



Amalipe Newsletter

Issue #3, 2008

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Session of the Council for Roma Integration in the MLSP

The first session for 2008 of the Council for Roma Integration in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy took place on March 25 in Sofia. It was chaired by the National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Mr. Baki Huyseinov. Deputy-minister Huyseinov presented the results from 12th session of the

OBSERVER

International Steering Committee of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. He outlined that Bulgaria had received high rating...
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FOCUS

The structural funds and the educational integration

The facts:

On March 14th the Ministry of education and science (MES) published a list with the approved projects within the grant scheme “Creating a favorable multicultural environment for practical implementation of intercultural education and upbringing” financed by the Human Resources Development Operational Program. 66 projects on the total amount of 6 000000 leva were approved. 42 out of them were submitted by organizations and schools, and 14 by municipalities. Among the selected projects are those by Center Amalipe, Roma Youth Organization – Slive, SHAM – Montana, Future – Rakitovo, and so on.

The results in the second call for proposals (“Let’s make the school attracting for young people”) were also published. The latter supported out-of-school activities including projects by Integro Association, Stolipinovo Union and so on. The implementation of the projects was supposed to start from January 2008 and finish by December 2009. It is expected the contracts to be signed by April 15th, 2008.

Comment:

The approval of projects within the two schemes mentioned above is definitely a step forward towards the educational integration of Roma children which would give a push to the whole integration process. At the same time we should not expect that this step would guarantee the successful implementation and speeding up of the process...

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NDI BULGARIA: LEFT MARKS

A COMPETITION FOR SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ROMA STUDENTS

It is already the 8th year that the competition for scholarships for Roma students - Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMSUP) is announced. The scholarships are given to Roma student from several countries in Central and East Europe, including Bulgaria. For the forthcoming school year 2008-2009 their financing is generally from the Roma Education Fund.

BAs, MAs, PhD who identify as Roma and are received in full time education in accredited university in the country during the school year 2008-2009 can apply for the scholarships.

The scholarships are also open for Roma pupils graduating at the moment high school who intend to become students or those who have already graduated secondary education and wish to continue in a university.

More information including the full package with documents, necessary for the competition one can find at: <http://ethnos.bg> in its Bulgarian version or on telephone 02/930 66 19 in Open Society Institute-Sofia. The deadline to send the scholarship documents is 15.04.2008!!!

COURSES IN PREPARATION FOR MATRICULATION AND CANDIDATE- STUDENTS EXAMS FOR YOUTH FROM MINORITIES

Consortium 'Get German Education and Training' and 'Open Society Institute' Sofia they offer free preparation courses for matriculation and candidate-students exams for youths from minorities with focus on Roma. Courses will be organized in different built-up area, as well as covering the entire territory of the country. They will provide preparation for successfully passing the matriculation or preparation for declares to candidate-student exams in the willing university specialty. The candidate must be to 30 ages, graduated their middle education during 2007-2008 or graduated in previous years and plan to candidate for full-time students or part-time during the candidate-students' campaign for 2008.

In the end of March the office of the National democratic institute for international affairs – NDI in Bulgaria closed doors.

In the course of 17 years NDI-Bulgaria has worked on the improvement of the dialogue between the civil sector and the political parties; has provided help for the building of democratic structures, public political debate and NGOs; monitored the elections and stood for the democratic values and civil participation. The reason for the closing of the office of the organization in the country is nice and happy from one side, but sad from another for all those people who have met its team and who have had the possibility to convince themselves in its professional work. Created to support democracy and to supervise the keeping of the democratic values, the office of Washington is closing its structure in Bulgaria because Bulgaria is already a democratic country. In relation to that Ms. Megan Unangst – regional coordinator of the Roma program of NDI in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania came from Washington D.C. on a few days visit. At a meeting in Sofia she said that NDI in Bulgaria is closing but there are many other and strong NGOs which can take over its work.

„Closing an office is always less exciting and less emotional than to make a fresh start. However we have been awarded by not few successful engagements and examples of steady development, over the years which give us a feeling of achieved goals and encourage us that every minute has been worth the effort. For us, the people from the team, the work with NDI and with you was like hearing your favorite song on the radio and feeling excitement, and it happened every day”, Ms. Sevdalina Voynova – a long time director of NDI in Bulgaria shared.

From its opening in 1990 till now NDI-Bulgaria has realized several successful programs like a program for the encouragement of electoral activity among the youth, NDI's Program "Connecting NGOs and Political Parties", "Women's Engagement in the Political Process Program" and "Roma Political Skills Development Program".

NDI will continue to work on its regional initiatives on Roma, Ms. Unangst underlined. At the moment, the 3rd in a row internship for Roma in the parliament is taking place and after it a seminar for the newly elected Roma councilors will be organized.

The organization will keep (although to a minimal extend) its presence in the country in the face of Mr. Dimitar Dimitrov from the Open Society Institute – Sofia.

Three representatives of Center Amalipe took part in the three successful cycles of the Roma program of NDI for the development of political skills. In this program the most active representatives of the Roma society – formal and informal leaders, students, NGOs also took part. NDI gathered together many young people enthusiastic and willing to change the reality to something better. Many acquaintances and friendships took place, many destinies were interwoven.

The office is closed, but its traces remain...

SESSION OF THE COUNCIL FOR ROMA INTEGRATION IN THE MLSP



Baki Hyuseinov

...for its integration activities. He pointed as extremely important that Spain, Bosnia and Albania had declared their will to become Decade members as well as that UNICEF also declared willingness to be partner in the initiative. Deputy Minister Hyuseinov presented the programs of MLSP included in the National Action Plan on Employment that relate

session: the necessity of appointing Roma in the police, the necessity of actual statistics based on ethnicity, the necessity of renovating the Roma integration strategies, the danger for strengthening the segregation through the so-called “delegated school budgets” as well as the manace too many village schools to be closed without preliminary work with Roma parents to convince them to support the education of their children in another place, and so on.

The Council for Roma Integration is established in 2006 as consultative body that helps the activities of Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the work of the National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

CENTER AMALIPE WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTION OF OBSERVER FOR THE MONITORING COMMITTEE OF NSRF

Only 3 NGOs will take part in the election of observer from the civil society for the Monitoring Committee of the National Strategic Reference Framework on behalf of the so-called “social organizations” (a category that included “organizations working for minorities’s and migrants’ integration”). These are Equip Foundation, International Society for Sustainable Development and Cooperation and Center “Amalipe”. They were selected by commission established by the Minister of Finance Plamen Oresharski.

In February the Ministry of Finance defined Rules for participation of NGOs in the sessions of the Monitoring Committee of the NSRF. The procedure included two stages: expression of interest by NGOs to participate in the election of observer and election of observers by NGOs that have been selected on the basis of the criteria envisaged in the Rules. These criteria included: effective and efficient work of the organization during the last 3 years, participation in developing, implementing and monitoring of strategies and policies, experience in implementing projects financed by the European Community. The candidates should define themselves in one of three categories: organizations working in science, education and culture; environment organizations and social organizations (including minority organizations). Every category will elect own observer.

Although there were expressions of interest of many capable organizations, the commission established by Ministry of Finance selected only three of them as covering all requirements within the group of the social organizations. In 15 days they should elect observer.

Center “Amalipe” will follow the decisions of the meeting of Roma NGOs from June 16, 2007 and will suggest for this position Maria Metodieva (Director of Roma Program of Open Society Institute – Sofia).

closely to the Roma integration. He insisted that 45 Roma will be appointed as labour mediators in the Labour Offices that the National Program for Literacy and Qualification of Roma will continue, etc. Ani Evgenieva – secretary of the Council – pointed that MLSP has prepared special action plan for raising the activiness of Roma community. It includes regional seminars with formal and informal Roma leaders, seminars with Roma students who graduate universities, preparing special course for mayors and city councillors about the Roma integration, and so on. MLSP will also conduct monthly monitoring of the implementation of the Decade Action Plan through collecting and summurising the information from the other ministries.

During the session new organizations were invited and approved as members: Center “Amalipe” (Veliko Turnovo), Integro (Razgrad), World without frontiers (Stara Zagora) and Hayache (Novi Pazar). Deputy Minister Hyuseinov insisted that these organizations have proved themselves as active and efficient and that they would strengthen the effective work of the Council.

Many suggestions were raised during the discussion about the Internal Regulations of the Council. George Parushev asked establishing working groups in different fields (employment, education and so on) that would have few members and would prepare opinions and positions on urgent issues. Deyan Kolev proposed all normative acts and decisions of MLSP with connections with Roma integration to be coordinated in advance with the Council. This is the only way for the Council to take real part in the decision-making process. For this purpose it is necessary to be established small expert group within the Council that could prepare expert attitudes to all documents of the MLSP.

Numerous burning issues were discussed during the



THE NEW REBELLION OF BATAK

Batak is a small village in a municipality in Veliko Turnovo District. It is not the historical village we know but it is about to become a history.

The fate of its school is not a unique one; this is the fate that almost 1200 schools in Bulgaria will face after the changes in the educational system and the introducing of the so-called delegated budgets. What is unique however is the reactions of the parents, teachers and citizens of Batak, especially today when we witness the total crashing of the educational values and trust in the educational system.

The school in Batak is one of those schools which the educational reform has put on the edge – it has small number of children but not so small to close the school. There are 80 children in the school who are from the village itself. The school in the next village (Karaisen) which is supposed to become a focal point school and take the children from Batak also has 80 children but 34 of them travel from other places (even from other municipalities). The school budget in Batak needs around 7000 Euro more to survive this year. Choosing between the two schools the municipality in Pavlikeni has chosen the one on Karaisen although more children are born every year in Batak. The municipality did not make use of the opportunity given to save both schools. In this way it has just shown that it does not want to take a responsibility and carry one a distinctive municipal educational policy.

And then Batak rebelled. Parents and teachers organized a huge meeting in the village for saving the school. They crowded the community center and shows what civil society means in a small village. In this way they smashed several myths. It smashed the myth that there is no quality education in Bulgaria because the parents unanimously stated that their children would not receive the same quality of education in the new school. It smashed the myth that Roma parents do not care about the education of their children. Most of the children in the school are Roma but the ambition of their parents to ensure their quality education has broken one of the biggest myths in Bulgarian reality. Parents are decided to fight for their school and even collect money from their own humble incomes to fill the school budget. “Tell me how much money do you need – Asen Asenov, who is a father of three children said – ...

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CENTER AMALIPE'S PROJECT FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IS APPROVED UNDER HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAM

The project “Introducing intercultural education and equal access to quality education of Roma children in Veliko Turnovo Municipality” of Center Amalipe was approved by Ministry of Education and Science within the Scheme “Establishing favourable multicultural environment for introducing intercultural education”. Partners of Amalipe within the project are Municipality of Veliko Turnovo and 4 schools.

Several activities will be realised within the project: establishing Municipal center for intercultural education, research on the family environment of Roma students, integration in the mainstream schools of Roma kids who have visited school for mentally disabled children, attracting and keeping at school Roma children who dropped out or who have never been enrolled in school. In the four included schools new forms of intercultural education (as an continuation of the existing Roma folklore classes) will be introduced as well as innovative forms for empowering parents and including them in the school process.

The project implementation will help the educational integration of Roma children in Veliko Turnovo municipality. It will also contribute for developing new approaches for applying intercultural education and for empowering parents that will be used in many other schools all over the country in the process of teaching “Folklore of the ethnos – Roma folklore” subject.



THE NEW REBELLION OF BATAK



Continues from p.4

... and I will save them from my bread to save the school.”
 “You close the school because there is no money – another mother shared. – I have three children. It is difficult for me too; I also do not have money. But I do not complain. Or should I also have to close my children?!”

The struggle for Batak (because the struggle for the school is also a struggle for the village itself which otherwise would gradually disappear) smashed one more myth: that we can not be united. This struggle united everyone: the young parents who have children in the school; the old people for whom the life of the school is also the life of the village; the institutions – the principal of the kindergarten promised 3500 euro from her own budget to support the school and help it survive.

The people in Batak are firm that they would continue this struggle to the end. They have collected more than 400 signatures against the closing of the school only for a day. The signatures were submitted to the City Council. The people had decided to go together to the session of the Council on march 25th and see whether their ‘representatives’ would dare to close a school with such an active civil position. Their next step would have been a village referendum.

This however was not needed. The educational commission at the Municipality of Pavlikeni finally decided that the school in Batak should be saved. This showed that despite the skepticism of many people the civil society in Bulgaria is strong enough to defend its positions.

The facts:

With its 80 students the school in Batak will receive a delegated budget of 88 000 leva while only the utilities and salaries of the personnel are around 102 000 leva. Which

means that the Municipality of Pavlikeni should co-finance it with 14 000 leva when no extras are provided (out-of-school activities, qualification of teachers, and so on). The closing of the school at this moment might seem an understandable decision, but not the right one. It is not the right one for three reasons. First, the closing of the school in Batak would bring to a collapse of the educational level of this people and would leave dozens of children outside of the educational system. Most probably half of the children would not continue education. The culturally determined fears of the Roma parents to send their children (especially the girls) in another settlement might seem funny for the administrators which are not familiar with Roma culture but this is the reality and it would bring to the dropping out of many Roma children. A serious problem is also the attitude of the parents in the accepting schools who do not want children from other places, especially Roma children – a problem which only few administrators dare to say but a problem which is a crucial issue for school principals. At this stage no body envisages serious work with the parents in both, the closed and the accepting schools – to prepare them for the change. Respectively there are no funds for this.

Second, the closing of schools like Batak will duplicate the recent problem with the kindergartens: only in a few years these villages will have enough children to “provide” the necessary budget for the school but ... there will be no school any more.

We do not estimate however one more thing – the closing of the school in Batak will leave its people with the feeling that their school is closed because most of the children are Roma; the focal point school where the children were supposed to move has a worse building but... the people in the village are not Roma.



The structural funds and the educational integration

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The realization of the dozens of projects will give an impulse to the educational integration. First, finally resources for this process will be provided. During the last few years the educational integration relied only on administrative measures which did not require financial resources (e.g. elaborating of plans, strategies, lists and so on.) or used financing from foreign donors. The Phare resources could not however bring back to life the comatose process of educational integration and achieve something significant in it. Second, the starting of a huge number of projects realized by various actors (NGOs, schools, municipalities, etc.) will engage new people in the process and will involve “fresh” human resources in it. This is extremely important for the educational integration – even more important than the range of financial resources. For years the circle of people engaged with the educational integration of Roma children has been extremely tight: few NGOs and even fewer experts from different institutions. This resulted to a complete lack of innovative ideas (they had been exhausted years ago and since then they have been mechanically replicated without a perspective to turn into a national policy) and to a process with questionable quality. At the same time it is clear that for the successful realization of such a complex process the human resources are extremely important.

Unfortunately it would be hastily to expect that the two schemes would guarantee the educational integration process. First, the amount for a single project is rather low (50 000 Euro) to achieve full success of the educational integration in any municipality. This could be justified by the fact that it is a pilot scheme as well as by the lack of serious success of the previous Phare projects which budgets were rather high. But whatever the reasons are we could expect that if all projects are realized successfully they would only relief the harsh educational problems without completely solving them. Second, both calls have not a clear focus of activities to support. It just seems that the first call “Creating of favorable multicultural environment...” supports desegregation activities: the experts from the MES made a very interesting clarification during the application process that even a school with 1%

Bulgarian students and 99% Roma kids is “integrated and ethnically mixed”; this makes senseless the whole desegregation idea. Third, and the most important one, at present there is lack of active policy on behalf of the MES for educational integration of Roma children; no such measures are included in the activities of the MES for renewing the Bulgarian educational system. At the same time both calls insist that the project should implement the governmental educational policy in the given municipality. So the project should just apply the MES policy at the local level without any possibility for innovative models which in turn could be multiplied at the national level. On the other hand, the so-called “national policy” almost lacks at the moment or is rather amorphous. This vicious circle does not promise a significant change in the process of educational integration.

Apart from this several problems accompany the first calls for proposals. The announcement of the projects approved was delayed with several months regarding the fact that application deadline was the beginning of October 2007. Respectively the signing of the contracts was expected by the end of 2007. No body has answered so far what necessitated this delay and how this would be compensated.

More alarming is the fact that quite a huge number of projects of special schools have been approved. One of them will participate in three projects – these projects however do not plan to integrate the children from the special to the mainstream school. It is a public secret that the special schools still continue to enroll Roma children without disabilities. Now the parents of these children will have one more stimuli to send their kids to these schools: thanks to the projects they would become more attractive than the mainstream schools. In this way practically the European money will start to finance this vicious practice of sending children without any disabilities to the special schools.

Nevertheless the worries outlined above the start of the projects directed to educational integration within Human resources development OP is indisputably a positive fact: it provides chance for continuing and even fostering the process of educational integration of Roma children.

**MASAKO WATABE:
A JAPANESE SPEAKING ROMANES
IN VELIKO TARNOVO****A MEETING OF ROMANI WOMEN IN
VELIKO TARNOVO**

Alina Covaci – program officer at the Roma Health Project of Open Society Institute - Budapest and Kamelia Dimitrova from Open Society Institute - Sofia were invited on special visit in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria by Center Amalipe. The guests were invited to discuss recent activities of the organization and to visit one of the Veliko Turnovo villages Malki Chiflik, where they had the chance to meet Romani women from the Millet group. They discussed healthcare issues and the most often barriers before Romani women's health and access to health care services. Some of the most serious problems are the health insurances. A significant part of Roma women are not insured. Another problem for the local population here is connected with the prophylactic examinations which Romani women don't pay attention to. Some of the obstacles are financial, other are social and traditional. In the conversations the women shared their desire to be included in educational programs in computer courses, in training courses how to write applications and CVs and other useful skills which could make them more competitive when looking for a job. Center Amalipe will continue working with the women from Malki Chiflik in this direction.

Here, in Bulgaria, the differences have always provoked fear and cautiousness. The unique about Japanese is that the difference raises curiosity, not only scares! Exactly this was the reason that made



Masako Watabe study Romanes in the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations in Paris where she has been learning it for 4th years as a faculty modulus. The young Japanese visited Veliko Tarnovo after an invitation by Slavka Stefanova, coordinator in Centre Amalipe. They have met in Paris at the end of 2007 during the Erasmus program. Masako was a real attraction not only for the Roma people she met in the old Bulgarian capital. She was an attraction for the journalists too. The young Japanese woman was the real proof for breaking up stereotypes and prejudices toward Roma.

In front of the local media the guest shared that they did not have Roma in Japan but the Roma music, culture and folklore are widely famous for her fellows who are interested and curious about everything different and exotic. First, she met Roma people in Czech Republic where she was working with Roma children and teenagers. There she faced the negative attitude of people from the majority "gadjo" toward Roma, but when she talked to them and got to know them better she found that things are different from the view point of the most of the people. Provoked, Masako was interested in Roma people life. She understood that the best way to find more is to learn the language.

During her short visit in the country Masako Watabe had the opportunity to meet Roma here closely.

A ROMA 3RD OF MARCH IN DRYANOVO

Have you ever been to the Dryanovo monastery? If not let me take you in the next few lines to that beautiful got-blessed place and describe you our visit there.

Dryanovo is a small town strategically situated between Veliko Turnovo and Gabrovo. It is exactly

in its suburbs where the monastery is situated – a place between century's old vertical rocks which have hugged the walls of the God place like a mother in order to protect it from evil forces.

On the occasion of the national holiday of Bulgaria – 3 March, after we put wreaths on the 'Mother Bulgaria' monument, a group of volunteers from Center Amalipe had the opportunity to visit the Dryanovo monastery. There the volunteers visited one of the most famous caves in the country – the Bacho Kiro cave.

The national holiday was celebrated as it should be. The patriotic feelings and the nice Bulgarian nature urged us to walk through the middle of the wild river, to climb rocks and to shout from the tops of the crags in order to here our echo. We celebrated the end of the holiday in front of the walls of Tsarevets where we watched the audio-visual spectacle 'Sound and light'. And at that time we were all together thinking one thing: 'Our country is so nice!'



SCHOOL



We present to you....

'ST. ST. CYRIL AND METHDIUS' STRALJA SCHOOL

In this monthly issue we offer you the chance to get acquainted with the pupils from 'St. St. Cyril and Methodius' Stralja school who have been involved in the Roma Culture and School Program of Center Amalipe for several years already. Under the guidance of their teacher Dimka Shiderska the pupils have not missed the chance to celebrate all of the Bulgarian and Roma national holidays. Here is what they tell about the celebration of the 14th February (the day of those who are in love) St. Valentine and also Todorovden (Theodor's name day). In order to celebrate St. Valentine the children made their own version of the TV show 'You have mail' with one of the main characters – Peyo who gave valentines to all who are in love including the teachers.

As it is typical for every celebration there were many songs, dances and merriment. There was also a contest to choose the best dancing couple which was judged by a jury.

The team of 'St. St. Cyril and Methodius' Stralja school said that despite the symbolic awards the celebration was very interesting and the children were very pleased with their program.

Todorovden was also celebrated by the students. Under the supervision of their teacher Mariana Georgieva, the second grades showed that they knew in details the custom for celebrating of the Horse Easter (Todorovden). They made small breads for health and fertility of the horses; they put presents on their chains. The girls washed their hairs in water with herbs and blossoming cornel-tree in order their hairs to grow like horses tails. They skillfully made the table for the holiday with the traditional breads in the form of food-shoe, stewed corn and small breads which was specifically decorated for the holiday.





CENTER AMALIPE ORGANIZED A YOUTH SEMINAR



The volunteers of Center Amalipe celebrated the first days of the spring with a seminar which took place in the suburbs of the old capital of Bulgaria – Veliko Turnovo on 23 March. The 18 youths – students and pupils had the chance to take part in a training course which main idea was to create a network – a team of youths, which would be included in various activities of the Center.

Youths – Roma and Bulgarians had the possibility to learn more about the Roma history, culture and folklore because of the presentations by Teodora Krumova and Deyan Kolev. In the process of training Atanas Stoyanov and Slavka Stefanova provoked those who were present by interactive and non-standard games; they discussed the issues of being a volunteer, what's the contribution of the volunteers in an organization and how we could motivate the youth to participate actively in the activities focused on the desegregation and integration of Roma children as well as activities which could popularize the Roma culture, history and folklore. One of the main tasks which the trainers gave the youths was to work in a team. One part of them prepared a project and another part worked on the campaign 'The Sunrise is for everyone' for 8th April.

Both teams showed supreme creativity and innovation. The youth expressed their will and enthusiasm to work jointly in the built network of Center Amalipe. They are convinced that together they could achieve everything.

A BACHELOR'S WEDDING IN KAMEN



The traditional Bulgarian folklore custom Bachelor's wedding (Men's marriage) was organized in the village of Kamen, Veliko Tarnovo region. The "wedding" takes place every leap year at Simi Zagovezni feast and it is typical only for Veliko Tarnovo region. It is celebrated also in the village of Prisovo, Kilifarevo town and so on.

Only men (bachelors) take part in the custom. They dress like the different personages of the wedding-guests: the bride and the groom, the mother-in-law, the bridesmaids and the other women.

In the village of Kamen the feast has been celebrated since 1932. This year the celebration took place on March 9th and was the best celebration ever seen. Up to 20 participants half of them dressed like women created the atmosphere of a real wedding in which the son-in-law was short as a child still playing with toys, and the bride was the tallest 'girl' in the village. According to the story of the plot the bride does not want to marry so she tries to escape from the wedding. Finally however she falls in love with the bachelor.

The end of the story is a happy 'marriage' and blessing from the priest on the square of the village.

For first time this year Roma from Kamen also took part in the wedding.



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