TABLE OF CONTENTS:
Focus:
- The French Ambassador HE Philippe Autie visited Center Amalipe
- Meeting of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with Roma Activists

Khere:
- Roma and Bulgarian Collected and Dispatched Relief to the People in Flooded Areas and the Village of Biser
- National Anti-aids Campaign "Prezervativaj se!" (Use condom!!) in Veliko Tarnovo and Pavlikeni
- February 21 – International Mother Tongue Day
- Celebrating of February 14 and St. Valentine's or St. Triphon Zarezan
- Center Amalipe Donates Computers to Schools, NGOs and Community Development Centers
- Information about "Promoting Social Inclusion of Young People in Marginalized Rural Roma Communities Project

Observer:
- The National Roma Integration Strategy has been Approved
- Representatives of the European Commission and Roma NGOs Discussed the National Strategy for Roma Integration and how it relates to the Utilization of EU Funds.
- Public Information Event for New Strategic Documents
- Center Amalipe Participated in a Conference on Scaling up action for Roma health in Serbia and beyond in Belgrade, Serbia, 28-29 February 2012

School:
- Working Draft Version of the Pre-school and School Education Law has been released
- Round Table for Discussion of the Draft of Pre-school and School Education Law
- Ministry of Education Announced Call for Proposals under Grant Scheme Literacy Services for Adult People
- A Discussion on CEICPEM Plan for 2012
- Workshop with Mentoring Teachers
- A school in Dzhurovo Launches a Project under SUCCESS Programme
- The School in Straldza has a Star Alley

Roma Health:
- Center Amalipe Holds Campaign for the Prevention of Tuberculosis in the Village of Daskot

Bright rugs
- Petloyvden (Rooster-day)
- Shrovetide

FOCUS
INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR ROMA INTEGRATION

On 28.02, the French Ambassador HE Philippe Autie Amalipe had a meeting with Center Amalipe as part of his visit to Veliko Tarnovo, associated with the exhibition "The archives of the planet" of photographs taken by the "operators" of the famous French banker and philanthropist Albert Kahn a century ago. Within an hour and a half he discussed with Amalipe team the situation of Roma in Bulgaria, the public attitudes regarding integration and the case of "Katunitsa", its causes and consequences. Teodora Krumova briefed the Ambassador about the activities of Amalipe in education and in particular the overall program of Amalipe for introducing intercultural education including Roma Culture Classes in the school curriculum. Atanas Stoyanov presented the work of the Community Development Centres, created by Amalipe in six municipalities in Bulgaria. His Excellence was intrigued by the trends in the community and the change in attitudes to education. He and Veronique North-Mink, First Secretary and Attache on institutional and technical cooperation strongly agreed that the positive examples in the community should be encouraged and promoted. They are not only role models that can support the development of the community itself, but also the most effective agents of change not only inside the community but also in terms of changing the attitudes towards the Roma community in the mainstream society. The guests left with a wish for further joint initiatives, and the desire to be guests of the ninth edition of the Roma Children's Festival "Open Heart", which Amalipe has been organizing on June 9-10 in Veliko Tarnovo.

MEETING OF US SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON WITH ROMA ACTIVISTS

United States of America will join the Decade of Roma Inclusion as official observer announced the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at a meeting with representatives of Roma organizations in Bulgaria. At the American Embassy in Sofia, she met with ten Roma activists, representatives of the Club Roma Interns at the National Assembly, 'Open Society Institute' and the Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance 'Amalipe'. The meeting was part of the brief, five-hour visit of the U.S. Secretary of State in Bulgaria on 5 February, which included talks with Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, President Rosen Plevneliev and Roma activists. Countries that don't fully integrate women or minorities of any kind will not have the economic growth in GDP that is possible and will face the loss of human potential stated Mrs. Clinton at the start of the meeting with Roma activists. She greeted the Bulgarian government on its commitment to the preparation of a National Strategy on Roma Integration, in which the Roma community itself took part. I am morally committed to support the Roma rights and consider it an important task, said the U.S. Secretary of State. Puts an accent on the necessity of implementing plans for Roma integration, Mrs. Clinton said that it is to interest of the beneficiary countries and one should not be left with the impression of a half-done job. Deyan Kolev expressed

Continues on page 2

KHERE (AT HOME)
ROMA AND BULGARIAN COLLECTED AND DISPATCHED RELIEF TO THE PEOPLE IN FLOODED AREAS AND THE VILLAGE OF BISER

Day of Commitment to residents of flooded region was held on the territory of Novi Pazar. On February 9, a charity campaign has been held to collect clothing, blankets and food. This is a joint initiative of the Community Development Center – Novi Pazar, established by Center Amalipe, the local Family Counseling Center for Children and Parents and Roma Women NGO – ‘Hayachi’ – Novi Pazar. Donations have been collected during a previously announced call. Moderators of the Community Development Centers via door to door round-up in the Roma neighborhood of the town managed to collect donations for those living in afflicted areas. Though the Roma families from Novi Pazar themselves need support and help most of them living under very severe conditions, each house provided its share in this charity campaign. With the support of the Municipal Authorities the collected relief has been distributed to the village of Biser (Southern Bulgaria). Emiliya Aldinova, moderator at Community Development Center - Novi Pazar said that the idea came spontaneously resulting from empathy for the victims. Nobody has relatives among the victims of the disaster but ‘Roma who heard the news felt pain as if it has had afflicted their own neighborhood’, Emiliya said. ‘Among the Roma people in our town there are also many poor and needy people. But everyone gladly gave clothes and blankets, no one made a fuss about we being Muslims and the victims - Orthodox, we - Roma and they – non-Roma…after all, we are all human beings’, said Yusein Shakir a community moderator. Thus, residents of Novi Pazar have shown that tolerance and humanity make no difference to color, race and ethnicity.
MEETING OF US SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON WITH ROMA ACTIVISTS

his gratitude to the Secretary of State that she managed to arrange for a meeting with Roma activists within her short timetable. This is an important political sign and we appreciate it - as Bulgarian citizens, we work with national institutions, but international support for Roma integration has always been of particular significance to us, said Kolev. He laid emphasis on the role of education in the Roma community modernization, clarifying that it comes to multicultural education in desegregated, ethnically mixed school environment. It is important that the in new Bulgarian Act on School Education, being currently in a process of preparation, texts should be envisaged to provide legal framework for desegregation and intercultural education. Advocacy is an important tool used by Roma NGOs in their dialogue with national institutions, international support being essential to successful advocacy, as the Roma integration policies at this stage have not found broad public support yet, politicians are indecisive and the civil society organizations work often in an environment of anti-Roma attitudes. Maria Metodieva underlined the need of Roma community empowerment. Good education is the first step, but it should lead to an impact of the educated Roma in all spheres of public and political life so they can take their share of responsibility for Roma integration. In addition, Gancho Iliev stated that it is necessary that educated Roma occupy positions in government institutions. There is already a cluster of good Roma experts, but their presence in institutions, especially those at the central level is minimal. He gave as an example the inclusion of African Americans and Hispanic Americans in U.S. institutions, which not only support the integration of minorities there but thus contributed to the effective work of the institutions themselves. Spaska Mihaylova stressed the necessity of targeted measures for ensuring equal treatment of the Roma woman. She expressed gratitude for Mrs Clinton's ongoing commitment to the women emancipation, stating that Roma women are double-way excluded and the potential of Roma women should be developed and utilized. Ognyan Isayev talked about ongoing discrimination that forces a lot of educated Roma to conceal their origins. We currently have two major Roma groups – the ones, who are extremely marginalized and live in ghettos out of the law and others, who are educated and integrated. The media and politicians attempt to brainwash the general public opinion with the idea that the first group of Roma are the rule and the rest are 'rare', which leads to stereotypes and discrimination, explained Isayev. Statements were made by Kina Asenova and Anelia Dudinova with a focus on the importance of Roma participation in business and economic life. Galia Trayanova made an overview of the Support Program for Roma Medicine Students, coordinated by 'Open Society' Institute, as well as her daily work as the only Roma expert at the Ministry of Health. She encouraged the Bulgarian Government support to programs for promoting Roma graduates and recruitment of more Roma experts in the ministries. Atanas Stoyanov mentioned the Internship Program for Roma in the National Assembly (supported by 'Open Society' Institute) and the Community Development Centers (established by CIDT Amalipe in 6 municipalities) as examples of how the potential of young Roma could be developed and they get involved in outreach activities for development of the Roma community. It is necessary that Bulgarian institutions provide follow-up and support of these initiatives insisted Stoyanov. He was commended by Mrs. Clinton that for his election as councilor at the Municipality of Strazhitsa, which is a good example of Roma to Roma support. Finally, Hillary Clinton said that the Roma issue should be prioritized in the agenda of the societies of Eastern Europe. The problems faced by Roma are similar to problems faced by excluded minorities all over the world. Roma organizations in Bulgaria proved to work effectively and is very important that they elaborate and advocate for their own general agenda, a program of goals and demands. The U.S. government would patronize such a program. This meeting will be continued, said Hon. James Warlick and thanked the participants for their commitment to protecting the rights of Roma.

THE NATIONAL ROMA INTEGRATION STRATEGY HAS BEEN APPROVED

On the very day considered the transition to spring - March 1 - The National Assembly approved unanimously the National Roma Integration Strategy. A total of 104 Members of Parliament supported the document with general consensus - all voted 'for', no one 'against' or 'abstention'. The Deputy Prime Minister and Chairperson of NCCEII Tsvetanov introduced the Strategy underlying that has been proposed to the Parliament for consideration as the government's intention is to introduce the integration of Roma as its long-term priority and they envisage the participation of other parliamentary parties in the process as well. We wish that this strategy be adopted by the 41th National Assembly and implemented by all future parliaments, all of us and together said Tsvetanov. MPs from the governing party GERB supported the document unequivocally. MPs from BSP and MRF also gave their vote 'in favour of', though with some reserves. According to Maya Manolova from BSP, the document has an utopic character. Milena Hristova, the only Romany MP in Parliament, argued that no specific measures have been incorporated in the document and also that the Roma inclusion is to be implemented by Government rather than the municipalities, as envisaged in the document. Ljutvi Mestan of MRF promised to vote 'in favour of' the Strategy, and emphasized the necessity for more precise and in-depth analysis of the reasons behind the core problem issue that hampers the complete integration of Roma. MPs from the party Attack did not take part in the vote. In their view, the Strategy provides for privilege of one specific ethnic group. The idea NRIS to be approved by the National Assembly was one of the main demands posed by Roma organizations in a series of conferences organized by CIEDT Amalipe, the Roma Academy of Culture and Education, 'World Without Borders' Association, 'The New Road' Association and 'Roma' Foundation - Lom held in October 2011. The Strategy itself was adopted by the Council of Ministers on December 21, 2011. In Decision No 01/05.01.2012 of the Council of Ministers contained extract that specifies the submission of the document for approval to the National Assembly. Apart from the Strategy, Action Plan has been adopted, which was not submitted to a vote at the National Assembly and will be the responsibility of the Council of Ministers. Experts from the European Commission and Roma non-governmental organizations discussed the National Strategy for Roma integration. Bulgarian NSRI is a subject to detailed assessment, involving 20 experts from the European Commission.

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND ROMA NGOs DISCUSSED THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ROMA INTEGRATION AND HOW IT SHOULD BE BOUND BY THE ABSORPTION OF EU FUNDS.

The event took place on 28th of February at a meeting held in Sofia. Eight experts from three major Directorates ("Employment", "Regional Development" and "Justice") represented the European Commission at the meeting. They talked to Gancho Iliev and Milena Ilieva ("World Without Borders"), Stella Kostova (Roma Academy of Culture and Education) Rumyan Rusinov (Center for Public Policy and Advocacy), Sergi Karakashev (Roma Foundation "Iskra") Rumyan Sechkov (Foundation S.E.G.A.), Malina Georgieva, Milen Milanov (Roma Education Fund) and Deyan Kolev (Center "Amalipe"). They discussed the National Strategy for Roma Integration, the difficulties of using EU funds in the current period and the necessary steps for closer linking of European funds and Roma integration in the new period. Roma activists united around the statement that their main proposals have not been considered in general narrative national Roma strategy and the consultation process was rather formal. The strategy is a good document, weak parts in it are the monitoring and implementation mechanisms. The Action Plan is rather not a plan - it describes the existing activities and it does not plan new - all proposed new activities were excluded from the final version of the Action Plan or were left without funding. Another serious weakness is the lack of adequate funding: 71 out of 120 actions in the plan are with no provided funding. These weaknesses would have been avoided if the Council of Ministers has approved the proposed by Roma organizations Annex, "Programs to support the implementation of NSRI". The application was discussed during the conciliation procedure of the acts of the CoM and the Deputy Prime Minister Tsvetanov himself declared that it is accepted.
However, it is not present in the Decision of the CoM and by now, two months already the Secretariat of NCCEII (National Council for cooperation on ethnic and integration issues) does not offer it again to the CoM - an example of striking discrepancy between the political leadership and bureaucracy. One of the biggest challenges now is the involvement of local authorities with the implementation of integration policy, insisted Roma activists. Cyril Kiryakov by DG "Employment" ensured that the European Commission focuses on the involvement of municipalities. With this purpose in October 2012 a European network of municipalities working for Roma integration will be established. The Commission will insist Application "Programs to support the implementation of NSRI" to be approved and will monitor the actual financing of the National Roma Strategy. Axel Cheney by DG "Justice" explained that the Bulgarian NSRI is a subject to detailed assessment, involving 20 experts from the European Commission. The evaluation will not be a single act - this will be made each year. The meeting was part of the visit of representatives of the European Commission, which also includes meetings with representatives of key institutions involved in implementation of NSRI. It is preparation for a forum which will be held in Sofia on May 22.

PUBLIC INFORMATION EVENT FOR NEW STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

Public information event on the development of new strategic documents of Republic of Bulgaria was held on 13.02.2012 in Sofia. It was organized by the Directorate “Programming of EU Funds” in the administration of the Council of Ministers (CoM). During the event were presented the objectives, the tasks and two teams of contractors on the project “Supporting the overall process of developing the new strategic documents of Republic of Bulgaria” of the Central Coordination Unit (CCU). Representatives of state institutions, ministries and the Interdepartmental Working Group to the Development Council, the social partners and businesses. Center “Amalipe” was represented by its Regional Coordinator Tsveta Antonova. The presentations by the contractor under "Preliminary Assessment of National Development Programme (NDP): Bulgaria 2020", association “Geo-Advisors” consortium and, the “Business and Strategies in Europe” contractor under "Analytical support to the preparation of National Development Program and strategic assessments” provoked questions and discussions related mainly to the approach in the implementation of activities and expected results. During the discussion it became clear that the contracts are projected to be consulted on the preliminary draft with representatives of various ministries in the three strategic goals and the eight priorities of the NDP, after developing their first draft they will be presented and consulted with the social partners, business and civil society. Mrs. Juliana Nikolova, chairman of the Public Council, stressed that this is a principled approach in which the base frame and the basics are defined by the institutions, followed by a consultation with business and social partners. The work of thematic working groups already begun at the eight major ministries, which, according to previously developed methods of CCU, they should include the so-called stakeholders - business, social partners, NGOs, and to organize discussions with them. Team leaders for contract implementation Associate Prof. Dr. Stelian Dimitrov and senior assistant Dr. Ralitsa Ganeva said that in the implementation process will be considered preliminary opinions expressed by all parties, and intermediate and preliminary reports on the implementation of operational programs, all data available to the ministries. In the presentations were identified deadlines for implementation of the contracts on a proposal by Mr. Petko Kovachev is accepted to be published and available to all partners, not just individual departments. In March the first frames of the NDP will be ready; until 27th of February the first draft of a detailed strategy priorities will be prepared and will then be discussed during a meeting of Working Group to the Development Council; in the end of May an updated and finalized version of strategies by priorities; in mid-June preliminary version of the interim reports for the overall integration and consolidation of priority strategies in a single document - NDP "Bulgaria 2020" will be prepared.
A WORKING DRAFT OF THE PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL EDUCATION LAW HAS BEEN PUBLISHED

On 14 February the Ministry of Education announced and published on its website a draft law on pre-school and school education. It regulates public relations that guarantee the right to education, as well as, the structure, functions, organization, management and funding of the system of pre-school and school education. The draft law is the result of intensive discussions that followed the publication of the previous draft in April 2010 and the concept of a new law in March 2011. Roma organizations working in the education sector participated actively in the preparation of the new law. During the workshops and national conferences initiated by CIEDT Amalipe and the Roma Education Fund in May and June 2010, they formulated proposals that provide for inclusion of the topic of educational integration in the law by introducing a standard for intercultural education, a ban on the formation of classes and schools along ethnic lines, introducing a mechanism for goal-oriented funding policy for educational integration at school level and by providing opportunities for knowledge validation, lifelong learning, support for education in small towns, etc. Forums organized by Amalipe and Education Fund in 2010 and 2011 gathered dozens of representatives of NGOs, hundreds of teachers and parents, as well as Minister of Education Sergei Ignatov and Deputy Minister Milena Damyanova. Representatives of Roma organizations joined the working groups preparing legislation and standards for intercultural education. In the newly published Draft most of the demands posed by the Roma organizations have been met. As a whole, the system of pre-school and school education includes equal access, preservation of ethno-cultural education and adherence to non-discrimination, which set the general framework of the state policy for integration of children and pupils from ethnic minorities. The establishment of tolerant attitude and respect for the ethnic identity of every citizen is one of the objectives of school education according to the Draft. In addition, it introduces state administered education standards for civil, health and intercultural education. Although its three-in-one from is far from being the most effective one, this standard - if properly developed - could become the legal basis for introduction of intercultural education and for conducting a large-scale educational integration policy, said Kolev. The draft-law requires that all schools develop their own programs to prevent early school leaving and integration of vulnerable groups. With respect to funding resources for the equitable access to education, school programs for preventing early school leaving will be financed by the state budget – i.e. schools will receive funds over the unified standards to provide for the implementation of those programs. Nevertheless, one of the key demands of Roma organizations has not been accordingly met – text, which prohibits the formation of classes and schools along ethnic lines. We will defend this to the last because it is a key aspect of educational integration policy, insisted Kolev. This draft is positive because it provides opportunity for the development of rural education: via the opportunity that elementary schools be furthered to secondary level (providing training up to 10th grade) they will not only be saved, but also hundreds of schools in small rural areas will be developed and the percentage of young people enrolled in secondary stage will significantly increase. At the same time, it is necessary that the law and accompanying regulations be more flexible to different forms of training so as to facilitate integration of children of seasonal migrants abroad. These are tens of thousands of children who leave school for a month or two to travel abroad, then have to stay out of school because of cumbersome regulations. Definitely more flexibility is entailed because the education system must comply with dynamic modern life, not vice versa, argues Deyan Kolev. In response, Deputy Minister Damyanova expressed her gratitude to Roma organizations for their activity and explained that the request to prohibit the formation of classes and schools along ethnic lines will be included in the bill.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCED CALL FOR PROPOSALS UNDER GRANT SCHEME LITERACY LITERACY FOR ADULT ROMA

The main objective of the project is to facilitate through literacy services and developing key competencies the further access of the illiterates and poorly literate people to educational and vocational training and make them accordingly more competitive at the labor market. At this stage, it is required that the schools interested in organizing training for target groups get registered through the school head. This will help project mediators to redirect potential students to the nearest school having declared willingness to organize training. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science through the ‘Educational Programs and Content’ Directorate is a beneficiary under the Operational Programme ‘Human Resource Development’ under the ‘New Chance for Success’ Project.

A DISCION ON CEICPEM PLAN FOR 2012

Meeting of the Steering Committee of Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities was held on 16 February at the Ministry of Education. Meeting facilitator was the Deputy Minister Milena Damyanova, Chairperson of the Steering Committee. The Participants dwelt
102 computers will be distributed by Center Amalipe to schools, centers for community development, local groups and Roma NGOs in support of their activities to raise the educational levels of Roma youth and empowerment of the Roma community. Computers are part of the donation of second hand computers through which Municipality of Lausanne and the Swiss Embassy support the development of NGO’s in the framework of the “Restart” Program. Besides Amalipe support by the Swiss Embassy received also the National Children’s Network and the Regional Association of Hospitals ‘Star Planina’. The contract about the computers’ grant was signed on February 14th at the Embassy of Switzerland in Sofia. Amalipe will use the donation to support the activities of the partner schools and organizations as well as the centers for the community development aimed at modernization and empowerment of local Roma communities in rural areas. The donation will stimulate student’s and parent’s clubs in 37 schools operating under “Reduction of Roma children dropping out of school” in 2010. Assisted are going to be the activities of the Centers for community development in Kameno, Peshtera, Etropole, Byala Slatina, Pavlikeni and Novi Pazar and local groups for community development aimed at preventing school failure, prevention of early marriages, increasing self-organization and modernization of local Roma communities. Supported are going to be also other Roma partner-NGOs as “World without borders” – Stara Zagora and “New Road” – Hayredin.

INFORMATION ABOUT “PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN MARGINALIZED RURAL ROMA COMMUNITIES” PROJECT

Within the project (financed by European Commission within PROGRESS Program) we plan to build four pilot Centers for Community Development (CCD) in the rural communities of Bulgaria. The Centers will work to overcome the problems of youth unemployment in rural areas and to provide new services in the community, with special focus (but not exclusively) on the Roma population. We will seek to ensure sustainability and wider application of the model at national and European level. In February 2012 there were sent notification letters for the start of the project to the mayors of 80 rural municipalities in Bulgaria and they were invited to participate. Application documents included a letter of interest and an application form. The requested information was on the overall socio-economic characteristics of the municipality: total number of population in working age; individuals up to 35 years number of unemployed in the municipality (officially registered and unregistered); individuals up to 35 years ethnic structure of population (Bulgarians, Turks, Roma, etc.), individuals up to 35 years educational status of the population (higher education, secondary education, primary education, without education) individuals up to 35 years economic characteristics of the municipality - the main areas of employment Social services which the municipality provides Programs / projects the municipality is working on (Rural Development Operational Program; Human Resources Operational Program, Project financed by World Bank, etc.). The application form and evaluation criteria can be found on the website by CIEDT Amalipe, Section News. The deadline for applications was February 29, 2012. By the deadline 38 rural municipalities applied. Among them were Sredets, Valchi dol, Devnya, Dolni Chiflik, Dulgopol, Lysakovets, Polski Trambesh, Strazhitsa, Mitza, Oryahovo, Hayredin, Dobrich-rural, Lukovit, Ugarchin, Brusartsi, Valchedram, Medkovets, Yakimovo, Septemvri, Strelcha, Knezhka, Nikopol, Kuklen, Perushtitsa, Dobrich-rural, Lukovit, Ugarchin, Brusartsi, Valchedram, Medkovets, Yakimovo, Septemvri, Strelcha, Knezhka, Nikopol, Kuklen, Perushtitsa, Dobrich-rural, Lukovit, Ugarchin, Brusartsi, Valchedram, Medkovets, Yakimovo, Septemvri, Strelcha, Knezhka, Nikopol, Kuklen, Perushtitsa, Dobrich-rural, Lukovit, Ugarchin, Brusartsi, Valchedram, Medkovets, Yakimovo, Septemvri, Strelcha, Knezhka, Nikopol, Kuklen, Perushtitsa, Dobrich-rural, Lukovit, Ugarchin, Brusartsi, Valchedram, Medkovets, Yakimovo, Septemvri, Strelcha, Knezhka, Nikopol, Kuklen, Perushtitsa.

A SCHOOL IN DZHUROVO LAUNCHES A PROJECT UNDER SUCCESS PROGRAMME

New project has been launched in school ‘Hristo Botev’ in Dzhurovo village, Pravets Municipality – School for Self-assertiveness and Preparation for New European Horizons – SUCCESS. This is complementary activity to the joint prevention dropout activities fulfilled with two other pilot schools in Sofia district within the project ‘Decreasing the Dropout Rate of Roma Children from School’. Its purpose is to provide support for children at risk of dropping out, increase motivation to participate in training and education process and provide opportunities for reasonable utilization of leisure time. In relation to its fulfillment, four studios and interest clubs will be established in the school: EUROPEAN CUISINE - What can we cook and eat IN THE EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES’ CLUB, YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST CLUB, FAIRY TALE WORLD CLUB AND DISCUSSION CLUB THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATION IN SCHOOL’. In the project extracurricular activities take part 32 children from 1st to 8th grade.

SCHOOL IN STRALDZHA HAS STAR ALLEY

The Secondary Comprehensive School ‘P.K. Yavorov’ - Straldzha already has its own Star Alley built with funds under the school program for dropout prevention of Roma students, supported by the ‘America for Bulgaria’ Foundation, which has been built jointly with CIEDT ‘Amalipe’. This is the place that gives due attention to talented students. Such an honour can be achieved only through hard work and success in a wide range of categories. Thus, our colleagues reaffirm the basic principle of the project – that each student can achieve excellence!

CONFERENCE ON SCALING UP ACTION FOR ROMA HEALTH IN SERBIA AND BEYOND IN BELGRADE, SERBIA, 28–29 FEBRUARY 2012

minorities, funded by Open Society Institute – New York and implemented by Center Amalipe. The program uses a methodology developed by Prof. Abhijit Das and includes the so-called “community inquiry” as a tool. One of the points of Baev made during his presentation was that until now the “official” Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of all Roma integration policy (including the one in health field) is carried out within the frames of the so-called “administrative monitoring” that means it is done by the same institutions that should implement the activities. Roma community is engaged in no way in this process. There is clear need of introducing different approach for M&E that allows Roma community to be active part in the process. Another important part of the project was to introduce proper mechanisms at grass-root level for carrying out community based monitoring as well as for strengthening community mobilization and self-organization. This part appeared as important as the inquiry itself since community monitoring could not be reduced to sociological survey but it is a mean for community to take ownership on the process. “Scaling up action for Roma health in Serbia and beyond” is taking place a month after a conference on Roma health convened through the Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, now held by the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Belgrade forum furthered the call for increased action on Roma health in both Serbia and the other countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The Government of Serbia adopted a national declaration on Roma health, and participants in the forum expressed commitment to key actions, including.
WORKSHOP WITH MENTORING TEACHERS

The picturesque resort place 'LESOPARKA' 2 km away from the town Lyaskovets was the venue of the workshop with mentoring teachers taking part in the second project year of the program for prevention of school dropout of Roma children in compulsory education age in schools across Bulgaria. The meeting was held within three days— in the period 24 - 26.02. 2012. Sixty-six mentoring school teachers together with Prof. Maria Baeva - expert pedagogue, regional coordinators of the schools in the four sub-regions of Bulgaria - northeast, southeast, northwest and southwest, and the chairperson of CIEDT 'Amalipe ’ Deyan Kolev, the program director of the Center and Teodora Krumova, the team of the project for the prevention of school dropout among Roma children, Sarah Perrin and Angel Ivanov - representatives of the ‘Americia for Bulgaria’ Foundation were also among the attendees. The main purpose of the meeting was to trace the progress of project activities, especially work on cases with dropouts or students at risk of dropping out. In panels – divided along regional lines issues specific for each school were examined, as well as results and follow-up possibilities of the program. We dwell on the activities relevant to the seven module training curriculum alongside which the mentoring teachers train their colleagues from the pilot schools in the course of the year. Another key topic of the meeting have been the retention mechanisms applied to identified cases of Roma students at risk of dropping out and successful practices in this respect. The teachers reported they have good reason to boast about regarding the children successfully retained in school during the first school term. At the end of the first day, the teachers had the possibility to enjoy the premiere of the movie 'The Mission Amalipe' which represents the work of the center Amalipe in the Programme during the first year of its implementation - 2010 - 2011. It the film, the audience could recognize teachers, principals and students among the workshop attendees which will further encourage future joint initiatives. During the second day of the meeting, again in work panels, the establishment and development of major elements in the prevention model has been introduced: parent clubs, student parliaments, the introduction of 'Ethnic Folklore-Roma Folklore classes, and the good practices of the peer education approach. The experience and ideas shared during this meeting are extremely useful to us and although I had the impression I already know all this one can always learn something new and useful said Miroylub Yonkov teacher from Hristo Botev Elementary School in town Dolni Tisbar . At the end, we presented the ninth edition of the Children's Roma Festival 'Open Heart', which this year will be held on 09 and 10 June in the town of Veliko Tarnovo. Some participants made a recommendation to us to organize such meetings as this for more than three days. We exchanged gifts and I expressed hope for more recent new meeting.

A DISCUSSION ON CEICPEM PLAN FOR 2012

on the report of the Center Director, Lilly Kovacheva, the Fundraising Plan concerning external sources, and Activity Plan of CEICPEM for 2012. This year, the Centre will continue the implementation of strategic objectives and priorities of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities, and simultaneously with this, start the fulfillment of the objectives set in the Action Plan of the National Roma Integration Strategy. New Calls for Proposals will be announced by means of which the Center will provide funding sources for projects initiated by schools, kindergartens and municipal authorities with view to guarantee equal access to quality education and the introduction of intercultural education. Apart from the state budget, CEICPEM will endeavor to attract additional resources from the Roma Education Fund, Operational Programme 'Human Resources', the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme, EEA Financial Mechanism, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and other donors.

CENTER AMALIPE CONDUCTED A CAMPAIGN FOR THE PREVENTION OF TUBERCULOSIS IN THE VILLAGE OF DASKOT

On February 8, 2012 members of the Center Amalipe conducted a campaign within the framework “Strengthening the National Program for Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis in Bulgaria” together with the nurse Ivanichka Balgaranova of the Specialized Hospital for Active Treatment of Pneumo-physiatric Diseases Dr. Treyman Ltd. Veliko Tarnovo. The campaign took place in the pensioners club of the village of Daskot with the assistance of Mayor Petar Kanchev. The meeting brought the disease tuberculosis to the attention of the people and sensitized for the serious condition after an infection. The campaigners and the nurse Balgaranova discussed the way the disease spreads, how to protect and how to treat the disease. While the attendees were leafing through the health education material, Momchil Baev from Center Amalipe presented the opportunities the Program for the Prevention of Tuberculosis offers – including escorting clients to the hospital, the role of the outreach workers and the care costs for the patients and their families. Some of the participants were already familiar with the disease and shared experiences. A woman said that her mother died of tuberculosis when she was 9 years old. The disease was not treated back then. Some people from the audience wondered why an almost forgotten disease is back again with such intensity and whether it is necessary for somebody who has suffered from this disease in childhood to be monitored periodically. The nurse Balgaranova named a number of factors such as miserable living, malnutrition, poor hygiene and the use of insufficiently cooked products like meat and milk as main factors for the spread of this infectious disease. According to Balgaranova everybody who has suffered from any form of tuberculosis should regularly monitor their condition because it is possible that latent tuberculosis bacteria still live in their organism. The campaign emphasized also the danger of infecting children in a household where they live together since many generations. All attendees took questionnaires and found out that for them there is no risk for the disease.

ANALYSIS OF THE HEALTHCARE REFORM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ROMA COMMUNITY IN REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA - FEBRUARY 2012

Project for changes in the Health Law. The Parliamentary Health Committee unanimously adopted the amendments to the Health Law which govern the complete ban on smoking in indoor public places and near school yards and playgrounds. Among the changes envisioned in the law are the prohibition of advertising and sale of energy drinks to children under the age of 18. Smoking is a major risk factor for cancer. Over two thirds of cancers in the country are due to this bad habit, according to report of the National Cancer Registry. Nearly 262,000 people in the country suffer different cancers. 180,000 of these tumors are directly related to smoking.

Program for cervical cancer prophylaxis The Ministry of Health has provided 20 million BGN lev in the European program “Stop and get a check up.” From this amount the prevention of cervical cancer will be funded through an examination with Pap test.

The information system for births will be tied with ESGRAON (USCRASP). The Health Ministry intends to expand the functions of the Information System of births. The idea is to connect it with the electronic registration system for deaths. The information system for births will be tied with ESGRAON (USCRASP) the implementation of a new program for cervical cancer prophylaxis is in the process.
Thus, the deadline for receiving personal ID number for newborn children will be shortened with 7-8 days. Ministry of Health set up an information system of births in 2011. All hospitals with Gynecological departments will report directly each of the births not later than three days after delivery. A total of 5381 births were registered in January this year. The number of newborns was 5452, about 36% of them have come to light by cesarean, and 9.2% were premature, according to data from the register of births. Thanks to the register of births needs for vaccines in the country. May be planned in advance.

E-Health: Electronic Registers Besides the information system for births in 2011 was created and an electronic register of interventional cardiology. A review of the register for invasive cardiology can lead to at least two conclusions. In January a burst of heart attacks apparently occurred due to the cold - heart attacks in November, 2011 were 1581, and in January, 2012 the number reaches 1995. It was also developed and approved for funding by EU funds the project BASIC to create a unified information system in healthcare.

National AIDS information campaign 19 mobile HIV / AIDS testing centers were opened in the country. Thus was launched the second phase of National AIDS information campaign. Other 19 are the permanently fixed centers for anonymous and free testing for HIV. According to preliminary data for 2011 a total of 84,623 people have gone through testing centers for anonymous and free testing. During the campaign are foreseen health discussions with students, distribution of protective materials with romantic messages and health education materials. The total number of officially registered HIV-positive in Bulgaria is 1486. The number of newly registered HIV-positive since the beginning of 2012 is 13, 10 of them are men. The average age of newly registered HIV positive men was 34 years, and newly infected women - 44. There are three main ways of HIV transmission - sexually or blood transfer and vertical way - from infected mother to child - during pregnancy, childbirth and lactation.

Bulgarians pay the most for drugs in the European Union In other Member States, the ratio of public to private spending on drugs is 80 to 20, while in Bulgaria only 44 percent of the cost is borne by the state and the remaining 56% shall be borne by patients. The ratio of public expenditure to private expenditure in European countries for drugs is 80 to 20. For Bulgaria, this ratio is 44 to 56. Bulgarians pay more from their own pockets for the medicines they receive.

24,500 cancer patients in Veliko Tarnovo In Veliko Tarnovo region there are more than 24,500 people with cancer, according to the oncological center in the old capital. Alarming statistics shows that every year mortality in these diseases also increases. Of all registered, just over 7700 patients are still alive. There are cases in which a family has two patients. Last year alone, the new cases in our area are 816, where most of the patients were men. Morbidity in Veliko Tarnovo region is higher than that of the country. In our region it is 3692 per 100 000 people, while the average is 3453 of 100 000. Besides the problems and lack of medicines for people with cancer, which we witness every year, often after diagnosis these patients remain unemployed The latter case is Pavlikeni teacher who was fired after her employer understands that because of the disease she will not be able to work for one year. A further social exclusion is torturing patients.

One year old child from Veliko Tarnovo died of starvation and pneumonia One year old girl died in Veliko Tarnovo hospital from severe malnutrition and pneumonia. The child from the village of Petko Karavelovo, Polski Trambesh Municipality has been transported to a hospital in condition in hospital and despite the efforts of the doctors died. The child is from a family of unemployed. The girl had five brothers and sisters with their unemployed parents living in extreme poverty in a room without electricity, heating and possibility of providing food.

**CELEBRATING OF FEBRUARY 14: ST. VALENTINE OR ST. TRIPHON ZAREZAN**

St. Valentine or St. Triphon Zarezan – surely for the community moderators from the centers for community development established by Amalipe this was another way to incorporate into one the communities in their settlements and to celebrate in a funny and memorable manner the Day of the Love and of the Wine. On February 14 a number of people honor the love and a big part of the humanity honors the wine. Valentine’s Day is Catholic and St. Triphon’s day – Orthodox. Interesting fact is that Valentine and Triphon lived almost at the same historical time. Both lived around 255 year, both were healers and have martyr’s death. But let’s cut out the historical facts. On February 14, 2012 the Centers for Community Development in Peshtera, Novi Pazar, Kameno, Etropole, Byala Slatina and Pavlikeni organized different event on occasion of that special day. After so many cold days the sun raised high at that day and combined of the excitement of the holiday the day become even more pleasant. In honor of the feast the community moderators previously had announced an essay contest entitled ‘What is Love’. The results of it and the award ceremonies were held exactly at February 14. On spots the celebration of February 14th began everywhere in the early morning of the day with presentation of the students’ essays and awarding the top three essay-writers. Competition was attended by youth from 12 to 18 years old. More active in writing, however, proved to be girls. To refute that the boys from Etropole presented a new song dedicated to the delicate part of humanity (women). Here is a list of some of the winners in the essay contest: Ginka Stoyanova Ivanova – 8th grade, town of Kameno; Bilyana Zyumbulyeva Mancheva – 10th grade, Novi Pazar; Ivona Milanova – 7th grade, Etropole; Philip Krasimirov – 12th grade, Byala Slatina. In addition to presenting essays about love in Byala Slatina was shown the movie “You are it” focusing on HIV/AIDS and promoting the message: Make love wisely! With a traditional cutting of the vines started the celebration of the day in Novi Pazar. This happened in the courtyard of the local Vocational School of Agriculture. In the early afternoon festivities continued in conjunction with Family and Consultation Center. There was organized a charity exhibition where everyone was able to buy Valentine cards and other Valentine items made by children and youth from Novi Pazar. In Pavlikeni, Byala Slatina, Etropole, Peshtera and Kameno young people handed out to passerby handmade valentines with love messages in them. Additionally to the valentines in Pavlikeni the Center for community development distributed condoms provided by the “Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS” Program of the Ministry of Health funded by the Global Fund to fought AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis.
organized and conducted in partnership with the Regional Health Center Amalipe and the volunteer’s Club K7 were traditionally implemented on February 14 in Veliko Tarnovo. The activities this year included a variety of different vocal and dance styles. Some of the performers were young people who have been involved in community development through special ads and in result of that there were more than 40 people on the theatre. In the “Theatric formation” there participate both students from the Professional Agriculture High School and “N.Y.Vaptsarov” Elementary School, Roma people call Petlyovden “Bashnovden” or “Ihtimya” because it is connected with collecting of the worst human tax: the blood tax and with taking little boys from their homes to train them for warriors. The Roma groups of Drandari connect this day with a few legends. One of them says that a long time ago, during the Ottoman rule the Turks started to kill all the boys (Bulgarian and Roma). In order to be sure that every house was checked they were putting a bloody mark on the doors. By this way they wanted to destroy these foreign families, because there is understanding that only boys are those who continue the clan. Then St. Evtim (Euthimius) appeared in front of a gypsy woman called Evtimiya and known as Ihtimya and ordered her to kill a rooster and with its bled to make a sign on the gate of the house. Ihtimya immediately fulfilled the words of the Saint and when the warriors saw the blood on her door they passed her house and they didn’t take her son. This is how Ihtimya saved her boy. Bashnovden is celebrated as a festival of the boy and the male’s strength and fertility.

SHROVETIDE:

This feast is mainly celebrated by Kaldarashi and the other Christian Roma. Just like the Bulgarian tradition, the celebrating of the feast is connected with asking forgiveness from relatives, friends, and neighbours. It is accepted that in the evening of this day younger people should visit their parents and take them bread, banitza with fortune slips, wine, and hen baked in the oven. The hen is an obligatory element, because it “lays and incubates eggs, it gives birth, therefore it is respected and it should be presented on Shrovetide.” The forgiveness is asked by kissing the hand of the elder. Some Kaldarashi practice a custom similar to the so-called “singing by rings” on St.George’s Day. After the dinner the young girls gather and put small objects, combs, rings, bracelets, on a piece of clothing. The girl who is the best singer dedicates each song to some of the girls who are present and takes objects under the table while singing. She guesses what kind of a man the girl the song is dedicated to would marry according to the object. If it is a comb, for example, she would marry a widower, if it is a ring - a bachelor, and so on.

KHERE( AT HOME)

NATIONAL ANTI-AIDS CAMPAIGN “PREZERVATIRAJ!” (USE CONDOM!!) IN VELIKO TARNOVO AND PAVLIKENI

The activities this year on February 14th in Veliko Tarnovo implemented by Center Amalipe and the volunteer’s Club K7 were traditionally organized and conducted in partnership with the Regional Health Development organized an entire theater spectacle with the collaboration of the students from “N.Y. Vaptsarov” Elementary School and “Theatric formation” led by Mrs. Miteva. The celebration began at 4 PM in a small hall, situated in the town. The community was informed about the event through special ads and in result of that there were more than 40 people on the theatre. In the “Theatric formation” there participate both students from the Professional Agriculture High School and “N.Y.Vaptsarov” Elementary School. Roma people call Petlyovden “Bashnovden” or “Ihtimya” because it is connected with collecting of the worst human tax: the blood tax and with taking little boys from their homes to train them for warriors. The Roma groups of Drandari connect this day with a few legends. One of them says that a long time ago, during the Ottoman rule the Turks started to kill all the boys (Bulgarian and Roma). In order to be sure that every house was checked they were putting a bloody mark on the doors. By this way they wanted to destroy these foreign families, because there is understanding that only boys are those who continue the clan. Then St. Evtim (Euthimius) appeared in front of a gypsy woman called Evtimiya and known as Ihtimya and ordered her to kill a rooster and with its bled to make a sign on the gate of the house. Ihtimya immediately fulfilled the words of the Saint and when the warriors saw the blood on her door they passed her house and they didn’t take her son. This is how Ihtimya saved her boy. Bashnovden is celebrated as a festival of the boy and the male’s strength and fertility.

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