

# ERRC AWARDED FOR PROMOTING ROMA RIGHTS

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) received the prestigious Silver Rose Award for social justice from **SOLIDAR** for its "outstanding work in promoting Roma rights and keeping this important question in the public arena." The ERRC shares the 2010 award with Colombian Trade Union Federations and former Prime Ministers Gyula Horn (Hungary) and Pierre Mauroy (France).

On 3 February 2010, Managing Director Rob Kushen and Women's Rights and Equality Coordinator Ostalinda Maya attended the award ceremony at the European Parliament in Brussels. Commenting on the award, ERRC Managing Director Robert Kushen said, "The award serves as an important reminder that the ideals of the European Union require equal rights for all its citizens, including Roma. We are grateful that SOLIDAR has chosen through this award to highlight the ongoing problems of Europe's largest minority."

Conny Reuter, Secretary General of SOLIDAR, noted that Romani communities still suffer massive discrimination which keeps them in poverty and condemns them to being excluded from the community at large despite many political initiatives from the EU and national governments. Reuter added that, "By awarding the ERRC with this SOLIDAR Silver Rose Award, we hope to raise awareness of the vital work that they are carrying out to promote Roma rights and keep the issue of anti-discrimination in the public sphere."

SOLIDAR, a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice,



ERRC Managing Director Rob Kushen and Women's Rights and Equality Coordinator Ostalinda Maya Ovalle received the SOLIDAR's Silver Rose Award from Ms Ana Maria Gomes, MEP and Member of the Silver Rose Jury.

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launched the Silver Rose Awards in 2000 to help raise the profile of individuals and organisations "whose struggles contribute greatly to social justice and equality throughout the world." With 53 members based in 25 countries, SOLIDAR works in cooperation with progressive civil society organisations, democratic parties and trade unions, aiming to influence EU and international policy and linking members together to network and carry out humanitarian and development projects.

The ERRC is pleased with this recognition of its efforts to improve human rights

respect for Roma across Europe. The organisation previously received the **Gruber Justice Prize** (2009), **Max van der Stoep Award** (2007) and **Geuzenpenning Award** (The Geuzen medal of honour) (2001).

## THE ERRC COMBATS RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ROMA AND EMPOWERS ROMA TO DEFEND THEIR OWN RIGHTS.

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Rob Kushen discussing the need to end racist violence, school segregation and forced evictions of Roma, during the ceremony.

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## EUROPEAN COURT FINDS INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENT OF ROMANI VICTIMS BY BULGARIAN POLICE

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found that Bulgarian police had engaged in inhuman and degrading treatment of three Bulgarian nationals of Romani origin during their arrest and detention in police custody, in a case brought by the European Roma Rights Centre and Bulgarian attorney Alexander Kashumov on behalf of the Romani Baht Foundation. This is the 6th complaint against Bulgaria that the ERRC and its partners have won on behalf of Romani applicants before the ECtHR.

The case, *Sashov v. Bulgaria*, was filed in 2003 and complained of police brutality

during the arrest of the three men in 2001 and of the failure of State authorities to institute an effective criminal investigation into their allegations of ill-treatment. During the course of the arrest, police fired shots at the men, beat them severely and put two of them in the trunk of a car in order to transport them to a police station. They were also subjected to verbal abuse on account of their ethnicity.

In its ruling, the ECtHR found that the use of force by the police against the applicants was extensive and disproportionate, and that the nature and intensity of the suffering amounted to inhuman and degrading

treatment. The ECtHR noted that the Bulgarian authorities failed to conduct an effective and thorough investigation in order to establish the circumstances of the ill-treatment of the applicants. Consequently the ECtHR found that the Bulgarian State violated Article 3 in both substance and in procedure. Each applicant was awarded 3,000 EUR for non-pecuniary damages and 4,500 EUR for costs and expenses.

The full text of the judgment is available in French [here](#).

Further information on the case is available [here](#).

## CZECH PRIME MINISTER REGRETS PRACTICE OF COERCIVE STERILISATION

After long years of legal battles and various advocacy and public awareness campaigns by the ERRC and its partners, the Czech government finally took the first steps to acknowledge responsibility for the practice of coercive sterilisation. During a press conference on 23 November 2009, the Czech Prime Minister Mr Jan Fischer expressed his regret over instances of coercive sterilisation that have occurred in the country. From the 1970s until 1990, the Czechoslovak government sterilised Romani women systematically, as part of policies aimed at reducing the birth rate of Romani women. Until recently the practice continued, albeit sporadically.

The Czech government adopted a motion that required that the Ministry of Health undertake a series of measures to ensure that such violations do not occur anymore, by the end of 2009. The motion, initiated by Minister for Human Rights Michal Kocáb, was widely welcomed by Group of Women Harmed by Sterilisation, Life Together, Peacework Development Fund, the League of Human Rights, the Center for Reproductive Rights and the ERRC. However, the NGOs emphasised that the Czech Government should move quickly to establish a mechanism to provide adequate compensation to the women whose reproductive capacities were destroyed without their informed consent.

Although the Final Statement by the Czech Ombudsman confirmed the ille-



The Group of Women Harmed by Sterilisation protesting in front of a hospital in Ostrava, Czech Republic, August 2006.

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

gality of the practice of coercive sterilisation in 2005, it took almost five years for the Czech government to acknowledge the very serious human rights violations inflicted upon Czech women, overwhelmingly of Romani origin. Elena Gorolova, the spokesperson of the Group of Women Harmed by Sterilisation stated: "The apology means a first step towards long awaited justice although much remains to be done. Also we hope that this apology will serve as an example to Slovakia, where the problem of coercive sterilisation still has not been addressed." There are 20 outstanding complaints pending with the

regional health authorities for investigation, which activists hope will now be addressed with priority.

The ERRC and the aforementioned organisations congratulated the Czech government for this milestone and urged further action. Managing Director Rob Kushen noted that "there are many hidden instances of coercive sterilisation. We urge the Czech government to step up investigative actions to ensure that all women who have suffered are identified and provided redress."

For further information on coercive sterilisation in the Czech Republic, click [here](#).

## ERRC CONDUCTS NEW FIELD RESEARCH IN TURKEY

The ERRC is currently implementing a new research project in Turkey on behalf of the European Commission, entitled “Understanding employment and decent work challenges in Turkey – the situation of Roma in Turkey.” The study is led by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), and the Edirne Roma Association (EDROM)

There has not been a study targeting the Dom community in Antakya prior to this. The population of the community is estimated to be around 6,000.

The researchers conducted interviews with the members of the Dom community, local authorities, representatives of the

problems in accessing public services such as education and healthcare, and there is an unemployment rate that is reportedly around 98%.

### BARTIN RESEARCH

Bartın province, located on the Black Sea coast, is one of the smallest provinces in northern Turkey. The Romani population in the municipality of Bartın is estimated to be between 1,500 and 2,000 people.

Researchers from the ERRC and EDROM carried out their research in Bartın in mid-January. They interviewed various members of the Romani community as well as the Mayor and Governor of Bartın, representatives of trade unions, social workers, as well as health care and education professionals.

Unemployment is one of the major problems that Roma face in Bartın. The interviews with Roma and state authorities indicated a low level of awareness of discrimination among Roma and that certain discriminatory practices in employment may exist although they are not recognised as such.

Furthermore, access to adequate housing has been noted as another problem for a considerable number of Romani families. While cases of discrimination in access to education were not registered, the number of Romani high school and university graduates in Bartın is very low.



Mustafa Karabulut, president of the recently established Dom-Der (Dom Association), at the ceremony of launching the organisation. This is the second Dom association in Turkey after an organisation established in Diyarbakır.

PHOTO CREDIT: SINAN GÖKÇEN/ERRC

joins in the project as a local partner. The main purpose of the study is to provide background information on the situation of the Roma in Turkey, stress policy options to ensure better social inclusion and fight against *de facto* discrimination.

In recent months, the ERRC's project staff reviewed the existing literature on Romani communities in Turkey. The ERRC is also responsible, in cooperation with EDROM, for conducting field research in three locations in Turkey to identify and document the discrimination that the Romani individuals face in different areas of life.

### ANTAKYA RESEARCH

Researchers from the ERRC and the EDROM conducted the first field research in Antakya, a city in south-eastern Turkey in mid-December 2009. The target group for the study in Antakya was the Dom community.

Dom are a distinct linguistic group originating from India and linked linguistically to Roma. Dom groups are found mainly in the Middle East and North Africa. They have, to a large extent, maintained their own language, Domari.

commercial chambers, health care and education professionals and representatives of human rights organisations.

The primary findings, based on these interviews, indicate that the Dom community faces discrimination in Antakya both in the public and private spheres. Members of the community also face



The Dom community in Antakya faces discrimination and in most cases live in substandard housing.

PHOTO CREDIT: SINAN GÖKÇEN/ERRC

## ERRC STAFF DISCUSS ROMA POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AT THE UN MINORITY FORUM

Representatives of the ERRC travelled to Geneva on 12-13 November 2009 to participate in the Second Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, focusing on Minorities and Effective Political Participation.

ERRC International Advocacy Officer Idaver Memedov made a statement recalling the extremely low level of participation of Roma in European and domestic politics throughout Europe, particularly in relation to their population size. Roma are rarely represented among the candidates of mainstream political parties or if present, the Romani candidates hold only lower level positions.

Finally, although every EU citizen has the right to vote and to stand for election to European and domestic legislative bodies election in their country of residence, many Roma who have exercised their right to freedom of movement within the EU face significant obstacles to registering their residence in another EU Member State and are thus effectively excluded from this form of political participation.



Idaver Memedov and Catherine Twigg of ERRC with Chairperson and US Congresswoman Barbara Lee and UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Gay MacDougall in Geneva.

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

The ERRC recommended the following: Governments must encourage effective political participation of Roma in the national parliament, European institutions and national governments should promote awareness of political rights and encourage greater political participation among Roma, including through the exercise of

voting rights for EU citizens residing in other Member States; and mainstream political parties on the domestic and European level should be encouraged to provide greater opportunities to Romani candidates, to enhance the effective political participation of Roma and to include Romani issues in their platforms.

## FREE MOVEMENT STUDY LAUNCHED

On 9-10 November, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights presented a new study, "The situation of Roma EU citizens moving to and settling in other EU Member States". The study was produced by the ERRC in cooperation with the European Roma Information Office, the Finnish League for Human Rights, Fundación Secretariado Gitano and Fédération nationale des associations solidaires. The study examined the movement of Roma within the European Union, seeking to un-

cover information about their experiences, the challenges they face and their access to fundamental rights.

At the conference, representatives of the ERRC highlighted several significant obstacles which hinder the full exercise of the right of free movement for Roma: means testing, barriers to residence or employment which affect access to other services and the promotion of the right to free movement for workers rather than for citizens in the EU directive on free movement.

The research findings presented in this study provide insight into the nature of

movement and the practical problems facing Romani EU citizens. As such, they serve as a tool for developing policies to improve the access of all EU citizens to fundamental rights and the full enjoyment of EU citizenship.

This study involved qualitative field research on the respect, protection and promotion of the right of Romani EU citizens to move freely and reside in other EU Member States. The data collected is presented in five case studies, a comprehensive report, summary report and a positive practices report. The reports are available [here](#).

## ERRC HOLDS STRATEGY DISCUSSIONS WITH EXPERTS AND BOARD MEMBERS

Throughout 2009, the ERRC underwent a process of strategic review. In the framework of its strategic review, ERRC held consultation meetings on 23 and 24 November 2009. The ERRC invited a group of prominent women's and Romani women's

rights activists to consult and provide input on the ERRC Women's Rights, Gender Equality and Child Protection strategy. The group, included representatives of partner organisations and international gender experts as well as Romani activists.

The discussion covered the four main areas of proposed ERRC activity related to women's and children's rights: coercive sterilisation, trafficking, gender-based violence (with a focus on domestic violence) and the over-representation of Romani

children in state care. The participants provided helpful input on ERRC's strategic direction and workplan, based on their international and domestic experience.

The following day, the ERRC hosted a meeting of its Board of Directors at its office

in Budapest. The meeting saw several new members join the board, including David Joyce of Ireland, Enisa Eminovska of Macedonia and Dan Pavel Doghi of Romania.

During the meeting members of the ERRC board and staff discussed the

results of the organisation's strategic review process. The priority areas of education, housing, free movement and migration, data collection, women's and children's rights, and violence against Roma and hate speech, were debated in depth.

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## NEW ERRC STAFF MEMBERS



**Darya Alekseeva** joined the ERRC as a lawyer in December 2009. Darya has a law degree from the South Federal University (Russia, Rostov-on-Don) and an MA in Human Rights from Central European University (Budapest, Hungary). Prior to joining

the ERRC, Darya worked as a human rights lawyer in Russia where she was involved in submitting applications to the European Court of Human Rights and organising regional workshops about the application of the European Convention of Human Rights in Russia.



**Hajnal Vernes** joined ERRC in April 2009 as Financial Manager. She gained experience in NGO finance while working as a Financial Manager for the Civic Education Project and as a Financial Coordinator at the Open Society Justice

Initiative. She holds a Masters degree from Budapest's Corvinus University, Faculty of Economics, and a diploma in Finance and Banking from the Budapest Business School, Faculty of Finance and Accountancy.

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## NEW ERRC BOARD MEMBERS



**Dan Pavel Doghi (Romania)** is Officer on Roma and Sinti Issues at OSCE ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. Mr Doghi has worked in Roma organisations since 1996. From 2000-2004 he was Programme Coordinator at the Resource Center for Roma Communities, in Cluj. He also worked as an advocacy fellow on Roma educational matters at the Public Interest Law Initiative (Columbia University) in Hungary. He studied social work at Babes Bolyai in Cluj Napoca, Romania,

and completed a postgraduate course in International Diplomacy at Malta University.



**David Joyce BL (Ireland)** is a practicing Barrister with an interest in constitutional law, human rights, public administration and housing rights. Prior to qualifying as a Barrister, he worked in community development with local and national Traveller advocacy organisations. He was a founding member of the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) in 1990. From 1998, he worked with the ITM as National Accommodation Officer and from February 2003 until August 2005, he was Legal Policy Of-

ficer of the Traveller Legal Unit. He has contributed to a number of reports and publications in regard to Travellers' rights. Mr Joyce is a guest lecturer at various universities, delivering lectures and presentations within the Equality Studies modules at NUI Maynooth and the Travellers, Human Rights and the Law module within Trinity College Dublin's LL.M. degree programme. In 2005, Mr Joyce received the Irish Person of the Year Award for his work and dedication to the cause of human rights for Travellers.

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**Enisa Eminovska (Macedonia)** most recently worked as an expert consultant on gender equality and crisis management at the UNDP country office in Macedonia. Previously she was Senior Gender Analyst Assistant, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, Local and Presidential Elections 2009; Consultant to the Kosovo Government on its Strategy on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities; Consultant to local Roma community-based organisations in the UN 'Return to Romani Mahala Project' - Mitrovica, Kosovo; and Regional Gender Consultant to the Joint Roma Women's Initiatives of the Open Society Institute. Ms Eminovska managed a day centre for street children at the World "Megjashi", Macedonia; and has been a

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researcher, international advocate and co-author of publications for UNICEF, OSI and the Roma Education Fund. She serves as the Macedonian Delegate at the European Roma and Travelers Forum and participated in the International Planning Committee for the Global Forum of Association for Women's Rights in Development and the European Feminist Forum.