



Amalipe Newsletter

Issue #9, 2007

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Free screenings of people without health insurance belonging to ethnic minorities

A campaign for free screenings of the general condition and the early diagnosis of pulmonary diseases for people from the ethnic minorities without health insurances has been started since the beginning of December by the Regional Health Centers. The screenings are carried out by the GPs and the specialists. The campaign follows an order of the Minister of Health. It is in connection with the implementation of the Action plan of the Health Strategy for people from vulnerable groups belonging to the ethnic minorities. The examinations should

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OBSERVER

A call for proposals from Bulgarian municipalities within Phare

The CFCU at the Ministry of Finance announces a call for proposals from Bulgarian municipalities within Phare BG 2005/017-353.01.03 "Improving the conditions and integration of minority groups in vulnerable position with special focus on Roma." The objectives of the call for proposals are: improving

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FOCUS

ROMA ORGANIZATIONS IN BULGARIA PROTEST AGAINST THE RUDE POLITICAL PRESSURE OVER ROMA ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR EXCLUSION FROM THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

More than 50 Roma organizations from the territory of whole Bulgaria signed a letter to the Bulgarian Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev expressing their concern and disagreement from the political control and pressure put from the state institutions of the executive power over the independent civic organizations and their exclusion from the decision-making process regarding Roma integration in Bulgaria. They point in the letter that their reaction has been provoked by:

- Denying Roma NGOs access to the process of elaboration of the new version of the Framework program for equal integration of Roma into Bulgarian society;
- Taking important decisions on behalf of the National council for cooperation on ethnic and demographic issues solely by its political presiding body without any consultations with the non-governmental organizations members of the NCCEDI;
- Rejecting the Roma experts nominated as observers in the Human Resource Development Monitoring Committee by a broad coalition of independent Roma organizations and an attempt of a governmental structure as the National council for cooperation on ethnic and demographic issues to present itself as a representative body of the Roma civil society;
- Sending a letter with untruthful content by the administration serving the

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OBSERVER

FREE SCREENINGS OF PEOPLE WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE BELONGING TO ETHNIC MINORITIES

be carried out from 10th to 21st of December and should cover around 1500 people. A special budget from the 'National programs' item has been allocated for carrying out the screenings. They should be completed and reported by the end of the year.

A CALL FOR PROPOSALS FROM BULGARIAN MUNICIPALITIES WITHIN PHARE

... the living conditions of the local Roma communities in vulnerable positions through reconstruction and rehabilitation work of the technical and social infrastructure; raising the quality and attractiveness of the educational system in schools providing integrated education and reducing the drop-out rate among Roma children through reconstruction and rehabilitation work of school buildings; foster building local partnerships between the local authorities, NGOs, the Roma community and other interested parties for developing and implementing straightforward measures for Roma integration

The activities which will be supported are improving the infrastructure in settlements with high number of Roma population; improving the social infrastructure for the needs of health, culture, administration and so on.; renovation and reconstruction works of school buildings providing integrated education. All relevant documents can be found at: www.minfin.bg. The deadline is January 21st, 2008, 4.00 pm.

A CALL FOR PROPOSALS UNDER THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAM

The Ministry of regional development announces a call for proposals under the Regional Development Operational Program 2007 – 2013, Priority axis 1, operation 1.1. "Social infrastructure": *"Support for providing appropriate and efficient educational, social and cultural infrastructure contributing to the development of sustainable urban areas."*

The aim of the grant scheme is improving, renewing and modernizing the social, educational and cultural infrastructure in the urban areas and providing social inclusion and equal access for vulnerable groups. The activities which will be supported include reconstruction, renovation and equipment work of educational institutions, of institutions providing social services, cultural centers and so on. The projects should be between 200 000 and 6 000 000 BGN. There is no closing date of the call. List of eligible municipalities and additional information can be found at www.mrrb.government.bg and www.bgregio.eu.

A CONFERENCE THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

A conference "The role of women in the decision-making process" was organized by the Information office of the European Parliament in Bulgaria on November 22, 2007 in Sofia. Papers on the situation and challenges women meet in building their personal, social, and professional life were presented by Mr. Toon Streppel, Head of the Information office of the European Parliament in Bulgaria, Mrs. Ingrid Shikova, EC Representation in Bulgaria, Mrs. Dushana Zdravkova, MEP, Mrs. Zita Gurmai, MEP and so on. In the discussion after the presentations Teodora Krumova announced the forthcoming report on the situation of Romani women in Bulgaria. The Information office of the European Parliament in Bulgaria proposed to present the report after it is published. The participants proposed to further discuss straightforward activities to propomote the higher participation of Romani women.

ROMA ORGANIZATIONS IN BULGARIA PROTEST AGAINST THE RUDE POLITICAL PRESSURE OVER ROMA ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR EXCLUSION FROM THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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... the **National Council** for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy regarding a decision of the Roma organizations members of the Council.

The letter, the list of supporting organizations and the following stages of the campaign were announced at a pressconference which took place on November 30. Lili Makaveeva (Integro Association – Razgrad), Deyan Kolev (Center Amalipe – Veliko Turnovo), Maria Stoimenova (Gyulchay Foundation – Sofia), Kalina Bozeva (Interethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation – Sofia), Gancho Iliev (World without Borders Association), Maryana Borisova (Youth Development Network – Simitly), Nikolay Yankov (Neve Droma Foundation – Shumen), etc took part in the press conference. The press conference was also attended by Mrs Dushana Zdravkova, Bulgarian MEP.

Lili Makaveeva pointed that the Roma organizations have managed to create a number of concrete successful practices for solving Roma problems at the grassroots level but it is necessary the institutions to take the initiative and apply these practices at the national level. Most of the institutions instead impede the initiatives of organizations and informal groups if they are not connected with certain political parties. Deyan Kolev provided concrete examples for the exclusion of Roma organizations from the decision-making integration process. He argued that the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues had turned into a tool for political control over the civic society and following this trend the institution would turn into a “Fatherland Front on Ethnic and Demographic Issues” (an analogue of the “civic” structures of the Communist regime before 1989).

The Deputy Chairman of the National Council Miroslav Popov answered that the Roma organizations would be included in the elaboration of the Framework program but just after the institutions

have worked out the first draft of the document. The organizations present at the press conference opposed that this was against all democratic principles for civic participation which should include all stages. Dushana Zdravkova, Bulgarian MEP, completely agreed with the organizations and declared her support. She underlined that the institutions should not behave like offended children but provide maximum possibilities for participation of the independent civic organizations and the Roma community in general in the integration process which would be the best guarantee for its success. “I hope the letter of the active Roma organizations would be taken seriously and the problems it raises will be quickly solved here in Bulgaria. If not, I will take the engagement to pose this issue in the European parliament”, Mrs. Zdravkova underlined.

After the press conference the letter was sent to the Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev with a copy to the President of Bulgaria Georgi Pirinski and the Chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament Georgi Pirinski. In the accompanying letter the organizations insist on a meeting to discuss the situation. If they are not answered within a month a parliamentary question would be initiated in the Bulgarian Parliament and after this the issue will be taken to the European parliament.

More information as well as the full text of the letter can be found at www.amalipe.com



Picture: Ruslan Yordanov, Classa Newspaper



ANNUAL REPORT "ROMA INTEGRATION IN BULGARIA – 2006"

Annual report "Roma Integration in Bulgaria – 2006" prepared by Center "Amalipe" was recently published. It concerns the main trends in Roma integration process from January to December 2006 with accents on education, social policy, living conditions, connecting EU accession with Roma integration and gender equality issues. Special attention is paid to the institutional and normative framework for Roma integration at national, regional and local levels.

Deyan Kolev, George Bogdanov, Maria Metodieva, Teodora Krumova and Boyan Zahariev are the report authors. The report combines results from permanent monitoring of the daily activities of certain national institutions with results from a field survey about the state of Roma integration in 17 municipalities all over Bulgaria realized by Center "Amalipe" and 8 other Roma NGOs. The monitoring of the activity of central level institutions (such as National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour, and so on) provides information about the real input of resources (financial and human ones) and about the really implemented activities for Roma integration by the side of the institutions concerned. It indicates also the main tendencies of the governmental policy for Roma integration as well as the changes in it. The field survey reveals the real outputs, outcomes and impact of the activities undertaken by central institutions. It reveals also the main trends in Roma integration at local level without matter whether they are results of a deliberate policy or of a random and unguided process.

The main conclusions about the Roma integration process during 2006 outlined within the report are:

- o Roma integration has not been steered by the documents designed to manage it and adopted by Bulgarian government (we called them "Roma strategies.") In practice everything significant, that happened with the Roma integration in 2006 was undertaken outside of the engagements towards the so called "Roma strategies";

- o the process was marked by a significant decrease of the efforts towards the integration of most of the institutions. The debate concerning the integration was taken years back that put into manace even the few things achieved during the previous periods;

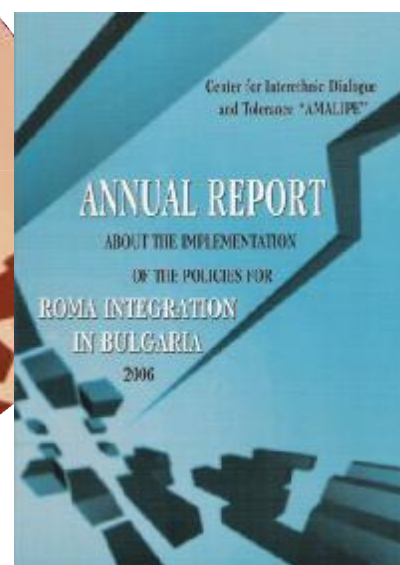
- o in 2006 the efforts for Roma integration

to follow the scheme inherited from the previous years: symbolic actions without additional financing from the state budget (with the only one possible exception: co-financing under the PHARE program) and without the additional engagement of new human resources. The year of 2006 did not show the presence of serious political will to change the designate scheme.

The report ends with concrete recommendations for converting Roma integration into a **straightforward and policy-oriented process** as well as for **including the Roma community as a partner and an active participant in the Roma integration process**. The recommendations are directed to the institutions of executive power, to the Parliament, to the President and to the Roma NGOs. In their totality the recommendations form a basis for building consistent strategy for converting Roma integration into one of the main public policies in Bulgaria.

Copie from the report could be obtained after request to the following address:

Center "Amalipe", p.o.box 113, Veliko Turnovo 5000, Bulgaria



PROMOTING ROMA EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL



DEYAN KOLEV TOOK PART IN PEER REVIEW IN DUBLIN

A series of meetings were organized by EUMAP and OSI – Brussels to present the launch of the two-volume report published by EUMAP Equal Access to quality Education for Roma on 13 and 14 December 2007. The researcher from the Bulgarian team Teodora Krumova took part in the meetings. Their aim of the meetings was to present the report and advocate for including its conclusions and recommendations in the policies and actions of the different institutions. In this respect meetings have been organized in Action against discrimination, Civil society Unit, DG Empl., DG Education and culture, European Social Fund Unit, Bulgarian and Hungarian Desk, DG Empl., the Europe Trade Union Committee for education and Educational International, ENAR, DG Enlargement and so on. The meetings showed that there is sensitivity among officials in the Commission, NGOs, and the Trade Unions about the importance of straightforward actions for speeding the Roma educational integration process. Special concern has been expressed by the officials about the continuing practice for placing Roma children in special schools (especially in Bulgaria). One of the EUMAP conclusions of the report is that intercultural education should become a corestone for the successful educational integration. In this respect the successful practice of Center Amalipe for introducing Roma culture classes in the school curriculum for both Roma and non-Roma children was highly welcomed and pointed as one of the examples. The Educational Trade Union called for more intensive cooperation between NGOs, the Roma community and the Trade Unions and in turn took the engagement to pass this message to its country branches. As a result a couple of working meetings on the educational integration of Roma children will be organized in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary. A developing trend will be the higher engagement of the EU policies with the civil society participation in decision-making and implementation processes. In addition, Roma issues will most probably turn soon into a horizontal policy.

The Chairman of Center “Amalipe” Deyan Kolev took part in Peer Review in Dublin (Ireland), organized by DG “Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities” of the European Commission. It aimed to observe the Irish Social Inclusion Forum as well as to discuss opportunities for its multiplication in the other EU member-states.

Experts from 10 EU member-states took part in the Peer Review. Every country was represented by one state expert (working usually in the Ministry of Labour) and one expert from an active NGO.

During the discussions Deyan Kolev pointed that the most important in the Irish Social Inclusion Forum is the idea that it is possible and necessary to have direct consultations with all stakeholders without putting them under National Councils or other institutions controlled by the executive power. At the same time this type of consultations does not exclude the existence of National Councils or state organized institutions for indirect consultations. As “a remarkable fact” Deyan Kolev described the existence of Irish Ministry of Integration although migrants and minorities compose less than 10 % of the overall population in Ireland. “Institutions are not untouchable phenomena. People create institutions when there is serious need to solve serious problem. It would be great if this idea was multiplied in our countries.” – pointed Deyan Kolev.



MEETING OF ROMA WORKING IN MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS IN VELIKO TURNOVO DISTRICT

Center “Amalipe” organized training for Roma who work as civil servants or are elected as city councilors or village mayors in municipalities in Veliko Turnovo District. The training took place on December 10 and 11 in Lyaskovetz. Twenty-two Roma all over the district participated in it. National strategies and programs for Roma integration, institutional infrastructure for minority integration at national and local levels, opportunities for financing of integration activities and peculiarities of the work in Roma community were the main topics discussed.

The participants exchanged valuable ideas and experience. They planned concrete steps for expanding the Roma presence in municipal institutions, for preparing municipal documents for integration as well



as for implementation of concrete activities for solving the aching problems of the local Roma communities. Center “Amalipe” was entrusted with the task to coordinate the campaign for fulfilling the steps planned.

TRAINING OF MUNICIPAL CIVIL SERVANTS FROM VELIKO TURNOVO DISTRICT



Training of municipal civil servants from Veliko Turnovo District took place in Veliko Turnovo on December 20 and 21, 2007. 21 civil servants from all municipal administration in the district as well as city councilors and mayors took part in the training. It was organized by the Regional Association of Municipalities “Yantra”.

Mariana Bancheva (Ministry of Education and Science), Plamen Gerginov (Ministry of Labour), Deyan Kolev and Teodora Krumova (Center “Amalipe”) were the main lecturers. Mariana Bancheva and Plamen Gerginov made the participants familiar with certain peculiarities of the application process within Operational Program “Human Resources Development” as well as with the forthcoming calls for proposals for 2008. Deyan Kolev and Teodora Krumova presented the main documents for Roma integration in Bulgaria and opportunities for financing municipal activities in this direction. Answering numerous

questions they insisted on broad Roma participation in preparing and implementing municipal strategies, projects and activities for Roma integration. Deyan Kolev provided valuable experience in this direction as well as advices how to find and engage different types of Roma authorities. The training was part of a joined initiative of RAM “Yantra” and Center “Amalipe” for strengthening the engagement of local institutions in Veliko Turnovo District with solving the problems of Roma community.



Center Amalipe

CENTER AMALIPE HAS A NEW WEB SITE: WWW.AMALIPE.COM

You can already visit the new web site of Center Amalipe: www.amalipe.com ! It contains information and news about everything connected with the organization, as well as information about the process of Roma integration in Bulgaria. You can read about Roma culture and history, about the monitoring and evaluation of Roma integration policies, intercultural education, advocacy activities of the organization, the situation of Romani women, publications, etc. You can find useful links and a lot of pictures, videos and other materials. The web site is in Bulgarian and English and is updated daily.



AN EC CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION 'SCHOOLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY'

In the second half of 2007 the European Commission services have decided to launch a consultation on education answering some basic challenges some of which are: one fifth of under 15-year olds attains only the lowest level of proficiency in reading; almost 15% of 18 – 24 year olds leave school prematurely; only 77% of 22-year olds have completed upper secondary education and so on. *Continues on p.8*

PUPILS PRESENTED ROMA AND BULGARIAN TRADITIONS DURING CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

Students from Primarily School "Vassil Levski"-Ledenik village took part in Christmas celebration organized in the village cultural house *chitalishte*. They presented songs and dances as well as exhibition of traditional objects and bread connected with Christmas and St. Basil's Day prepared according to Roma and Bulgarian traditions. The exhibition was prepared within the school project "Roma and Bulgarian traditions in Ledenik" financed by Municipality of Veliko Turnovo and Ministry of Education and Science. The celebration was visited by the mayor of Ledenik, the Chairman of Center "Amalipe" Deyan Kolev, artists all over the municipality and many people from Ledenik.

In his congratulation words Deyan Kolev pointed that joint performance of Bulgarian and Roma traditions is the only way to preserve the cultural spirit of Ledenik. He defined as major aim for the school to motivate all children to continue their education in secondary and high schools. "The village of Ledenik will live forever since the school and the cultural house *chitalishte* are alive. All citizens of the village as well as the mayor should pay good care for both of



them!" – pointed Deyan Kolev

The project of Primarily School "Vassil Levski"-Ledenik "Roma and Bulgarian traditions in Ledenik" was one of 50 projects of primarily schools which preparation was helped by Center "Amalipe" in May 2007. Forty-eight of them were financed by Ministry of Education within the National Program "School – desirable territory of the student".



AN EC CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION 'SCHOOLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY'

SCHOOL

Respondents have been invited to identify what actions are necessary within their national contexts to ensure that schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st century; and identify those aspects of school education on which cooperation at European Union level could help to support Member States in the modernization of their systems. Reflecting its role in support of Member States, the Commission's services will draw on this information and on other sources to identify those areas where exchanges of experiences and joint work would be most profitable for future work within the Education and Training 2010 work program.

Center Amalipe's comments to the Commission Staff Working Paper 'Schools for the 21ST Century' (SEC(2007)1009)

Question 1: How can schools be organized in such a way as to provide all students with the full range of all competences?

Including the four new transversal competences is one of the challenges traditional educational systems have to meet. There are two parallel ways to meet this challenge. They do not contradict but complete each other. One of the ways is to include the transversal competences in the traditional subjects. This has to be a requirement. An example in this direction is the new curriculum policy in Bulgaria. Since 2001 a change in the curriculum has been under way in the Bulgarian education system, starting from the first grade and moving gradually onwards. The change involved the inclusion of ethnic and religious diversity, conveying the values of tolerance, after the Ministry of Education and Science required the inclusion of these issues in the curriculum for certain subjects.

The introducing of the transversal competences in the content of traditional subject should be accompanied with the second approach: promoting elective subjects oriented around the new competences. Such an example is the Roma culture program implemented by Center Amalipe in Bulgaria. These two approaches should not be discussed separately but as equal parts of one system; they should complement each other. Thus the traditional educational systems which are based on the traditional subjects could integrate the new transversal competences.

Question 4: How can school system best respond to the need to promote equality, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?

One of the reasons for the high number of Roma children who have dropped out of school or have not attended school at all is that in most cases the educational system is still a monocentric one presenting only one culture: that of the majority population. For Roma children and their parents the school system is still an official and alien. They do not see there anything from their own culture and traditions. The educational system is still excluding regarding minority children, children with disadvantages, and so on. Therefore, the school system could better promote equality and respond to cultural diversity by include this cultural diversity as an integral part of school curriculum.

Question 7: How can school staff be trained and supported to meet challenges they face?

One of the challenges traditional educational schools have to meet is welcoming the increasing cultural diversity in school. The enlargements of the European Union and the inclusion of new nationalities increase this tendency. This is extremely valid for the new Member states with significant number of Roma minority. 44% of the first-grade students in Montana district in Bulgaria and 40% of the students in Sliven district in Bulgaria are of Roma origin. This confronts teachers who teach these children to adapt their approach and take into account the cultural values, traditions and attitudes of all their students, in order to make them feel the school environment comfortable and welcoming. Educational systems however are the most traditional and conservative ones and are still not flexible enough to answer teacher's needs for more knowledge and skills to work in multicultural environment. At the same time there is a need to establish an open system of training which would allow non-governmental organizations to be also engaged as training institutions. Non-governmental organizations have accumulated significant experience in intercultural education and trainings. In addition, NGOs are more flexible to answer the developing educational system than universities are.

The including of the new competences and especially intercultural education which refers to cultural awareness and expression is not an additional task but one of the major means for modernization of the educational system.

Center Amalipe

VRASTIRI 2007 AN EXHIBITION OF BURGUDJII MASTERS



Exhibition of exquisite iron objects produced by masters – blacksmiths from the *Burgudjii* Roma group took place on December 14 and 15 in Veliko Turnovo. Seven Roma blacksmith masters presented their unique hand-made production. Different types of knives, swords, adzes, axes, as well as hand-made iron souvenirs with high quality were shown during the exhibition. The masters who live in the village of Kamen and the town of Levski are representatives of the *Burgudjii* group that has earned its leaving with blacksmith services from centuries. For first time *Burgudjii* masters agreed to show their ancient secrets before broad audience during the exhibition.

The event was honored by representatives of the Municipality of Veliko Turnovo, delegation of Strajitzta Municipality (lead by the Deputy Mayor Verka Boshkova), representatives of business associations and many citizens of Veliko Turnovo. A Greeting letter was sent by Bulgarian Industrial Chamber as well as by the Mayor of Veliko Turnovo MD Roumen Rashev. “Through this initiative your organization again proved its consistency in promoting the positive image of Roma community” – wrote in his Letter MD Rashev.

Every visitor had the chance to receive catalogue and DVD disc with movie that shows the traditional production process of iron objects.

The exhibition, „VRÁSTIRI” (Workshop) 2007 was organized by Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance “Amalipe” with the support of Regional resource cultural center “Fabrikata” and Veliko Turnovo Municipality. Its initiator was Atanas Stoyanov, student in Public Administration from *Burgudjii* Roma origin. He did not hide his emotion that the citizens of Veliko Turnovo showed high interest and respect to the traditions of *Burgudjii* Roma.



Catalogue of handicraft, history and traditions of the Burgudjii Roma

Catalogue of handicraft, history and traditions of the Roma from *Burgudjii* (Blacksmiths) group was recently published by Center “Amalipe”. The catalogue name is “Vrastiri – Workshop”. The catalogue contains short description short introduction about the *Burgudjii* Roma from North – Eastern Bulgaria, their customs and traditions (with accent on calendar and wedding feasts), dialect and history. The catalogues describes also the traditional *Burgudjii* handicraft – production of iron objects and provides information about the production process as well as about the objects produced by 7



prominent *Burgudjii* masters. Colored pictures make visible all things described.

Twenty minutes movie with the same name accompanies the catalogue. The movie presents the production process through the stories of two *Burgudjii* masters retailed in Romani and Bulgarian.

The catalogue and the movie are published by Center “Amalipe” with the support of Regional resource cultural center “Fabrikata”. Their author is Atanas Stoyanov, student in Public Administration from *Burgudjii* Roma origin. He is one of the Amalipe staff members.

AMALIPE CENTER FOR INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE

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