

European
Roma
Grassroots
Organisations
Network

Preview 2010

ERGO
Network



ERGO
Rue d'Edimbourg 26
1050 Brussels
Belgium

T: (+32) 2 - 893 10 49
F: (+32) 2 - 893 10 49
E: info@ergonetwork.org
W: www.ergonetwork.org



Roma youngsters from the TerNype network demonstrate for a more positive Roma image in the streets of Cordoba, Spain

Colofon
Coordination editor
Jeroen Kuiper
Editors
Jan Marinus Wiersma
Matthias Verhelst
Ruus Dijksterhuis
Jeroen Kuiper
Biser Alekov
Graphic Design
Nicolet Pennekamp
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- Jan Marinus Wiersma - President
- Roma Representative - Vice President
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- Roma representative - Board Member

Staff ERGO

- Ruus Dijksterhuis - Executive Director
- Valeriu Nicolae - Advocacy Director
- Biser Alekov - Policy and Advocacy Officer
- Matthias Verhelst - Strategic Advocacy Officer
- Tiku Hasantari - Coordinator Youth
- Carlien Huijsmans - Coordinator Planning & Control
- Jozef Pang - Financial Controller



Ruus



Valeriu



Biser



Matthias



Tiku



Carlien



Jozef

www.ergonetwork.org

ERGO has a new website!

In 2009, we fulfilled one of our wishes of the last years: the introduction of a new internet presence. On www.ergonetwork.org, you can now find information about ERGO's working approaches, our lobbying efforts, our European campaigns, our work in Brussels and our recent activities in a more modern design. Please take a look!



Preface

By **Ruus Dijksterhuis**, Director of the ERGO network

It is a honour to present to you the new ERGO network through these special pages of the annual report. In Summer 2010, ERGO and Spolu fused into one organisation, which combines the best of both organisations. The representative character of ERGO and its expertise on European advocacy combines with the professional expertise and financial track record of Spolu. With merging our resources and expertise, we can make a difference in the empowerment of grassroots Roma across Europe. This part of the annual report describes the policies and programmes that we developed to achieve our aims.

The ERGO Network unites Roma and pro-Roma organisations that empower and mobilise Roma in Europe to achieve their citizens rights and to give them a voice against anti-Gypsyism practices. We want to create favourable conditions for our members and partners to influence the European, national and local political agendas concerning Roma. Also, we want to support them in their advocacy for improvement of the position of Roma and to address crucial Roma issues by way of campaigning, research, information dissemination and networking.

The ERGO network is eager to work and ally with organisations that share our vision on Roma. This can be done, for instance, through cooperation with European lobbying and advocacy efforts or through becoming a partner in a project. We want to strengthen our liaison role, providing information

on European Roma policies and programmes to members and organisations on the ground. And, in return, we hope to bring up information that shows policy-makers the obstacles that prevent successful Roma inclusion, while helping Roma NGOs and communities develop needed skills and knowledge to advocate for change in their country, region or municipality.

The organisation of ERGO is mixed, with Roma and non-Roma members, partners,

board members and staff. Within a year, two of the five board members will be Roma; a procedure to find a Roma vice chair is already set in motion. ERGO strives to have at least 50% Roma staff members and to ally with a majority of Roma-led organisations as member and partners. We strongly believe that teaming up Roma with non-Roma creates the right dynamics for a strong and recognised organisation that invests in Roma in Europe.

I'm confident that the new ERGO will remain one of the main European Roma organisations, which, together with its members and partners, follows critical policies and interventions of Member States, the EU and of Roma NGOs and communities. And this will contribute constructively to the improvement of policies and practices by analysing and identifying factors for success in formulating concrete suggestions.

Presenting the ERGO staff, from left to right: Jozef Pang, Carlien Huijsmans, Marga Verheije, Matthias Verhelst, Valeriu Nicolae, Biser Alekov, Adriatik Hasantari, Ruus Dijksterhuis, Lilia Makaveeva



European Advocacy

ERGO aims to empower Roma communities to become the driving force for change in their own societies. At the European level, ERGO promotes Roma inclusion measures that recognize the importance of full participation of Roma as equal stakeholders in policy design and implementation. In the autumn of 2009, ERGO decided on its mid-term priority issues for European advocacy:

EU Policies Bottom-Up

The European Union regards Roma inclusion as an important issue. Unfortunately, too often action plans, programmes and initiatives thought up in offices in Brussels and national capitals do not fit the situation of Roma. ERGO wants to reveal actual obstacles to Roma inclusion and to suggest how policies should be improved to have a greater impact.

Human Resources

ERGO wants a strengthened Roma component in EU programmes for Human Resources Development to help individuals progress, but also to help create vanguard of professional Roma. They can be role models, take up key positions in public administration



ERGO staff member Matthias Verhelst during a working meeting with members of the ERPC

or assume leadership roles in business and civic society.

Support for Grassroots NGOs

A long-term investment in civil society is needed to develop the capacity of Roma communities to fulfill their stakeholder role. In particular, NGOs that can – independently and critically – monitor policy implementation and authorities need support. The EU should release financial support for such organisations.

Fight Anti-Gypsyism

Equal citizenship for Roma will remain an illusion as long as Roma face open and covert discrimination, racism and even violence. The EU should commit to effective action to combat anti-Gypsyism by all available legal means and needs to recognize the specific character of anti-Romani practice and discourse, which will otherwise continue to cripple inclusion efforts.

“Dear President Barroso”

In 2009 a new European legislation started. While during 2004-2009 a remarkable level of awareness about the importance of addressing Roma inclusion at the European level was achieved, the current period needs to focus on accomplishing results. In view of the fact that the time was approaching for the nomination of the new college of commissioners, ERGO in October 2009 wrote to President José Manuel Barroso to encourage him to ensure that the commitments of the European Commission were translated into real action. ERGO received no more than a polite answer but drew attention to the challenge in an article by ERGO chair Lili Makaveeva and treasurer Ruus Dijksterhuis in the well-read European Voice newspaper. Under the title “Barroso-II needs to do better on Roma Inclusion”,

the authors pointed out that the European Commission needs to do more than only encourage member states to use the opportunities of European policies to improve the socio-economic situation of Roma communities. Where countries pursue discriminatory policies or neglect Roma exclusion, EU member states also need to be held accountable by the European Commission.



European Roma Policy Coalition

The European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) is one of the important channels for ERGO's European Advocacy. The ERPC, established in 2007, brings together important civil society organisations – such as Amnesty International, ERIO and the Open Society Institute – that share the aim of promoting a European Roma Strategy. Over the past few years the ERPC has become a recognized dialogue partner on Roma inclusion issues for the European institutions. ERGO is an active member of the ERPC and contributed to the coalition's input for the first and second meetings of the newly established Roma Platform in June and September 2009. In the ERPC framework, ERGO also participated in consultations with the Spanish EU Presidency in their preparations of the Second European Roma Summit in April 2010.

Local Policy Monitoring

An assessment of the results of European programmes to promote Roma inclusion shows that many of the obstacles that need to be overcome lie at the local level: the place where policies actually need to be put into practice. Although national and European frameworks are necessary to create favourable conditions for Roma inclusion, it has increasingly become clear that bottom-up pressure is the key to making sure these policies actually deliver results where it matters: in the day-to-day reality of Roma communities.

Based on the experiences of its members, ERGO concluded there was great need to support communities and grassroots organisations to effectively advocate for local inclusion strategies and to monitor the concrete outcomes of commitments that are most of the time made at a higher level. The Local Policy Monitoring Programme of ERGO focuses on the empowerment of Roma grassroots groups to challenge the approaches and policy choices of local authorities. Furthermore, a local perspective and bottom-up pressure are crucial to developing integrated approaches for Roma inclusion that fit particular local

contexts instead of just combining thematic interventions in an ad-hoc manner.

Finally, there is a clear link to EU-level policy development. The sort of information such can produce is now mostly missing in evaluation reports. This could be very valuable in the development of the next generation of interventions in favour of Roma inclusion. ERGO will start the implementation of the programme in the course of 2010 in Bulgaria and Albania and promote its adoption by partners in other countries phase by phase.

Policy monitoring by the Bulgarian GORD network

In December 2009, the Bulgarian Roma network GORD invited 30 representatives from Bulgaria, Turkey, Macedonia and Albania to exchange experiences about Roma policy implementation on the local level. The representatives discussed how Roma can participate in design, decision-making and monitoring of local Roma (related) policies. National Roma action plans and policies for social inclusion of Roma exist in the above-mentioned countries, but are usually hardly applied at local levels.

During the meeting, the GORD network presented the outcomes of a quick scan research they held in 21 Bulgarian municipalities in 2009. In this quick scan, local leaders made an inventory of the implementation of the national Roma policy at the local level. The main conclusion of the research was that many mayors and local councils are either unaware of these policies or are reluctant to adopt them. This clearly shows the typical attitude of many authorities, the so called 'applied anti-Gypsyism' at the grassroots level.

The Roma representatives concluded that many similarities exist in the implementation of Roma policies at the local level:

- In places where there are no active Roma organisations, Roma issues usually are not on the political agenda.
- In the few places where local Roma strategies are adopted, no significant progress is made to improve the situation of Roma.
- Investments in Roma human resources at the local level are needed to enable equal participation in the societal structures.
- The growing anti-Gypsyism should be tackled.



Photo: GORD

Lobbying through Regional Offices in Albania

Roma Active Albania has set up two regional offices in Korca and Fier. These regional offices are well anchored in the Roma civil society in their regions and established structural relations with authorities and institutions. In both regional offices, local Roma leaders are supported in developing action plans in cooperation with the municipality. Local leaders lobby for the adoption of their priorities in the annual plans and budget for the municipalities. In Korca, this resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with regional authorities to discuss relevant political and social developments on regular basis.

In Fier, the regional office will soon become an independent NGO to position itself better as a representative organisation for Roma to articulate the priorities of the Roma communities in their region. This regional office is one of the most successful examples of capacity building of Roma civil society and of improving the negotiating position of the grassroots Roma.

The coordinator of the regional office in Korca, Erion Jakupi (right) in discussion with ERGO staff member Biser Alekov (left) and Mustafa Jakupov from RROMA (centre)



Photo: Jeron Kujner

Empowering Roma youth

ERGO focuses on the empowerment of Roma youth. One of their fields of interest is the issue of identity. This is understandable because Roma youngsters are in a phase of life in which they explore and discover their own distinctiveness. They face discrimination, for instance, in schools, sports field and the job market. ERGO supports Roma youth to become self-organised and to explore the meaning of their identity and its effect on their lives.

ERGO has been working on the development of a multi-annual Youth Programme focusing on the issues of identity, activism and responsibility. The central goal of the programme is to strengthen, empower and connect Roma youth across Europe through empowerment, mobilisation, self-organisation and participation.

The Youth Programme will support TernYpe, a loose network composed of involved and ambitious Roma youngsters from across Europe. TernYpe emerged during meetings in Berlin and Tirana last year. This informal network now is in the process of developing an internal structure with rules and procedures for membership. ERGO and TernYpe agreed to cooperate, thereby respecting each other's independency. Also different national and regional Roma youth activities, initiatives and campaigns will be supported. The programme enables Roma youth to discover their own path and priorities and stimulates creativity and innovation in order to contribute to change in society. Inspired by the 'Typical Roma?'-campaign, ERGO would like to support and contribute to international and national youth campaigns as well.

Christina Martocian

"My name is Christina Martocian. I live and work in Baia Mare, Romania. After finishing primary school I was working as an assistant dressmaker for several years. When I was nineteen, I decided to become a Roma school mediator because I saw that many children in my city were not motivated to attend school. On the one hand, I wanted to fight discrimination, and on the other hand, I wanted to convince youngsters that school is important to succeed in life. One important part of my work is also to support the teachers and inform them about the Roma community."

"I also became active as a volunteer with the Baia Mare Roma Youth Club. We participated in ERGO's 'Typical Roma?'-campaign. As a part of that campaign, we did theatre plays about stereotypes of Roma in Baia Mare. In a few months I will start to study social work at the university in Baia Mare. My dream is that people in Romania start to understand that everybody is equal and that also

Roma are capable of doing the same things as non-Roma. I know that I cannot change the world completely, but I can change some part of it. Therefore, I want to be a positive example for others."



Photo: Hristo Kanchev

Albanian Youth network

ERGO partner, Roma Active Albania, took the initiative to organise an international meeting in Albania in July 2009 for Roma youngsters from eight Roma youth organisations from all over Europe. The goal of the meeting was to concretise the steps towards the

constitution of an independent European Roma youth network. By now, the TernYpe youth network has come into existence. It is composed of ambitious youngsters and youth associations who create space for Roma youngsters to become active citizens through empowerment, mobilisation and participation.

RAA is also the driving force behind the Albanian Roma Youth Network. This network consists of 35 active Roma youngsters from all the communities Roma Active Albania is active in. The network serves mainly as a platform of exchange. One of the activities of the Roma Youth Network was the production of a youth magazine. In 2009 the first edition of the magazine,

'Youth Voices', was distributed to schools and universities. The magazine was very successful: all copies were handed out on short notice, which motivated the youngsters to do even better for the second edition.

Some of the other activities of the Albanian Roma Youth Network included workshops on lobbying, advocacy and media work in Korca and Fier, lobbying work at municipalities and activities such as the celebration of traditional Roma holidays in different Albanian places, and discussions about the issue of Roma identity.



Roma youngsters presenting the magazine 'Youth Voices'

'Typical Roma?!' - Campaign

In 2009, ERGO started an international campaign with a focus on improving the image of Roma, called 'Typical Roma?' We wanted to get more experience with campaigning as a working tool for grassroots empowerment and to attract new and young active Roma.

ERGO launched the 'Typical Roma?'-campaign in November 2009 in Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Moldova and Romania. The campaign lasted until the second Roma Summit in Córdoba in April 2010. 'Typical Roma? – an international campaign to respect the citizenship of all in one society' – was meant to provoke people to think about what actually is typically Roma. The campaign partners carried out different national activities, while at the same time the national coordinators worked with the international coordination team to plan European activities. This combination worked well.

The campaign started with public press conferences in Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania. Then the participating organisations conducted a research in their countries about the image of Roma in society. Some did creative research (filming), others did quantitative research (questionnaires, interviews) followed by activities in the five countries, such as debates with journalists on hate speech towards Roma (Bulgaria), theatre plays on Roma image

(Romania), cartoon drawing on Roma stereotypes (Macedonia), parades in favour of Roma (Albania) and essay competitions (Moldova).

ERGO can draw positive conclusions about the campaign. All of our goals were fulfilled: we raised awareness about the issue of Roma image in many countries. It is difficult to make an exact estimation of the number of people reached through the campaign, but in Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania mass media wrote and broadcasted several issues about the campaign. Further, through street actions and by disseminating materials, thousands of persons were reached. The special www.typicalroma.eu website received many visitors. A special Typical Roma? facebook group already has almost 1000 members. Several Typical Roma? movies appeared on youtube. Typical Roma was present at high-level conferences in Brussels and Budapest in March and May 2010, with about 300 Roma stakeholders. ERGO managed to involve new, young Roma activists in the campaign.

The Most Roma-friendly Mayor - competition

In 2010, Roma NGOs from the five countries participating in the 'Typical Roma?'- campaign selected the 'Most Roma-friendly Mayor' in each of their countries. In a competition, the participating organisations sent out a call for applications, in which municipalities were invited to answer a list of questions concerning the Roma policy of these municipalities. An independent committee selected the winning Mayors. The competition was meant to strengthen the dialogue between municipalities and Roma communities. The five winning Mayors were invited to the Roma Summit in Córdoba in Spain in April 2010. By describing the best practices of Roma inclusion in South-Eastern Europe and by bringing these stories to the EU Roma Summit in April 2010, ERGO built a chain of information from the grassroots level to the highest political levels.

One of the main goals of the competition was to make municipalities more aware about the fact that they have a role to play in the implementation of Roma policies on the local level. By asking them to analyse and describe their work in the field of Roma policies, they became more aware about the need for these policies. Further, the competition increased the level of knowledge about the need for Roma policies in the local media, through the broad press attention that the competition received. Another positive result of the competition are the increased contacts between local municipalities and the local Roma NGOs. There is willingness for structural cooperation, for instance between the Albanian Mayor of Korca and Roma Active Albania. In the case of Moldova, there are concrete plans to involve the Moldovan Mayor in promoting Roma policies through the Moldovan network of Mayors, in cooperation with the Moldovan NGOs Tarna Rom and Porojan.



ERGO-Director Ruus Dijksterhuis awards Most Roma-friendly Mayors during Cordoba Summit in April 2010