

## EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE

The “European Roma Institute” (ERI) is proposed as an independent organization with the mission of increasing the self-esteem of Roma and decreasing negative prejudice of the majority towards the Roma by means of arts, culture, history, and media.

The idea of a European Roma Institute originates from discussions by Romani intellectuals over the past four decades. Prestigious Romani arts and culture organizations in Europe, prominent artists, cultural producers and intellectuals are convinced of the value of this initiative, backed by the Open Society Foundations which formally approached the Council of Europe with the proposal of a partnership establishing ERI.

The proposed Institute is in line with the fundamental values and principles laid down in the Council’s “Strasbourg Declaration”. It aims at strengthening the recognition and respect for Roma cultures, overcoming discriminatory attitudes and promoting co-operation between Romani and non-Romani communities throughout Europe. Building on the Council of Europe’s previous efforts in the field of advancing knowledge of Romani history and culture, ERI will support the Roma-related policy agenda and activities of the Council of Europe and its member States.

This paper elaborates the principles underpinning the ERI project, the Institute’s goals, functions, budget and governance structure. The Council of Europe is proposed to co-fund the project in its start-up phase with an initial contribution of at least € 200K per year.

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## European Context

The widespread social, cultural and economic marginalization of Romani communities in Europe persists, although some progress has been made in recent years. Sectoral policy achievements have however been insufficient to produce a major and deep change, not least because they address primarily socio-economic challenges without tackling the root causes that stand in the way of meaningful progress: ignorance, hatred and mistrust. Socio-economic strategies will have a limited impact as long as widely held stereotypes about Romani people are not addressed more assertively. Romani people do not possess an international institutional framework for preserving and developing a positive self-image that can be set against negative stereotyping and prejudice. Drawing on the power of culture and the rich history of Romani contributions to European culture, ERI will fill this gap.

As the “Strasbourg Declaration” explicitly states, effective human rights protection “must be embraced and supported by society as a whole”, and genuine participation of Europeans of Romani origin “is a precondition for success”. The Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General, the Parliamentary Assembly and other organs of the Council of Europe have repeatedly emphasized this aspect.<sup>1</sup> Many Romani leaders and representatives have long emphasised this correlation.

## Principles Underpinning the ERI Concept

The proposal and vision to establish ERI is grounded in six founding principles, which will define the Institute’s establishment, core functions, governance, structure and membership:

- Respect of the dignity of Romani people and Romani identity;
- Diversity and plurality of Romani identities and cultures;
- Romani leadership with the support and co-operation of non-Roma, key to breaking the stereotypes by representing talent capability, confidence in taking responsibility, cooperation and inclusiveness;
- Engagement and contribution of Romani organizations and individuals in the establishment and on-going activities of the Institute;
- Political autonomy and non-partisanship, openness for collaboration with public authorities and political institutions as partners;

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<sup>1</sup> CM Declaration on the Rise of Anti-Gypsyism and Racist Violence against Roma in Europe (February 2012): “The effectiveness of strategies, programmes or action plans ... can be significantly reinforced by resolute action to combat anti-Gypsyism and action to improve the trust between Roma and the wider community...”. Also CM/Rec(2008)5 on policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe; Recommendation Rec(2001)17 on improving the economic and employment situation of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in Europe. SG Report 2014 “on the State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Europe”, pp.46-47. PACE Resolution 1927 (2013) “Ending discrimination against Roma children”, § 4. Congress Resolution 366 (2014) “Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels”. ECRI General Policy Recommendation

- Highest quality standards in the domains of arts and culture, as well in as its own operational performance.

## The Unique Role of ERI

Many projects tackling anti-Roma prejudice have been implemented for decades. However, Romani people face challenges that go beyond the local scale or short-term projects. Changing negative prejudice will take a long time, it is therefore necessary to establish a viable institution which can achieve a critical impact, building upon — and scaling up — existing initiatives in order to give them long-term sustainability. No other international institution has ever systematically documented and promoted Romani arts, culture, history, talent and their cultural and intellectual contributions to society.

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There is a need for an international institution to connect the initiatives and organizations which have systematically documented and promoted Romani arts, culture, history, talent and their cultural and intellectual contributions to society.

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No other Roma organisation at European level has ever supported the collection, exchange and showcasing of the rich cultural production of prominent individuals and organizations of Romani background. ERI aims to work on the root causes of growing anti-Roma sentiment in majority populations, and to boost the self-esteem of Romani people.

## Three Core Functions

As a *creative hub*, ERI will support the exchange of existing and creative new ideas and materials across cultural borders, cultural domains and Romani identities, in order to document the historical experience of Romani people in Europe. ERI will be the promoter of Romani contributions to European culture and talent, success and achievement.

As a *communicator and public educator*, ERI will disseminate a positive image and knowledge about Romani people, and will use public spaces for dialogue, such as schools, mainstream cultural institutions and media.

As a *policy advisor* ERI will provide expert advice in its areas of competence, when required by the Council of Europe, its member States and other partners.

## Main Working Tools

ERI is expected to use *inter alia* the following tools, in order to achieve its mission and goals:

- Public events, exhibitions and performance of arts and other culture

products, to develop public dialogue and awareness of Romani culture;

- Online technology for the collection and dissemination of image and knowledge, to make Romani history, language and other Romani contributions accessible;
- Extensive use of media (including social media, photography and movie) to engage with wide audiences and to spread a positive image;
- Expert networking, exchange and co-production among artists, cultural producers, archives, linguists and historians, to share and develop knowledge and materials;
- Fellowships for outstandingly talented young Romani people, offering a professional placement experience, to boost the capacities of a new generation of cultural leadership;
- Connecting with mainstream arts and culture networks to establish partnerships and networks of supporters;
- Awards recognizing extraordinary talents and achievements, named after important Romani figures (e.g. Nicolae Gheorghe, Papusza, Django Reinhardt);
- Work on innovative European initiatives of model value
- Interaction with stakeholders from other policy areas related to Roma, and with pan-European initiatives addressing the situation of Romani people;
- Studies and reports in its field of competence, including exploration of conceptual, methodological and policy issues for the Council of Europe and its member States.

## Establishing the European Roma Institute

ERI will be established as an independent institution (e.g. a foundation) under national law.

The founders of ERI will include the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations and the “Alliance for the European Roma Institute” (“the Alliance”)<sup>2</sup>.

As one of the founders, the Council of Europe will be linked to ERI mainly in four ways:<sup>3</sup>

- The Council of Europe (as well as representatives of other founders and possibly major funders) will be represented on the governance structure of ERI.
- The Council of Europe (CM and/or CAHROM, SRSG for Roma Issues) will receive information on the Institute’s work, e.g. through regular reporting, and will benefit from policy advice provided by ERI on all relevant aspects of Roma inclusion policies.
- The Council of Europe will provide at least in the five-year start-up phase a regular financial contribution towards ERI’s core operational costs and will upon request assist ERI in its fundraising efforts.
- The Council of Europe will provide ERI with information and expertise, and can use ERI’s expertise in the context of its own programme of activities.

<sup>2</sup> Currently in the registration process

<sup>3</sup> The proposal follows the logic chosen in the case of the “European Wergeland Centre”, which is attached to the Council of Europe through a CM decision, a co-operation agreement and the membership of Council of Europe representatives on the EWC Board. See CM documents CM(2007)178 rev (*concept note*), CM(2008)104add (*Statutes*), CM(2008)104 (*Co-operation Agreement between Norway and the Council of Europe*), CM/Del/Dec(2008)1032/7.1 (*CM decision*), DD(2011)96 (*CM exchange of views with the EWC Executive Director*). [www.theewc.org/](http://www.theewc.org/)

The exact modalities of the bilateral co-operation will be laid down in a Memorandum of Understanding.

The Alliance, currently in its formation phase, is made up of Romani organizations and individuals who have publicly demonstrated their commitment towards the initiative of a European Roma Institute. The Alliance engages with other organisations, individuals, governments and other stakeholders actively supporting this initiative. Moreover, the Alliance is ready to contribute financial, material, intellectual, creative and reputational assets to ERI. Four renowned organisations are at the core of the Alliance:

## European Roma Cultural Foundation

The *European Roma Cultural Foundation* (ERCF)<sup>4</sup>, an independent organization that aims to educate and inform the non-Roma population about Roma arts and culture and to help creating understanding, tolerance and mutual respect between Roma and non-Roma communities, raise awareness among European institutions, policy-makers and stakeholders about the role of Roma arts and culture and to build up a broad partnership across Europe (and beyond) for support of Roma arts and culture. ERCF opened a prominent gallery space in Budapest (Gallery8), which built a comprehensive collection of European Roma art, and conducts an extensive and intercultural exhibition and education program.

ERCF's recent international achievements include: the *Archive and Academic Conference on Roma Hip-hop* (2010) The establishment of the diplomatic body *The Romani Elders* and their *Public Intervention for the Unfinished Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Murdered Under the National Socialist Regime* in the frame of the 7th Berlin Biennale (2012) and the *Inside Outsiders Program* series in co-operation with Moderna Museet, Malmö (2014). ERCF is a consulting partner for several European Biennales, Art Museums and Cultural Institutions, including the German Federal Cultural Foundation in building a digital archive of knowledge, culture and art by and about Roma in Europe. ERCF received the Igor Zabel Award for Art History and Art Criticism (second place, 2012), the Katalizator Contemporary Art Award (2013) and the Otto Pankok Award (2014). ERCF has a data-base of more than 600 organizations and initiatives working in the domains of ERI, which is a significant resource that can be used for including many of them in ERI and reinforcing their work to date.

## Romedia Foundation

The *Romedia Foundation*<sup>5</sup> founded in 1992, which has since made use of television broadcasting, publishing and the opportunities offered by multimedia digital technology to provide an insider's viewpoint on Roma issues. The foundation works towards contributing to a positive perception of Romani ethnic identity, combating anti-Roma prejudice, and providing alternative information to policy makers. Romedia is a partner of HBO television channel. Its "Mundi Romani" documentary series was broadcast on Hungarian TV network "Duna" and in

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.romacult.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.romediafoundation.org/>

2008 the series received a nomination for Best News Documentary at the Monte Carlo Festival for “Trapped: the Forgotten Story of the Mitrovica Roma”; a year later the same film was shortlisted for the FIPA award for Best Reportage and Current Affairs. The following year, UNESCO formally honoured the series with its Prize for the Rapprochement of Cultures. “Mundi Romani” has also won two First Prizes at the “My Native Land International Television Awards” (2008 and 2009) in Ukraine. The Romedia Foundation’s latest documentary film, “Uprooted – Children’s Perspectives on Europe’s Repatriation Policies”, entered the top three in the Child and Family Awards category at the 8<sup>th</sup> Al-Jazeera International Documentary Film Festival (Doha, Qatar, 2012).

## Romano ButiQ

*Romano ButiQ*,<sup>6</sup> established in April 2011, is the founder of the Museum of Romani Culture and a Documentation Centre on Roma in Bucharest, spaces dedicated to the promotion of the art and personalities and a better and direct knowledge about Roma. Romano ButiQ promotes non-discrimination through the development of cultural and educational activities. It works to present realistic views of the Roma community and to create spaces for people to discover and experience the value that members of this community bring to society, beyond the paradigm of negative stereotypes or victims. Romano ButiQ promotes the study, cultivation, development and promotion of the cultural and artistic heritage of multicultural communities, especially the Roma community, in Romania and abroad.

## Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma

The *Central Council of German Sinti and Roma*<sup>7</sup>, the national representative body of Romani people which maintains with the help of German public authorities the world-renowned “Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma” in Heidelberg. Parts of the Central Council’s archive could be transmitted to ERI following its establishment.

Alongside its function as a museum for contemporary history and a site for commemorating the past, the Centre provides a setting for encounters and dialogue. A significant part of its public relations work is devoted to human rights. As a forum for other minorities, too, the Centre seeks to lend its voice to all those who have suffered discrimination and racist violence. In view of the persecution of the Roma and Sinti under National Socialism, the Centre feels an obligation to provide a forum for critical debate on pressing socio-political issues.

Another part of the Centre's work is to present the cultural contributions of the Sinti and Roma minority in the fields of literature, the fine arts and music, thus helping to break down stereotypes. To this end, the Centre arranges conferences and seminars in conjunction with experts from Germany and other countries. Every spring and autumn, it runs a program of public events that includes lectures, exhibitions, films, concerts and excursions.

The Alliance commenced the consultation for ERI in October 2014, and is currently under legal formation in order to work with the Open Society Foundations and the Council of Europe on

<sup>6</sup> <http://romanobutiq.ro/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sintiundroma.de/en/home.html>

founding of ERI; once ERI is established, the Alliance will act as a facilitator to support openness and inclusion of other organisations and individuals in ERI, as collaborators or members.

## Membership, Governance and Management

ERI will be open to all formal or informal groups, organizations and individuals who support ERI's mission and founding principles and are ready to contribute to change. Interaction with ERI is regulated through membership; members will have key roles in building the resources of ERI, engaging in creative exchange and co-production, taking ownership of ERI's initiatives and engaging in its decision-making. Members will have full access to ERI's information and knowledge resources, collections, archives and database.

ERI membership is based on contribution in terms of financial, intellectual, material and creative resources, in order to strengthen ERI's impact. ERI will organize its membership through particular thematic sections (arts, culture, media, knowledge), to which members should commit. Membership is open to organizations and individuals. Precise standards for membership will be developed by the founders once ERI is established.

The governance structure of the ERI will be composed of two layers, the 'Barvalipe' Academy<sup>8</sup> and the Board ('Pakiv')<sup>9</sup>:

- The 'Barvalipe' Academy is the agenda-setting and strategic body of the Institute, composed of up to 30 highly regarded, publicly acknowledged people in the areas covered by ERI activities. They are mandated for a maximum period of three years, serving on a voluntary basis. At the start of ERI, the Board ('Pakiv') nominates the initial ten members of the 'Barvalipe' Academy who, in turn, invite another ten prominent personalities from ERI's field of competence. Ten delegates representing the ERI members will complete the composition of the Academy once the sections are set up and an election policy is in place. Two thirds of the Academy members must openly declare their Romani ethnicity, respecting the diversity among the Romani communities. Gender balance must be ensured.
- The Board ('Pakiv')<sup>10</sup> is ERI's statutory and founding body. It supervises the adherence of operational work to the statutory norms. The Board 'Pakiv' is made up of 7 to 9 members and includes representatives nominated by the founders, who will be joined by 'Barvalipe' Academy delegates once it is established.<sup>11</sup> The majority of the Board 'Pakiv' must be made up of members who openly declare belonging to Romani origin.

<sup>8</sup> "Pride", "richness" or "greatness" in Romani language

<sup>9</sup> "Trust", "respect" in Romani language

<sup>10</sup> Not to be confounded with the "Pakiv European Roma Fund" (Budapest)

<sup>11</sup> It will be up to the Council of Europe and Open Society Foundations to decide if they want to have a representative in the Board 'Pakiv' and the period of their engagement.

ERI will be managed by a Secretariat.<sup>12</sup> The administrative office will implement projects and organise communication among ERI members. According to the programmatic needs and the financial capacity of the Institute, permanent and temporary staff members will be recruited through open competitions. Staff shall be recruited from diverse cultural backgrounds in line with ERI principles.

The Secretariat of the Institute shall be headed by an Executive Director appointed by the Board following an open competition for a determined period of four years.

## Key Activities After Establishment

The programmatic scope will have to be developed in detail by the ERI governance structures according to available budgets. However, three initial steps seem important.

The first step will be building membership based on existing initiatives and organizations working in the domains of ERI's mission. That way ERI will act as a hub for connecting, exchanging and developing knowledge and work of outstanding Romani and non-Roma thinkers, creators and activists. The key task for this step will be to map ideas and materials of valuable existing small-scale and isolated initiatives, organizations and individuals working in the interest of the affirmation of Romani cultures and identity. Organizing them in four main sections (arts, culture, media and knowledge) will increase the efficiency and impact of the Institute's work. The programmatic scope will have to be developed in detail by the ERI governance structures according to available budgets. However, three initial steps seem important.

The next step will be building partnerships with mainstream arts and culture organizations, networks and institutions (museums, libraries, theatres, universities, festivals) and online social media. Open Society Foundations will help ERI to build partnerships with organizations such as the Sundance Institute.<sup>13</sup> The Alliance and individuals and organizations members of ERI will provide connections with professional contacts, both thematically and at national level. ERI's intellectual and creative potential lies in innovative communication methods, targeting existing cultural platforms so that Romani presence and contribution is appreciated by the general public and used for societal change.

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As a third step, ERI will develop new narratives and encourage media producers, curators, and professionals, at the same time supporting and providing institutional backing for already existing remarkable initiatives. This includes forging and supporting agreements with

<sup>12</sup> Apart from activity costs, an annual start-up budget of € 600K is expected to cover operational and staff costs, based on a calculation for three to six persons depending on the qualification structure and local salary scale (subject to revision).

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.sundance.org>



mainstream and Romani media. Using the potential and the professional knowledge to change already existing portrayals of Roma in the media through direct self-representation in film, journalism and traditional and new media, ERI will challenge the status quo through narratives come from Romani history, culture and experience.

## Location

The question of the seat remains open for the time being. The Secretariat will mainly host the administrative functions, while ERI activities are organised throughout Europe; ERI will function as a creative hub, its activity must therefore be present in as many countries and locations as possible. The Secretariat location is therefore not a priority issue.

The Secretariat could be located in Brussels for strategic purposes of its European profile. Equally valid alternatives could be:

- premises offered free of charge by a Council of Europe member State (in European art and cultural centres, such as Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Milan or Madrid, or those with a significant Romani population such as Bucharest, Sofia, Budapest, Skopje, Venice, Seville or Istanbul)
- or premises using the infrastructure of the Alliance or other members joining ERI after its establishment.

## Budget

The initial budget during the five-year start-up phase is projected at around € 600K per year, covering operational and staff costs as well as a minimum level of activities.<sup>14</sup> It will be necessary to bring together several funding sources, including the Council of Europe and the Open Society Foundations. The alliance of ERI supporters will contribute financially and in-kind. After being established, ERI will immediately engage in fund-raising activities. The founders will commit to an initial five-year period, subject to a satisfactory performance review after two years.

Informal consultations during 2014 have shown that a multi-stakeholder start-up funding scenario could be achievable, involving the Council of Europe, one or several member States, the Open Society Foundations and other funders contributing towards the initial budget (a realistic contribution of the Council of Europe would amount to one third of the budget, i.e. at least € 200,000 in 2016 and 2017, with a *pro rata* contribution in 2015).

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<sup>14</sup> Based on the budget estimate provided in May 2014 (subject to revision)