

THE EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE: *FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS*

This paper provides information on a number of frequently asked questions, notably those raised in the context of the 9th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM) in May 2015. It has been drafted jointly by the Open Society Foundations (Roma Initiatives), the SRSG for Roma Issues of the Council of Europe, and the spokespersons for the “Alliance for the European Roma Institute”.

The name of the project

1. Is “European Roma Institute” really the most appropriate name for the project?

“European Roma Institute” (ERI) is a working title. Other names have been proposed, like “Roma Centre for Arts and Culture” or “Roma Network for Arts and Culture”, in order to avoid unwanted connotations and misunderstandings. The final name will be selected following further consultations.

Decision-making process and budget

2. What has been the discussion process so far?

After twenty years of mostly project-based support from the Council of Europe and the Open Society Foundations for Roma arts and culture, it became clear that Roma need stable and large-scale organizations in order to preserve and further develop their culture as part of European cultures. With this in mind, it was proposed to explore the option to set up the European Roma Institute in the form of an international treaty bringing together some, but not necessarily all Council of Europe member States (“Partial Agreement”). Under Council of Europe rules this format requires a minimum number of participating States (currently 16). The informal consultations with governments showed that it would be preferable to create an independent organization that can enter into a close partnership with the Council of Europe and its 47 member States.

Based on an alternative proposal (setting up ERI as an independent entity led by Roma but co-funded by the OSF, the Council of Europe and other funders), informal consultations with member States resumed at ambassadorial level in late 2014. This second informal consultation opened the way towards the formal procedure within the Committee of Ministers, starting in February/March 2015 when the Ministers’ Deputies finally decided to consult the member States’ experts assembled in CAHROM.

Besides the complex formal procedure, the ERI proposal has been presented and discussed in various meetings where the envisaged founders were invited and could outline the concept. Numerous public statements of the proposed founders were made in events and online.

3. What will be the decision-making process from here on?

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe will resume its debate on ERI before or immediately after the summer of 2015, in order to prepare the final decisions on ERI and the Programme and Budget of the Council of Europe for the years 2016 and 2017 (which contains the financial support to ERI).

This debate will draw on the comments expected from the member States

experts (CAHROM) in early July 2015, and relate to the draft statutory documents currently elaborated by the Council of Europe Secretariat in consultation with the other founding partners. These documents will include the statutes (specifying inter alia the membership criteria and governance principles), rules of procedure, the draft budget and the memorandum of understanding for the co-operation between ERI and the Council of Europe.

In parallel, the various options for the final choice of the seat of ERI will be explored, together with the willingness of individual member States to host the Institute and contribute to its work.

Once the necessary decisions are reached at the political level, the open calls for membership and staff recruitment will be launched and the procedure for the selection of the members of the governance organs will commence.

4. Have Roma civil society organizations and institutions been consulted?

Numerous discussions around this initiative have taken place at events, meetings and individual discussions in cities throughout Europe, including Brussels, Bucharest, Budapest, Berlin, Strasbourg, Sarajevo and Krakow, as well as online. On these occasions, representatives of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, experts, activists, academics, artists, curators, media experts and governmental institutions have had the opportunity to express their support or criticism of the Institute.

The leadership of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) has been consulted on various occasions on 2013, 2014 and 2015.

Recently, the “Alliance for the European Roma Institute” launched a public consultation to open this discussion up even wider and allow everyone the chance to participate.¹

5. What is the “Alliance for the European Roma Institute”?

Following discussions among Roma activists, scholars, artists and media professionals, a group of committed Roma individuals and organizations who recognized the value of ERI proposal publicly supported the idea and expressed their readiness to contribute materially and financially towards ERI. This group formed the “Alliance”, asking the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the Council of Europe to enter into partnership on this initiative.

All “Alliance” members work on a pro-bono basis as a way to show their determination and to contribute to the establishment of ERI. Until now the “Alliance” has organized meetings and participated in activities at national and international level, advocating the establishment of ERI.

The “Alliance” involves individuals as well as organizations, who often had to obtain the approval of their governance organs before publicly supporting ERI.

¹ <http://osf.to/icQdjO2>

The “Alliance for the European Roma Institute” is not linked to the “Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion” of the Council of Europe.

6. Who are the members of the “Alliance” and what will be their role?

The “Alliance” is formed by recognized and experienced scholars, artists, intellectuals and curators,² as well as four Roma organizations³ with extensive expertise in the field of arts and culture.

The “Alliance” is engaging in discussions with a variety of Roma stakeholders (national Roma councils, museums, NGOs, networks) and with the general public through an open consultation, with the aim of gathering concerns, questions and ideas, in order to reflect as much as possible the needs and ideas of grassroots militants and community representatives.

Together with the other members of ERI (see below), “Alliance” members will ensure that from the start ERI will be able to reach out to Roma communities across the continent, access and co-operate with existing cultural and artistic initiatives, and relate successfully with national and international media.

7. What is the starting budget of the European Roma Institute?

The initial budget during the five-year start-up phase is projected at around € 600 000 per year. This amount will cover the minimum operational and staff costs, and will allow running a minimum level of activities.

At the present moment the budget is planned to be covered by contributions from the Open Society Foundations (€ 200 000 per year), the Council of Europe (€ 200 000 per year) and a variety of other funding sources, including the “Alliance” and possibly the host country/city.

The “Alliance” has made a pledge to contribute financially and in kind, in the order of € 1 million.

The starting budget will allow ERI to make funding bids towards grant-giving institutions and private donors. It will cover the costs of the following items:

- (1) Salary costs for key staff, i.e. a Director, a Development and Communications Officer and two administrative support staff (one of whom will support the basic IT infrastructure)
- (2) Two annual meetings each of the governance organs (Board and Academy), for project planning and to build the membership base
- (3) Office supplies, computers, internet and telephone expenses

² Katalin Barsony, Dr. Nicoleta Bitu, Dr. Ethel Brooks, Timea Junghaus, Sead Kazanxhiu, Saimir Mile, Andrzej Mirga, Anna Mirga, Dr. Ciprian Necula, Dijana Pavlovic, Nadir Redzepi, Romani Rose, Dr. Iulius Rostas and Mihaela Zatreanu. CVs are available ^{on} the Facebook page of the public consultation.

³ European Roma Cultural Foundation, Romedia Foundation, Romano ButiQ, Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma

(4) Two launching projects/programmes that build upon existing organizational strengths of the partners and work through arts and culture, to promote positive images of Roma and to fight anti-Gypsyism

(5) Two fellowships supporting young artists, activists and scholars in their work, to be selected through an open call.

The facility costs (rent, electricity etc.) will ideally be borne by a sponsoring partner.

8. Will € 600 000 per year be sufficient to pay for all relevant costs connected to ERI activities foreseen in the concept?

No, the ERI budget will have to evolve significantly over time. As is the case with practically all comparable international institutes (particularly those operating in the cultural field!), annual budgets will be composed of (a) basic funding for the essential operational costs (governance organs, technical facilities, core staff) and (b) project-based funding for activities (including project staff). The annual budgets, and hence the choice of activities and projects, will be decided by the governance organs in accordance with the statutory rules.

ERI members will be invited to contribute in kind, through their expertise, time and – where possible – financial contributions.

9. Will the European Commission co-fund ERI?

On various occasions in 2014 and 2015, high-level representatives of the European Commission expressed their political support for ERI and stated that ERI will be able to access funds from the European Commission through regular procedures.

The European Commission cannot be a founder of ERI, since there is currently no institutional build-up for the Commission's Roma policy foreseen.

Membership and leadership

10. How will the European Roma Institute reflect the multiplicity of Romani cultures?

ERI is guided by the principle of diversity and plurality of Roma cultures and identities. Roma diversity is a living reality and will be fully respected. ERI will help diverse Romani cultures to interact, exchange and co-produce. ERI will create a space where these pluralities of Roma experiences and cultures will be projected and appreciated.

11. Who can become a member of the European Roma Institute?

ERI membership will be open to organizations and individuals who support the

principles laid down in the ERI statutes. Members will be invited to contribute to the work of the Institute and to strengthen its impact. Members will self-select their adherence to the thematic sections (arts, culture, media, knowledge).

Members will have key roles in building the resources of ERI, engaging in creative exchange and co-production, and taking ownership of ERI's initiatives. They will be represented on the governance organs of the Institute. Members will have full access to ERI's information and knowledge resources, collections, archives and database.

12. What is meant by “Roma leadership” of the European Roma Institute?

Roma representing themselves, and being able to define who they are (and who they are not), is the best way to break prejudice and stereotypes.

It would therefore be inappropriate to establish an institute on Roma culture, history, language and art without Roma leadership. If Roma intellectuals and artists are not allowed to lead the Institute, the result would be that Roma would be denied ownership of ERI – and would distance themselves from similar initiatives even further in the future.

Within ERI, Roma leadership will be translated into a governance structure that gives Roma a strong role in decision-making and management processes.

13. Will non-Roma be able to lead the European Roma Institute?

The project of the European Roma Institute is based on Roma leadership, but this does not mean Roma-only. ERI will be open for the participation of non-Roma; everyone supporting the basic principles will be able to join the European Roma Institute as staff, partner, member or contributor.

The founding principles of the European Roma Institute are:

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

Added value and overlap with other initiatives

14. What is the added value of the European Roma Institute, when there are already so many other Roma organizations?

ERI will have a substantively artistic and cultural vocation. ERI is not designed to be an instrument of democratic representation of Roma communities in Europe; ERI is therefore not comparable to the ERTF or other NGO networks, which claim to represent the much broader range of interests of Roma organisations and communities towards public authorities. Nor is it designed as an academic institution, which would compete with universities or research institutes.

Quite a few institutions at local and national level document Romani culture, and there are many local and short-term projects which tackle anti-Roma prejudice. All of these are either limited in their geographical or cultural scope; or patronizing in their conceptual approach; or short-lived and unstable – or all of these together. No stable institution exists yet in Europe which gives Romani culture a recognizable and recognized platform, which systematically promotes Romani arts, culture, history and talent, and which documents the cultural and intellectual contributions of Roma to society.

ERI is envisaged as a hub connecting the initiatives and institutions working at local and national level, providing visibility to cultural and artistic productions and to the work of Roma artists at European level. With regard to existing cultural initiatives, ERI will have a complementary function.

Changing negative prejudice will take a long time. It is therefore necessary to establish a sustainable institution, which can achieve a critical impact. ERI is about changing the stereotypical image and negative prejudice about Roma.

Anti-Gypsyism must be tackled in many forms, including campaigns, litigation, research, education, training and monitoring. Many intergovernmental institutions like the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the OSCE have engaged themselves in this fight, together with civil society organizations and many committed individuals. ERI proposes an additional and very specific way to combat anti-Gypsyism: through the arts, culture and media. Many initiatives already pursue similar objectives at local or national level, without however being able to dispel the prevailing negative stereotypes against Roma. Acting as a hub and multiplier for the many small organizations, initiatives and individuals, bringing together their creativity at European level, ERI will deliver convincing and innovative responses to anti-Roma prejudices.

15. How will the European Roma Institute work with other Roma initiatives?

The European Roma Institute will not be a competitor, but an additional opportunity and resource for existing initiatives. The plurality among the Roma will be expressed through the membership of national and local organizations and individuals. 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.

16. Is the European Roma Institute designed as a research institution?

The European Roma Institute will not be a research institution. However, it will provide an additional opportunity to network and exchange among academics, scientists, arts practitioners and other activists, Roma and non-Roma alike. It will serve as a hub for all those who are connected to, and working with, Roma in all aspects of life. Furthermore, it will be an institution that Roma and non-Roma could turn to for cultural production, knowledge and resource sharing in the area of ERI's competence.

17. How will ERI work with Roma organizations at local level?

ERI is designed as a membership-based foundation. Informal and formal groups, organizations and individuals, Roma and non-Roma alike, will be able to join as members. The members ERI will guarantee ERI's presence on the local level. In terms of activities, ERI will act as a hub, enabling connections, exchange and co-production among its members in as many locations as possible.

Members of ERI, including organizations and individuals of the Roma grassroots, will participate in the governance of the Institute. Through thematic sections, they will be able to nominate Board members and together define priorities, select activities and venues.

Romani culture and the social situation of Roma

18. Will ERI isolate Romani culture and history from the culture and history of the majority population?

Romani culture, arts and history have always been part of European societies and will remain so. The project of the European Roma Institute is to make those influences more visible and accessible for a wide audience in Europe.

Today, it is estimated that cultural institutions store over 10 000 artworks created by Roma artists – but hardly anything is accessible to the general public. ERI will have a role in providing access to this wonderful cultural heritage.

19. How will the European Roma Institute help to reduce Roma poverty?

ERI's mission is not to take Roma out of poverty. A number of other instruments exist with this purpose, including the financial instruments of the EU or the anti-poverty strategies at national level.

However, there is overwhelming evidence that these instruments and strategies are severely slowed down or stalled by the negative image of Roma in the general population. Anti-Gypsyism often makes it difficult to even consider

public measures to address the marginalization and discrimination of Roma.

20. How will arts and culture help combat anti-Gypsyism?

The aim of the European Roma Institute is to counterbalance the negative image of Roma in mainstream society, by demonstrating the strengths and talents of Roma.

ERI also offers young Roma an opportunity to develop a positive self-image, offsetting the negative stereotypes they encounter in their environment. ERI is as much about educating Roma youth to develop a sense of identity, pride and security.