

PRESS RELEASE

Serbia Moves to Advance Roma Culture and Education; in an Effort Also Supported by the Open Society Foundations, the Council of Europe, and Germany

BELGRADE—Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić today inaugurated the first branch of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERiac) and the new headquarters of the Roma Education Fund (REF).

Tuesday's opening comes as Serbia gets ready to invest in Roma entrepreneurship and inclusion in public administration.

Speaking about the launch, President Vučić said: "The opening of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture and the Roma Education Fund in Belgrade shows how much effort Serbia is investing in preserving the Roma language and culture, quality youth education and greater Roma participation in public life, fighting discrimination, and respecting social equality and human rights. In this way, we are creating a better future for all citizens, because a better life for Roma means a better life for Serbia."

Alexander Soros, deputy chair of the Open Society Foundations, welcomed Serbia's unprecedented commitment:

"President Vučić has set a new standard for the Western Balkans—and Europe—by opening the first branch of ERiac and helping the Roma Education Fund relocate to Belgrade. It is my hope that the other leaders of the region and Europe follow suit. My father George Soros and I have sought to advance Roma education, culture, Roma leadership, and economic entrepreneurship, and I am grateful that today we have greatly strengthened their effort."

ERiac aims to dispel prejudice and encourage Roma pride in their role in European history and culture. ERiac is a joint initiative of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, and the Alliance for the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. The German government hosts ERiac's headquarters in Berlin.

Timea Junghaus, ERiac Executive Director:

"For centuries, the Roma have contributed to the artistic and cultural heritage in Serbia and the entire region. Yet these contributions have often remained invisible. The establishment of ERiac's first branch is a historic milestone. It paves the way for ERiac Serbia to become a leading stakeholder, promoting Roma cultural inclusion in the vibrant mainstream cultural scene in Serbia and the region."

The same building will also house the Roma Education Fund, an organization working to increase the access of Roma children to education.

Redjepali Chupi, Interim Director of the Roma Education Fund (REF):

“REF wants to create a future in which everyone can develop their full potential and creativity. I am thrilled to welcome ERIAC into our community here in Belgrade. Together we are creating a powerful inner core, aimed at countering stereotypes and prejudices about our community.”

BACKGROUND

ERIANC was borne out of an effort by a broad coalition of Roma scholars, activists, and artists. They secured the support of the Council of Europe and the Open Society Foundations, who have funded ERIAC alongside the Alliance for the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture.

ERIANC was launched in 2017 in Berlin, where it is headquartered, with a unique and single mandate as the transnational, European-level organization for the recognition of Roma arts and culture.

ERIANC SERBIA will promote Roma arts and culture in Serbia and the entire region, making a significant impact on the cultural recognition of Roma. Located in the city center at Majke Jevrosime St. 51, the ERIAC SERBIA office and art space occupies a total area of over 130 m² on the ground floor, with a beautiful open space suitable for art exhibitions and events.

ERIANC SERBIA was inaugurated on May 25, with an opening ceremony attended by the president of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, deputy chair of the Open Society Foundations Alexander Soros, as well as the ambassador of Germany to Serbia Thomas Schieb and ambassador and head of delegation of the European Union to Serbia Sem Fabrizi. The ceremony was accompanied by the opening of the exhibition “Roma Resistance and Resilience,” featuring the works of Roma contemporary artists from across Europe.

Since its founding, ERIAC has become a recognized leader of contemporary Roma artistic discourse, hosting hundreds of arts and culture events around the world, including, among others, at the 58th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia. ERIAC acts as an international creative hub to support the exchange of creative ideas across borders, cultural domains, and Romani identities, currently bringing together over 160 Roma and non-Roma members from around the world.

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