



Amalipe Newsletter

Issue #7, 2007

Table of contents:

[OBSERVER– brief news – pages 1,2 and 4

[FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE: The NCCEDI– an institution for a state control over the civil society? – pages 1,3,4

[KHERE (AT HOME) PAGES 5-9
Romani women activists met in Sofia – p. 5

An exhibition of Roma smiths is being prepared –p.6

Empowering the powerless – p .6

[SCHOOL
call for applications for projects proposals for HRD OP – p. 7

Roma organizations will not take part in the elaboration of the updated Framework program for Roma integration – This became obvious at the last meeting of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues on July 4. Teodora Krumova raised the question whether broader Roma participation in this process would be provided. In response to this, Miroslav Popov, Deputy Chair of the NCCEDI, clarified that the Framework program would be elaborated by Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate. After this the draft would be discussed in the working groups of the NCCEDI and proposed to the Council of Ministers. Interested NGOs can only send their suggestions by mail/e-mail.

OBSERVER

The financing from the state budget for the National program for improving the living conditions of Roma will follow the scheme “5+15+25” – This was clarified by Ms Elly Dencheva, expert in the Ministry of Regional Development during a conference “Mainstreaming vs. Targeting” organized by the National council for cooperation on ethnic and demographic issues in Sofia on June 6th, 2007...

Continues on p.2

FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR COOPERATION ON ETHNIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES

THE NCCEDI: AN INSTITUTION FOR A STATE CONTROL OVER THE CIVIL SOCIETY?

The Regulations of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCCEDI) adopted with a decree of the Council of Ministers No. 351/20.12.2006 points that the Council is a “coordinating and consultative body”. One of its main duties is to “carry out public consultations between state institutions and minority NGOs...” This implies that the governmental and the non-governmental sector are equal participants in the work of the Council; that its coordinating and consulting functions do not abuse the autonomy of each of these participants and do not suppose predominant control of any of them.

The activities of the NCCEDI during the last few months reveal a different picture. The Council turns more and more into a body where the participation of the NGOs is minimalized; moreover, the Council tends to pretend for “certifying” functions on behalf of the civil society...

Continues on p.3

OBSERVER

The National program for improving the living conditions of Roma...

In 2007, the Ministry of Regional Development has provided 5,000,000 BGN for refurbishment works in the Roma neighbourhoods. In 2008 15 million BGN will be devoted for this purpose, while in 2009 this money will be 25 million BGN. After this an evaluation of the results will be carried out and if the assessment is positive a bigger budget will be provided. The money will be divided among the municipalities on a project basis.

Comment: the National program for improving the living conditions of Roma adopted by the Bulgarian government in March 2006 envisages the astonishing amount of 1.25 billion BGN. 40% of this amount should be provided by the state budget. There was a lot of skepticism when the program was approved whether this amount of money would be provided at all. (see Amalipe, *The Roma Strategies in Bulgaria in the Eve of EU Accession*) The scheme "5+15+25" presented by Mrs. Dencheva is far from the millions expected. Obviously they are postponed for next government... If it decided to decide to take on this engagement (the Program is a decision of the Council of Ministers and is not binding for the next governments). Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge that finally the state budget will finance works for improving the conditions in the Roma neighbourhoods although it is still questionable where these small amounts of money will be enough to cover the needs and problems in the ghettos...

Roma organizations will not take part in the elaboration of the updated Framework program for Roma integration ...

Comment: It seems that the new version of the Framework program will be elaborated without Roma participation. The working groups at the National council which are supposed to discuss the program do not have a working format: each of them is comprised of more than 20 people (NGOs and institutions). Up to now they have never met to discuss an issue. It is not realistic to expect that this would happen by the end of September when the new Framework program will be submitted to the Council of Ministers.

There is only one Roma among the experts in the Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate who will prepare the Framework program. Up to now only five NGOs have sent their suggestions to the draft by e-mail. This method obviously does not work...

Roma parents must be obliged to speak in Bulgarian at home: this was suggested by Mr. Georgi Krastev, Head of the Roma integration Department at the Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate during a public discussion of the report "Equal access of Roma to quality education" presented in Sofia on June 27. They should be subject to administrative sanctions if they break this rule – Mr. Krastev proposed. According to him this is necessary for the children to speak good Bulgarian before entering school and thus minimize the number of early drop-outs.

The Center for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities announced its first session for projects support. Schools, municipalities, Regional inspectorates of education, etc. could apply with projects for educational integration for 4 programmes of the Center. The whole cost of the financed projects will be 500 000 lv. The deadline for applying with projects is 31-th August. Conditions and forms for applying could be found on <http://coiduem.mon.bg>. It is expected till the end of year 2007, the Center to announce another call for applications.

Comment: We have to welcome the fact that the CEICSEM, established by a decree of the Council of ministers in January 2005, has finally started to work! After two budget years of non-absorbing the fixed financing for the Center from the national budget, this year that probably won't happen again. The projects, that the Center will support, will give a chance to many schools, which are realizing activities in connection with the educational integration, to get – even though it is a humble amount – financing for these activities; that would definitely foster the integration process. In the meantime, we could hardly expect any fundamental changes or a substantial impact for the educational integration at least because of three ...

Continues on p. 4

FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE

NCCEDI – AN EXECUTIVE BODY FOR STATE CONTROL UPON THE CIVIL SOCIETY?



Continuation from p. 1

... and strives for establishing control upon each of the independent civil initiative in the field of ethnic issues. In that case, on purpose or not, the Council is to establish control upon civil society in the pointed sphere, which is in a contradiction with its Structure regulations, it is not in harmony with the principles of a Democratic country and will sensibly worsen the quite low efficiency of state policies for Roma community integration.

NGO participation in the Council activities is minimum; there is no NGO participation in the decision making process. During the last few months, in fact, all important decisions are made one – sided, from the Council political board, without even consultations with some of the NGO Council members. For example, NCCEDI did not support the campaign about the inclusion of Roma issues in the Operation programs and in the National Strategic Reference Framework carried out by Council member organizations. Instead of that, in the Work group sessions for preparation of Human resources development Operational program, the representative of the NCCEDI (appointed without the NGO knowledge) opposed to these proposals from the Councils' name. The fact that representatives of the NCCEDI are defined one – sided from the Council political board and they have the right to vote from its name about issues which are not being discussed with NGO, is significant for the formal role assigned to the NGOs in the real Councils' activity.

More and more persistently the NCCEDI and it's the "Ethnic and Demographic Issues" Directorate which administrates the Council's work, declare claims for "certificative functions" in relation to civic organizations especially towards the Roma ones, stating that "The only real working Roma organizations are those which are members of the NCCEDI". This is not only a contradiction of the Structure regulations of the NCCEDI (where there is not even a hint of such "certificative functions"), but it doesn't respond to the reality: a significant part of the influential Roma organizations are not members of the Council. That claim is a serious threat to civil society containing the idea that a governmental body run by political persons, could decide which the legitimate organizations are. From here till the full political control upon civil society there is just half a step.

During the last few months the NCCEDI has been trying to establish control upon the independent civic initiatives in the field of minority integration. The attitude of the Council managing body to the idea of wide participation of Roma organizations in creating an updated version of the Framework programme for Roma integration is indicative in that matter. Although Deyan Kolev (Amalipe) and Rumyan Sechkov (S.E.G.A) have stressed at a meeting of the Roma integration commission on 23-th May, the necessity of wide civic participation and it was repeated at the meeting of the NCCEDI on 4-th July, the Council board has refused to allow that participation. "Roma participation" is limited to sending proposals by e-mail. After that employees from the Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate will prepare the Framework program. In that case, the NCCEDI – the body, preparing the new Framework program – will be a body that guarantees the non – participation of the Roma community and the civil society in that process.

Example: The NCCEDI and the selection of Roma NGOs representatives in the observation committees.

On 16-th June representatives from more than 30 Roma NGOs (some of them are members of the NCCEDI, some are not) nominated...

On the next page...

OBSERVER

Continues from p .2

The Center for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities announced its first session for projects support.

Comment :

... reasons. First of all, one of the important “players” in the field of educational integration - the NGOs – are excluded from the potential beneficiaries. They could not apply with their own projects and the expert opinion they have accumulated won’t be used. On the second hand, the project’s cost is too low (under two of the Programmes - just about 7 500 lv. for each project). That may help some schools and municipalities to solve specific problems, but it won’t stimulate national policies implementation. Third, the lack of aimed and permanent conducted national policy for educational integration for Roma children by the Ministry of education and science has no chance to be made up by small local projects.

In Bulgaria there has never been an assimilative policy in relation to Roma community – That was stated by Georgi Krastev, head of the Roma integration Department at the Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate during a conference “Mainstreaming against targeting”, which was organized by the NCCEDI on 6-th July in Sofia. According to his opinion, even during the so – called “revival process”, when it was forbidden to use the word “Roma”, Roma language, Roma music, Islamic names and the Bulgarian nation was proclaimed to be monoethnic, there was no attempt for assimilation. He based his assertion on the fact that Roma continued to live in isolated quarters, which is preventing the assimilation.

FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE

The NCCEDI ...

Continues from p. 3

... voted solid for their representatives in the Monitoring committees of six Operational programs and the National Strategic Reference Framework. They referred to article 10 from Decree No 182/24.07.2006 which allows participation of NGO representatives as observers in the Monitoring committees.

The NCCEDI and the Commission for Roma integration were informed and even cooperated for the preparation of the meeting of the organizations. Two weeks later, on the Council session on 4-th July, the Council turned 180 degrees around and tried to start a new nomination procedure alternative to the one already made: nominations on behalf of the civil organizations. The argument – the nominations have to be made by the Roma integration commission and only organizations, members of NCCEDI may participate, because they are the only legitimate representatives from the Roma civil society.

Later it turned out that the NCCEDI had already appointed its own representatives in the Monitoring committee of “Human resources development” Operational programme – Ina Ahmedova (policy advisor of vice – Minister Emel Etem) and Georgi Krastev (head of the Roma integration Department at the Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate). None of them is NGO representative. Their “choice” isn’t consulted with the NGOs Council members, but it is one-sidedly defined from the Political board of the NCCEDI.

This puts us in a paradoxal situation: the NCCEDI is a body where institutions and NGO members are equal and the NGOs have the right of their own representatives in the Monitoring committee of OPHRD. Instead of being chosen at a Council session representatives are appointed by the political board, and they are not even NGO members. In addition, the NCCEDI is trying to “cancel” the nominations of a wide forum of NGOs, starting a new procedure where only the Council member organizations will have the right to choose from the name of the civil society. In that case it turns out that the civil society is the NCCEDI, and the NCCEDI is only its political board.

ACTIVE ROMANI WOMEN DISCUSSED PROPOSALS FOR THE FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME ON A THREE-DAY MEETING IN SOFIA



Proposals for changes in the Framework programme that have to foster the solving of the main problems about Romani women were discussed on a threeday meeting entitled “Broadening the political agenda”.

The workshop was in hotel “Relax” in Sofia from 2-nd till 4-th July. The meeting was organized from CIEDT “Amalipe” and “Open society” Institute Budapest. There were 20 Romani women activists with creative understanding from all over the country - Blagoevgrad, Bobov dol, Veliko Tarnovo, Simitly, Stara Zagora, Sofia etc... The main purpose of that workshop was to start a process of proposals making, directed toward Romani women problems which should be included in the new Framework programme.

Guests of the meeting were Isabela Mihalache from “Open society” Institute, Budapest and Nikoleta Bitu from JRWN Romania. The two Romani ladies presented the positive practices from the Romani Women Network Programme of “Open Society” Insitute in which Programme Bulgaria is now included. In the same time there was a discussion about the possibilities and challenges in front of Romani woman, the need of sustainable dialogue and cooperation between women organizations and the institutions.

Representatives from NCCEDI, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (Deputy Minister Baki Hjuseinov) presented the existing policies toward Romani women in Bulgaria.

Unfortunately the attitude of the institutions to Roma society and to Romani woman is still paternalistic. The institutional approach is still superficial and not profound. Significant was the fact that the standpoint of Mr. Hjuseinov was that in Bulgaria there are not enough educated Romani women to participate as lecturers in the seminars and the meetings organized by the MLSP in the country (in that moment in the room there were 20 intelligent and well trained Romani women, working for the Roma community in different fields). From other side, Dr Ahmedova, representative from the MH declared that the practice of the health mediators would be more successful if they were men instead of women. (!)

The practice of the institutions shows that it is not enough to go in a place, to make a seminar for Romani women and to report an activity. It is necessary to have deep and competent knowledge of the problems, to create adequate programmes and working models, persistency and sharing efforts. This is a precondition for real and efficient results.



**AN EXPOSE OF ROMA SMITHS IS
BEING PREPARED****EMPOWERING THE POWERLESS
IN THE VILLAGE OF KAMEN,
VELIKO TARNOVO REGION**

Seven Burgudjii Roma will be supported into producing traditional knives, swords, axes and so on, which they will present on a special exhibition in the old capital city. The initiative of CIEDT “Amalipe” is named Vrastiri 2007 (Workshop 2007) and the idea comes from Atanas Stoyanov. The idea is supported by Regional resource culture center “The Factory”, the city of Gabrovo. The participants are mainly young masters skilled in making knives. They are descendants of smiths from centuries.

The aim of this project is to promote the production of the masters to the audience and to connect them with business organizations of metal manufacturing. Besides, on that expose the creators could explain and show the producing process of their articles, and to tell about traditions and customs of the Burgudjii Roma community.

A catalogue and a film will be made within the project. The newsletter of CIEDT “Amalipe” will remind you about that event in the next issues.

A project in the competition “Empowering the powerless” announced by Open society Institute, Sofia was won by a Roma civil initiative group „VRASTIRI” in the village of Kamen, region Veliko Tarnovo. The project aims to raise the Roma civil activity of the Roma community in the village of Kamen and to remove the barrier “Local authority” – Roma. In the project there are mainly Roma youths participating.

The project is one of the 17 – th approved and it is one of the two on Roma issues. There were 120 projects submitted for examining in the contest.

„We are glad we have the opportunity to realize our ideas for our future and we appreciate and thank for that!” – shared the members of the project initiative group. After the news that they are between the approved ones Atanas Stoyanov, Penka Marieva and Vasil Kalinov now have more faith in themselves and in their possibilities. They are convinced that the Roma club they are going to create will help for the community development in the village of Kamen...





PROJECTS PROPOSALS CALL FOR APPLICATIONS WILL START WITHIN "HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT" OPERATIONAL PROGRAM

More than a year ago CIEDT "Amalipe" initiated an advocacy campaign for measures and indicators inclusion connected with Roma integration in "Human resources development" Operational programme and in the others strategic documents, regulating the assimilation of the Structural funds. More than 46 Roma NGOs were involved in the campaign and it achieved most of its purposes. Some of the Roma NGOs however stood passive and had a sceptical opinion about accelerating the process of Roma integration by the Operational programs.

Only time will show which of the opinions was more realistic and how far the European funds could change in a significant way the position of Roma community. We should not forget that it is just the beginning and HRDOP gives us hope in that connection.

The scheme "Creating a favorable multicultural environment..." is well-provided – for the year 2007 with 5 574 116 lv. There were never invested so much funds in the educational integration.

In July, for example, the Center for educational integration announced its first call for proposals by a scheme which had been backed up with significantly less money. The provided amounts do not guarantee that the aims will be achieved, but the sum is a necessary premise. Moreover, the HRD OP Scheme sets concrete indicators for measuring the success – 5 500 students will be integrated in mass schools, 300 teachers will be trained in intercultural education, 9 000 students will participate in forms of intercultural education (so called FCP "Roma folklore" and etc.).

The positive thing is that a big part of the recommendations from CIEDT "Amalipe" to the Scheme "Creating a favorable multicultural environment..." were taken into account: the NGOs and schools could apply with their own

projects (the version, that was in a first place and proposed from MES was that only the municipalities could do that), and the financial scheme was made easier, allowing candidates to receive 80 % from the sum before the last report (the first version allowed only 20 %). These changes will make possible the participations of Roma organizations which have enough expertise and will contribute for the success of the Scheme. To what extent the Roma organizations are prepared in absorbing the European funds is very complicated question, but there is a premise for that.

The weakness of the Scheme is connected with the permission of only local projects with municipality disposition to apply. There is a requirement for cooperation from the municipality and the sum is comparatively small (up to 100 000 lv. for a project). This does not allow the realization of national projects and will put in uncomfortable position the municipalities in which there is not an educational experience. A big part of small municipalities are in that condition and these are the places where thousands of Roma children live and study.

The impossibility for supporting national projects leads to another weakness – it is obvious that that Scheme will solve many local problems and won't create models for educational integration which could apply in a national level. There could be a reason in that if the MES applies a large scale and checked national policy for Roma children educational integration. There is a lack of such a policy and the projects of HRD OP will have only local meaning and will favour the active municipalities that already have the experience in the field of educational integration and the municipalities in which region there are organizations with proved educational expertise.

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