, Djelem and Sa e Roma (Hederlezi), with many Bulgarian and Roma songs and dances. The music of Vodoley Roma band "Dalas" and the passion of all guests and participants did an unforgettable celebration. It gave faith to all the ninth-graders to continue and finish their secondary education.

And if you want to see how the present ninth-graders looked years ago and how they grew up you can visit our short movie at: <http://vbox7.com/play:dd53bcb1>



*Център-Амалипе
с. Водолей*



МИНИСТЕРСТВО
НА ОБРАЗОВАНИЕТО
И НАУКАТА

