



Press Release on April 8th, International Roma Day

“Political participation is the way to Roma integration”

Brussels, 7 April 2009 - Almost 40 years after the first international Romani meeting in Orpington (UK) in 1971, living conditions for most of the Roma in Europe have not only failed to improve but have even gotten worse.

That first meeting in Orpington laid the foundations of the Romani international movement, when Roma people decided to come out of the ghetto to find their place in the society, being accepted for what they are, for their culture and their values. In that occasion, they agreed to call themselves Roma instead of Gypsies or other depreciative terms.

But nowadays, despite all the efforts made by the Roma community to see their rights respected, in many countries in Europe they still face the highest level of segregation and unacceptable racial prejudice. When celebrating the 8th April, International Roma Day, we cannot forget that we still are far away from the objectives of equality and integration established nearly four decades ago.

We ask the European institutions, Member States, regional and local authorities, politicians from all parties to commit themselves to this struggle for a society where anti-Gypsyism and racism are totally banned and where Roma are not held as scapegoats or seen as a dangerous and hostile minority. In recent times, European institutions and policy makers have become increasingly aware of the Roma issue and are showing political will for improvement of the minority's conditions. We invite them to continue on this path towards a more inclusive society for Roma. This could be achieved through a comprehensive and strong European Roma policy.

ERIO believes that the most effective solution to this problem is active Romani political participation. Roma, parties and civil society should cooperate in order to develop approaches to concrete Roma participation in the public debate and in the decision-making. Only with a sound involvement in public and political life, Roma people can find a way out of their segregated situation.

BACKGROUND: *During the congress in Orpington, the International Romani Union was founded, the Romani flag was accepted and the song “Gelem, Gelem” composed by Jarko Jovanovic was adopted as an anthem. As well, the delegates unanimously declared April 8th as the International Day of Roma.*

The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) is a human rights advocacy organisation promoting the rights of Roma communities throughout Europe. ERIO lobbies European institutions, national governments and international organisations in order to bring about improvements in policies concerning Roma communities. ERIO cooperates intensively with Roma organisations and supports them in establishing their concerns and demands to European and national decision-makers. The ultimate goal of ERIO is to contribute to the eradication of racism, discrimination and social exclusion faced by the majority of Roma in Europe.