

## **European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIANC)**

### **MINUTES**

#### **Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting**

**March 31, 2020**

**Held online**

#### **Attendees:**

Board members: Željko Jovanović, Gilda Horvath, Iulius Rostas, Thorsten Afflerbach (delegated on behalf of Snežana Samardžić-Marković,)

Non-Voting Board Members and guests: Lorenz Barth (Federal Foreign Office), Michaela Kückler (Federal Foreign Office); Anita Czikonczi (RIO), Kinga Rethy (RIO)

Barvalipe Academy: Maria Bogdan, Emran Elmazi (delegated by Romani Rose), Delia Grigore, Delaine Le Bas, Florin Nasture, Miguel Angel Vargas, Mihaela Zatreanu

ERIANC Associate Members: Angela Kocze, Isaac Blake, Sevdija Demirova, Mate Dezso, Nina Dudek, Asmet Elezovski, Jose Heredia, Ljuan Koka, Vera Lackova, Justyna Matkowska, Andrzej Mirga, Emil Metodiev, Gonzalo Montano, Sami Mustafa, Fabian Sanchez, Inger Sigfridsson, Samat Skenderi, Suad Skenderi, Santino Spinelli, Bledi Taho, Moritz Pankok, Dijana Pavlovic, Nadir Redjepi, George Vasilescu.

ERIANC Team: Timea Junghaus, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Zsofia Bihari, Joanna Khandijeva, Andrea Petrus

Minute-taker: Almir Huseini

#### **1. Organizational Matters - Agenda, assembly rules and instructions for ZOOM**

ERIANC Deputy Director, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka addressed all participants with welcoming remarks, introduced the technical instructions (including how to use simultaneous translation to Romanes) and explained the rules of the online meeting. She informed the participants that the meeting is being recorded. She presented the agenda and passed the word to Zeljko Jovanovic for formal opening of the General Assembly.

#### **2. Welcome remarks by the Chair of the ERIAC Board and the General Assembly**

Zeljko Jovanovic, the Chair of the ERIAC Board opens the General Assembly reiterating that ERIAC was established with the aim to define properly who Roma people are in the context of economic crisis occurred in 2008, heightened by the violence Roma faced in Hungary and other countries in Europe. In this context, the far-right gained political momentum building on anti-Roma narratives. It was very important to destroy negative narratives about Roma and this is what shaped the foundation of ERIAC.

The ERIAC Board asserted that the current crisis caused by COVID19 enhances the effects of the financial crisis and intensifies fear and anger which again negatively affects all Roma communities. The ERIAC questionnaire on the effect of COVID19 showed that even the likelihood of basic earnings for Roma is in question. The real challenge is how ERIAC should

defend our communities in the information and communication space from the attacks of far-right, when Roma artists, cultural producers and activists suffer from existential crisis. How should ERIAC protect Roma from the increasingly more powerful far-right and from the consequences of the evolving economic crisis? ERIAC was never meant as a place for survival of cultural producers but was established to be co-creator with cultural producers. ERIAC is not a foundation - ERIAC is an association and it has members whose social capital, skills and ideas contribute to its collective potential and power. We have to decide if we continue individually or fight together under the umbrella of ERIAC. Finally, the main question is how we use opportunity to do something with ERIAC, which we cannot do individually. What is the unique role ERIAC should play? It is also important to highlight that we have the strong support of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundation and the German government – and these are important allies for our cause.

### **3. Preliminary results of ERIAC Questionnaire**

ERIANC Executive director, Timea Junghaus introduced the preliminary results of the ERIAC questionnaire “Covid-19 impact on Roma arts and culture”. The results show that ERIAC members are severely impacted by the crisis. The extent to which further the crisis will impact based on the estimation of the damage now is very worrying. Out of individual respondents, 53% freelancers, 30% employed, 14 % informal status. In case of institutions, 65% operate in the domains of Arts and culture Artists (art genres, musicians, performers, theatre artists), 37% are academics 37%, and 30% are researchers/ educators. For almost 34 % of the respondents, the current crisis means complete closure and ending of cultural activity, 38% suffered severe impact and is currently reorganizing activities. Based on these preliminary results, only 45% has reserves sufficient over 3 months of lifetime; what is an alarming data is that 20% has sufficient reserves for only 1 month. 80 % has seen no provisions of support for the cultural crisis from the governmental or regional aid programs.

Results show as well that there is a consensus that ERIAC should address the effects of the crisis. Most members agreed that ERIAC should shift its role to:

- Becoming an online platform to inspire 6.5/10
- Funding grant-giving 6.4/10
- Professional certification and arts council role 6/10
- Dissemination of opportunities, financial aid for arts and culture programs 5.8 /10

The questionnaire represents a consensus that the virus will not be over soon and will have long term consequences.

What is also strongly apparent is: Only 3.03/10 thought that we shall switch from culture to humanitarian activities.

The collection of data will be continued and will be a part of strategy-rebuilding process of ERIAC. The questionnaire will be translated to most EU languages and directed also to non-ERIANC members, to gain critical knowledge about the overall impact in the field of Roma arts and culture.

### **4. Membership brief:**

**Reports from the members: How does this crisis affect us/ communities/ organization/ cultural producers/ arts and culture field?**

Following the presentation, Timea Junghaus opened the discussion, seeking reports from the members. In all countries the situation of Roma communities is very dramatic; the crisis affects adversely Roma communities:

- Cultural producers and cultural workers experience disastrous effects with all performances canceled;
- Roma people suffer because of income deficiency, especially now as movement is limited;
- Anti-gypsyism is growing in the media and campaigns are organized using almost Nazi language. Racism in the social media is increasing and again Roma people are serving as a scapegoat of the crisis;
- Marginalization, lack of water, electricity puts Roma in the special risk of being affected by the pandemics. As a consequence, lots of losses occur especially within elderly population in the Rome communities.

The members reconfirmed that the Roma arts and culture field is severely affected, with specific examples being given from Spain, Macedonia, Romania, Italy, Serbia and other countries.

**5. Discussion What is the unique role ERIAC can play? What can the ERIAC members do? How can we help? What are the expectations and needs of the community? What resources can we mobilize? What are potential solutions and ideas for collaboration?**

Following the membership brief, the participants were encouraged to discuss practical ideas for the strategic reorientation of ERIAC's activities in the face of the current crisis. It was asserted that ERIAC needs to support Roma artist and be closer to communities, while it should also serve as a communicator and public educator on the European level.

Some important and concrete suggestions were made, including:

- The importance of framing on projects with two goals:
  - o Projects of democracy and defending of human rights;
  - o Project of economic recovery and efficiency.
- Concrete activities should focus on:
  - o Romani history-children teaching;
  - o Strengthening the self-esteem of Roma communities without requiring extensive financial recourses but with great result and impact on the communities.
- Meetings with development bank, German government and the EU representatives for establishing common action and mutual support towards both, economic and democratic empowerment;
- Support Roma artist to transition online, produce virtual performances and help fundraising providing information on available funds;
- Reach out to private donors and funders for supporting Roma arts and culture;
- Educations through videos on social media strengthening Roma identity and unity;
- Symbolic actions that support all Roma and Non Roma who experience Corona virus.

Representatives of the German government, Mr. Lorenz Barth and Ms. Michaela KÜchler reconfirmed continuation of support to ERIAC and supporting Roma arts and culture in all next events planned in the upcoming period. They re-affirmed that Roma culture is the priority and it will remain the priority in the next four years.

**6. Conclusions and closing by the Chair of the General Assembly**

Following a vivid discussion, Timea Junghaus and Zeljko Jovanovic concluded the meeting by planning the next steps.

It was confirmed that further discussion within the ERIAC thematic sections will be organized.

ERiac will also continue gathering data by further distribution of the questionnaire, in order to evaluate the economic, cultural and social impact on Roma communities.

ERiac management committed to providing information on available financial aid, funds and grants towards Roma artists and community.

ERiac will use its online platforms to continue activities promoting Roma culture, shaping the discourse on Roma culture supporting, and encouraging Roma artists and community.

On the long-term conclusions, ERIAC will continue collection of data on the Covid19 impact on Roma communities and will build the long-term strategy.

Approval date of the final Minute-document: April 2, 2020.

Zeljko Jovanovic

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Chair of the General Assembly: Zeljko Jovanovic

Signed the original document

Almir Huseini

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Appointed Minute-taker: Almir Huseini

Signed the original document

In compliance with para 13 (10) of the ERIAC Statutes this Minutes are to be prepared, signed by the minute-taker and confirmed by the Chair of the General Assembly. They shall be published on the web portal of the association.