



MINUTES OF THE TRANSNATIONAL MEETING IN ATHENS

Wednesday 28th – Friday 30th March 2012

Wednesday 28th: Welcoming dinner

Thursday 29th March 2012:

Venue: Acropolis Hill Hotel, ATHENS

Attendance:

- Denis STOKKINK and Céline BRANDELEER (PLS)
- Arnaud BREUIL, Floriane BESSON (ICOSI), and Roland BIACHE (Solidarité Laïque)
- Pierluca GHIBELLI (CGM)
- Dimitris MICHARIKOPOULOS (ISI)
- Federico CAMPORESI (DIESIS)
- Juan PEDREGOSA and David DUEÑAS (CEPS)

Objectives of the meeting :

- To discuss on the advancement of the project ;
- To debate on the comparative study and to share our research with and between experts ;
- To assess budget and the financial reports ;
- To debate on the content of the trainings and of the raise-awareness campaign ;
- To agree on a work calendar.

Cf. Ppt presentation by PLS.



1. Advancement of the project

Each partner quickly presented the last developments of the project at national level

In France, the focus groups and lunch debate were organized in November and December 2011. The first focus group was led over the story of the migration of a Portuguese family: Why they came to France; how they are politically involved in local and European elections.

The second focus group was organized with various Portuguese associations from Paris and the near suburbs as the great majority of Portuguese migrants in France lives in this area. During this focus group, ICOSI found out that the Portuguese community was very well organized and involved in associations with the aim of defending their culture but, that despite of this, there is no real involvement in politics.

Concerning the lunch debate, a meeting was held with some participants from the previous meetings and it was the occasion for them to talk about their personal story and feelings about the Portuguese migration in France.

All in all, the outcome of these workshops was positive although it is quite striking that for Portuguese migrants, there are no direct links between the associative network and political participation.

In Spain, CEPS organized three focus groups, including two with members of the Gipsy community. Juan explained that some questions about the future dissemination within the community arose during these meetings. CEPS and the participants proposed for instance to create a video to disseminate information within the community and beyond.

In Belgium, the 2nd focus group was held in October and the lunch debate in December. While the focus group did not gather as many people as expected, the lunch debate was a big success as it gathered around 60 participants from both Polish and Belgian communities. Among the participants were some local political representatives (including Polish candidates to the next municipal elections), local civil servants, academic researchers, a member of the European Commission and a representative of the Polish embassy in Belgium. The outcome was very positive.

In Italy, the lunch debate was held in February during which were discussed the implementation of the next activities. For example, an interesting idea for the training sessions would be to involve cultural mediators of the community as priests (indeed, there often is a strong link between migrants and religion) and representatives of trade-unions.



They identified some dissemination tools as newspapers, ICT, social networks, brochures, films, etc.

During these activities, it stood out that the link with the native country is very strong, but also that Romanian migrants suffer from discrimination and from a big lack of information. In this context, new ideas for recommendations came into mind: the possibility of co-development between local community and origin country on the one hand, and activities linking civil and social rights on the other hand.

In Greece, the national research done so far has led to interesting findings. The second focus group was held in September and the different workshops were directly done in Bulgarian as there are some difficulties for the Bulgarian migrants to express themselves correctly in Greek. The national report should also be translated to Bulgarian. The lunch debate could not be organized because it didn't bring enough people as most of them were working. The trainings will be organized in cooperation with Bulgarian associations and maybe the Embassy too, in Bulgarian.

What stood up from these activities is that migrants don't realize how influent they can be.

Review of the Project objectives:

Issues addressed:

- Low participation of cultural/representatives organizations of European citizens residing in another MS;
- Low participation in local and European elections;
- Gender mainstreaming issues;
- Racism, xenophobia, discrimination.

In comparison with the activities done so far and their results, we agreed that we have a good match with the objectives but we should nevertheless give more importance to the gender issue aspect.

Review of the Progress report:

We reviewed the general content of the progress report sent to the Commission end of January 2012 (activities description, changes/difficulties encountered, visibility given to the project and to the FRAC program, general assessment of the project according to its objectives, future activities, etc.). The somehow problematic gathering of information was stressed out. We agreed that everyone should comply with the calendar to hand out financial and activity reports to PLS.



2. Comparative Study

Cf. ppt presentation by Diesis

Now that the five national studies come to an end, Diesis has started the drafting of the comparative study. As the template was not always followed by all partners, harmonization took a little more time than expected but Diesis managed to come out with a first draft and a structure proposal for the study:

Seven chapters:

- 1/ EU citizenship
- 2/ Project presentation
- 3 to 7/ National studies and conclusion

Some parts are still missing like the French recommendations and good practices (Chapter 4) and Greek good practices (chapter 7). It was also stressed out that we should have a general bibliography. The partners debated about what a good practice is in order to agree on a common understanding of this part of the study.

Partners agreed that the study has to be filled out with a conclusive paragraph for each national study, a bibliography and the name of the experts in each chapter. We also agreed that the study has to go deeper in the comparison through transversal topics (such as community strength and its “services” or networks, type and reasons of migration, importance of religion, type of obstacles to participation, role of women, etc.) and should incorporate indicators of participation and integration as well as a small chapter on the types of migration we are dealing with. Besides the final report should not only focus on political rights, but also address social and civil rights too. It is also important to increase the gender issue aspect in the study.

Partners agreed that it would be a good idea to make two reports of the comparative study: a short executive summary (about 30-50p. including the recommendations and a synthesis of the national reports) and the final extensive report (English electronic version only). With this in mind, it was asked to partners to make a conclusive paragraph for each part (max. 5p). A proof reading might also be needed to harmonize the English quality of the writing of the study.

We also agreed that it would be interesting to include the training curriculum in the study as a result of the research



3. Trainings and national seminar

Trainings

Aim of the trainings:

- Empower contact persons and associations representatives (enhance their mediation role)
- Inform and train them in order to participate actively and to raise awareness among actors of the participatory process
- A special focus on women association is important.

General objectives:

Now that we have identified the main obstacles and drivers to participation, we can think of ways to enhance skills, knowledge and networks for contact persons in order to increase participation of the community as a whole.

The main objective is therefore to give them tools in order to increase their cultural mediation role and orient it toward a greater participation.



All in all, the general objectives of the trainings are to:

- Give them tools to increase their cultural mediation role (migrants and women association),
- Look for ways to help them inform and raise awareness in their own community? (Participative democracy and civil dialogue),
- Share, discuss and confront ideas,
- Identify main drivers and obstacles,
- Evaluate of the training process and follow up.

Participants

Contact persons from the community, representatives of migrant associations, with a focus on women associations

Duration

Two training sessions (2x7hx15participants), in April, May or June

Main content

The trainings will be held on the issue of participative democracy and civil dialogue. It will present to the associations' representatives:

- The concepts of civil dialogue and participative democracy
- The importance of their participation in the decision-making process that is related to the interests of EU citizens residing in the country and how they can take part in the democratic life of the host country and of the EU
- The tools to be active in the civil dialogue at national and EU level
- How can associations inform and raise awareness among their members and the community
- Capacity building of associations
- The important role of women in participation and how to empower them to participate and to run for local elections

Expected result

These two training days will stimulate participants to:

- Share, confront and discuss their ideas on participations and to make them evolve in this regard,
- Identify the main drivers and obstacles to a full participation in the country of residence



- Discover new tools of participation and evaluate for which kind of situation they may be relevant
- Conceive and launch new participative ideas or projects adapted to their community and its specific mindset
- Diffuse their newly acquired knowledge to their community

Example of training program: see ppt presentation

- First contact with participation.
- A complete presentation of the principles of democracy
- Case study
- Creation of a personal project
- Evaluation

In practice, it is important to identify the main problems of the community. For example, Polish migrants should access full citizenship while Portuguese migrant should create a “sustainable citizenship” habit in France.

CGM proposed another example for the content of trainings for the Romanian community: They wish to focus on social enterprise especially for women with an idea of co-development with Romania. They also want to include trade unions.

For example:

1st session: general presentation

2nd session: social enterprise and how it can help participant

3rd session: woman and social cooperative with the aim of improving their general participation by creating participative tools.

Trainings curricula:

Based on the national workshops experience, on the results of the research and the trainings, the partners and the experts will develop a curricula of training adapted to the specific issues addressed by the project.

The curricula will be a tool for any representative associations of non national EU citizens willing to take part actively in the democratic life at EU or national level

→ June-September: electronic and paper version drafted by Diesis



National seminar

The training sessions will be followed by the organization of a seminar in each partner's country. The seminar, gathering each around 70 persons, will focus on the role of the representative associations of EU citizens residing in another MS, and especially women associations in the civil dialogue in the resident country. They will raise the issue of the electoral and political rights of EU citizens

They must be held between June & September by each project partners and address the issue of political and electoral rights and citizenship.

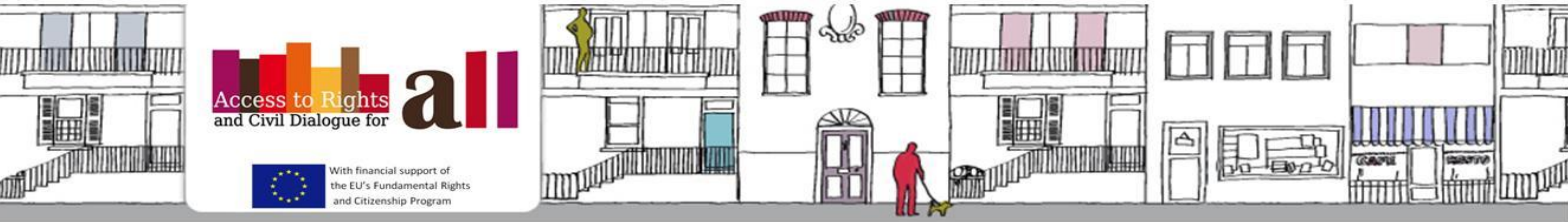
4. Administrative and financial aspects (budget and financial reports)

In order to guarantee an optimal coordination of the project, we recalled that each partner should hand out a financial and activity report to PLS every four months in order to keep the coordinator up to date with the progress of the project at national level. The reports should include all the expenses (invoices numbers, boarding passes, train tickets, a detailed electronic time-sheet for each employee working on the project, pay slips with the detail of all taxes...).

The objective of these internal reports is to facilitate the coordinator's task for final report.

| Four months duration (invoices copies, proofs of travel, payslips, timesheet that occurred in this period) | Deadline to send the documents |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Report 1 | 30 th May 2011 |
| Report 2 | 30 th September 2011 |
| Report 3 | 30 th December 2011 |
| PROGRESS REPORT (narrative + financial report) | 9 th January 2012 |
| Report 4 | 28 th May 2012 |
| Report 5 | 28 th September 2012 |
| Report 5 | 25 th January 2013 |
| FINAL REPORT (narrative + financial report) | 30 th January 2013 |

We checked if the actual expenses fit the provisional budget and if anyone had any administrative problem. In this view we discussed the flexibility of the budget categories (10% rules, categories A, B, C, D, E = Fixed amount that can be changed within the category) to see whether we could allocate more money for translation. We decided that changes in the budget should be as minor as possible and always be in accordance with the project objectives (e.g. Translations to Bulgarian or Polish are relevant as they ensure a good communication towards the community).



5. Raise awareness campaign

General objectives

- The campaign will be targeted to the chosen community and to any EU citizen residing in the country.
- Based on the project's results, it will address specific issues previously identified
- It will be organized in cooperation with the representatives of migrant associations
- June-September

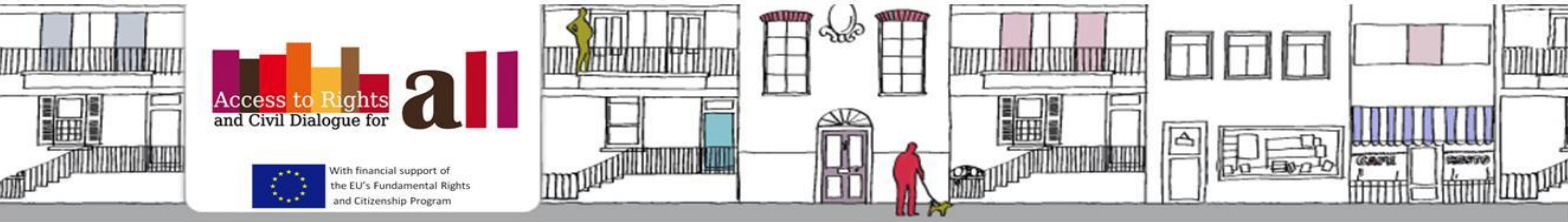
Main activities to be prepared: event + leaflet

- The partners will use their network to present the project and organize an event like an exhibition or a concert whose aim will be to inform as many people as possible
- The partners will elaborate a leaflet with information on political and electoral rights, on procedures to take part in the democratic life and on the fight against racism and discrimination.
→ Electronic and printed version (translated)

6. Communication tools

Every partner explained what his/her organization is doing to diffuse information on the project and its outcomes at national level. We then discussed of ways to improve communication, for example at European level. We discussed the idea of creating a short movie on the project, which would have to be translated and adapted to the national context.

Internet and websites must be used to disseminate information and we can also contact migrant associations to go beyond our traditional network.



7. Work calendar

Next Transnational meeting:

We agreed that the next transnational meeting should be held in France, probably on October 22nd – 23rd (to be confirmed) – to start around 10h30.

Provisional agenda of the meeting: budget, activities, raise-awareness campaign, reparation of the final seminar

Final Seminar in Brussels:

The objective is to present the main results of the project. The seminar can be organized around January, 28th 2013 – 01st February 2013 in Brussels. For the venue, we proposed the European economic and social committee, or the Belgian national labour council. We agreed that we should contact and invite the Commission to this event.

2012

- 1st Newsletter and recommendations (April)
- Modules of trainings (April-May-June)
- Curricula of trainings (June)
- Publication of the comparative study (May)
- National raise-awareness campaign (June-Sept)
- Transnational seminar in Belgium/France (Sept)
- 2nd Newsletter (Sept-Oct)
- Financial reports (May and Sept)

2013

- Final seminar in Belgium (Jan-Feb)
- Final financial and activity report (Feb-March)



Visit of the new Acropoli Museum



Friday 30th March 2012

Visit to the Greek Ombudsman: sector for Migrant's rights

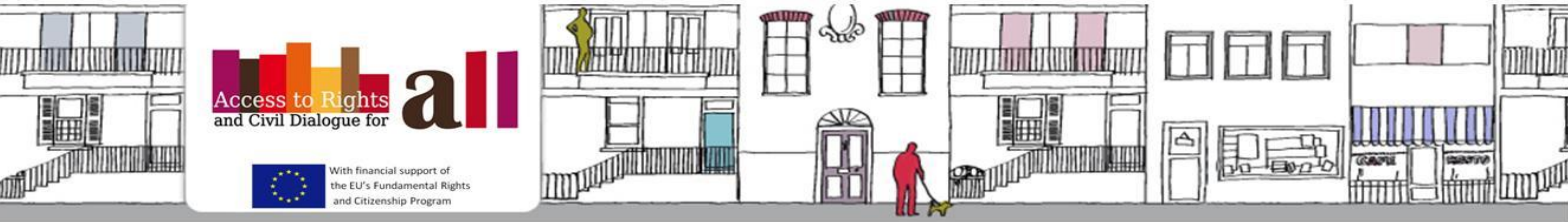
The Greek Ombudsman (GO) is an independent authority which controls the legality of administrative actions and intervenes in case of misadministration. The GO focuses on Roma and migrant issues but also on gender issues, children rights, etc. It intervenes only after a complaint from a citizen, or a migrant (even in irregular stay) towards an administrative act directly concerning the person.

The GO can propose changes in the law but it is not legally binding. It can only intervene outside judicial procedures and try to dialogue with the administration. If no change occurred, the mediator will issue a written record on the situation (symbolic weight – non binding) which will serve the person in court.

Many concerns touch the social rights and the social security system. Freedom of movement is the ground principle behind social rights. The 883-2004 EU regulation on coordination of social security systems sets out that EU citizens can transfer their social rights from one member State to another. This has been set up to facilitate free movement of workers (e.g. facilitation with pension benefits).

The problem with Bulgarian migrants is that some try to get Greek pension benefits even if they mainly have worked in Bulgaria. Greek pension benefits are higher than in Bulgaria, although this may change with the long lasting economic crisis. Most Bulgarian migrants are women and usually benefit from a low pension benefit according to the years they have worked (and paid social contributions) in Greece. However Greek State raises this pension benefits to the basic minimum income.

It is important to note that the UE regulation sets up a coordination but not a harmonization of the social security systems, which stays in the hands of the member States. Therefore, the complement of these low pension benefits is conditioned to an obligation of residence (to avoid social security shopping). But this obligation of residence is not very well defined in EU regulation, which leads to some problems in its application.



The 38-2004 EU Directive on permanent stay says that the right of permanent stay is granted to any citizen after 5 years of uninterrupted stay. This right guarantees the person the same treatment than any Greek citizen, including welfare care (non contributive system). There are derogations to this permanent stay right, for example, if a person is married to a Greek citizen, ... The general rule is 5 years of uninterrupted stay but it is not applied by Greek authorities, which state that “they do not fully understand the terms of the Directive”.

A person is entitled to the permanent stay right as long as he/she has been staying 5 years in Greece without interruption. This right is not conditioned by the issuance of the residence permit (which only is a proof of the right).

Concerning the specific case of the Bulgarian community, there are about 80 to 90 000 Bulgarian migrants in Greece where they gained full rights since 2009. Romania and Bulgaria are part of traditional migration patterns which means that Greek citizens were also moving there.

There are strong ties between migrants and this is something the Ombudsman tries to play on by stressing that to be organized as a community can help migrants to defend themselves. The Bulgarian community suffers from a lot of stereotypes, misunderstandings (from both sides) and a huge lack of information.

The most common issue they used to complain of is the bad services migrants received when asking for a resident permit because it was issued by a special police authority which already dealt with political asylum seeker and could not cope with the amount of demands. This changed in 2010 with the creation of a separate asylum office.

Another important issue Bulgarian migrants share with the Romanians is fake marriage with non EU-citizens. Some Bulgarian women are forced to marry Pakistani or African men. Besides the problematic issue itself, these stories create trouble for real couples and, to make it even more difficult, in Greece religious marriage is recognized by the law...

Are EU migrants aware of their rights as EU citizens? Those who come to the Ombudsman come because they already are aware that they have rights, otherwise they wouldn't come.

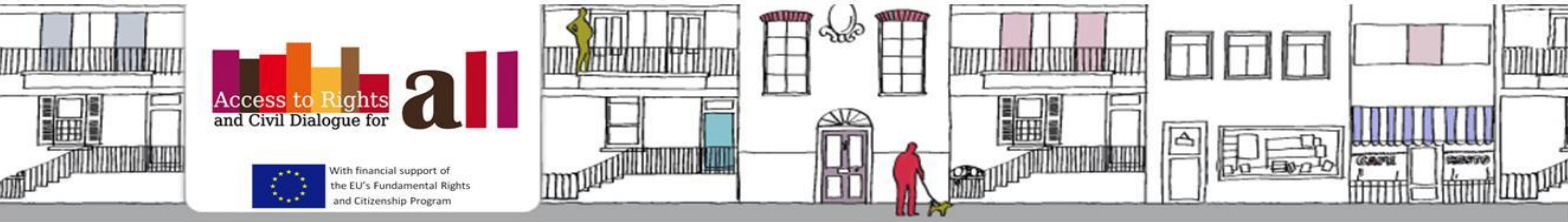


**Meeting with Mrs Blagorodna Filevska,
President of the Greek-Bulgarian Cultural Association “Paisii Chilendarski”**

Mrs Filevska participated in the focus groups of the project. She also was the first Bulgarian person who was candidate at EU elections in 2009 in a Greek political party.

“Paisii Chilendarski” is a Greek-Bulgarian association that focuses on education, on promotion of cultural and organizes intercultural activities. The association also advocates the rights of Bulgarian people in Greece. The association was funded two years ago but obtained legal recognition less than a year ago. This delay is indicative of Bulgarian difficulties to effectively exercise their rights in Greece.

The initial objective of the association is to be an education structure for Bulgarian children to allow them to learn their native language. As equivalent to the educational system, it should have been “for free”. However, the Greek authorities did not want to finance the project, even though children have rights to learn their native language. No facilities were provided by the State and there is a huge bureaucratic burden to get proper language courses. So some Bulgarian migrants decided to organize themselves. Fortunately, they now have the support of the Bulgarian Minister of Education who has a special program for Bulgarian language learning in foreign countries.



The association saw that the interest of Bulgarians was that they could not exercise some rights. Some didn't even know that they had rights. For the last EU elections no good information was provided by the Greek State, although this was better for the last local elections. But still Bulgarian people don't understand what politics and participation can mean to them. The aim of the association therefore is to inform them about their rights.

From an ethnologist point of view, this behavior comes from a lack of political culture and has to be put in context. Historically, because of the old communist regime, Bulgarian people did not develop a strong culture of participation or transparency. Even if the political context has now changed in Bulgaria, this democratic culture takes time to rise. The main obstacles to participation are that they don't feel related to or concerned by elections and that they have very little knowledge on EU politics and on how it can affect their life.

Until 2008, Bulgarian migrants were mainly women of a certain age without kids. They specialized themselves in elderly care, child care, cleaning, seasonal work in hotel and restaurant, or even prostitution. Their work usually was undeclared.

After the adhesion to EU, more families and younger women came to Greece. But prostitution worsened too after the accession as mafia traffic was easier thanks to freedom of movement. Now most prostitutes are from Roma origins. Certain groups of Roma from Bulgarian origins (gangs) have a high criminal level. This impacts the image of the community as a whole.

One of the biggest problems is that we do not have official data on the real number of migrants. There probably are more than 200 000 but nobody knows. As Bulgaria is a neighboring country, circular migration is easy. Migrants usually come to get seasonal work in tourism industry for 4-5 months and to get Greek unemployment benefits while returning to Bulgaria.

Until 2011, they were persistent to stay in Greece because the situation was worse in Bulgaria. But now with the economic crisis, some think to go back but only if they have a house in Bulgaria and don't have to pay a rent. At the first good economic sign, they will come back in Greece. Further, returning to Bulgaria is less attractive than to move to another member State.

In this context, the association tries to inform Greek society on Bulgarians (lots of stereotypes and misunderstandings), and to promote integration and intercultural dialogue. The lack of information on both sides are so important that even in local administrations, some civil servants don't know Bulgaria is a new EU member State !



Concerning political representation, which possibilities are available to Bulgarian people? It is a very good step that EU citizens can vote at local elections. But there is little awareness in Greek society. Greek citizens would be reluctant to vote for someone who is not Greek.

Further, it is a political problem: to run as a candidate, you have to be approved by a political party, which is not always easy! For example, Mrs Filevska was a candidate and was shown on tv and media. All this publicity and her foreign origin put her in an awkward situation. She did not benefit from a good integration from other members of the party. In addition, in Balkan countries, there seems to be a traditional lack of trusts towards neighbors. Some Greek persons therefore had the feeling she was a spy...

Besides giving basic information, the purpose of the association is to educate the Bulgarian community to be more integrated, to know their duties not only asking their rights and complain. One key element in this is language improvement. The knowledge of Greek language is quite weak among the Bulgarian community. This is related to the fact that they mainly occupy low skilled jobs. This can be problematic as the Greek State never provides translation for Bulgarian migrants (public authorities though they would understand Russian...). As a consequence, the important information is only in Greek, even information directly concerning the Bulgarian community.

