



## EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE

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7 June 2007

To: Ms Elena Rylenkova  
Director, news agency "Kuzbas-inform"  
Russia, Kemerovskaya oblast, 645007,  
Novokuzneck, Ordzhonikidze str. 35, 5<sup>th</sup> floor  
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Cc: Mr Genady Podpriga  
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Dear Ms Rylenkova,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation that monitors Roma rights and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse of Roma. The ERRC is concerned about the linkage of Roma with crime and inappropriate references to Roma ethnicity in description of crimes in the titles and content of news articles on your portal ([www.kuzinform.ru](http://www.kuzinform.ru)). Such linkages contribute to the incitement of anti-Romani sentiment in society.

For example, a report dated 7 September 2006 entitled "The swindlers-hypnotists came into view in Mejdurechensk" starts with the phrase "Roma swindle in the city. They break into houses begging for antiques and then they rob people with the help of hypnosis." In a report dated 13 October 2006 entitled "the Romani swindlers are operating in Mejdurechensk," unidentified criminals are referred as "Roma": "This time their victim was a pensioner, who allowed Romani women to enter his flat due to their promises to heal him from all the diseases." According to unofficial statistics, the number of Roma living in Russia is more than 1 million;<sup>1</sup> given the tone of the reports quoted above, your audience would be lead to believe that all Roma are engaged exclusively in robbing and swindling.

Racial prejudice by the author is also apparent in a report dated 19 June 2006 entitled "Drug dealers should be brought to responsibility!" in which the descriptions of many criminals convicted of drug dealing refer to ethnicity only in case of a Romani criminal. In a report dated 25 September 2006 entitled "The resident of Novokuznetsk has exchanged her automobile 'Nissan' for 3 kg of marihuana," the suspect is referred to as "the passenger who looks Romani." These biases continue in reports published this year. A report dated 16 February 2007 entitled

<sup>1</sup> European Roma Rights Centre, 2005. In Search of Happy Gypsies: Persecution of Pariah Minorities in Russia. Budapest, p.23.

“The activists of United Russia in Novokuznetsk presented a computer to the Drug Control Service” Roma are referred to as a criminal gang, despite the fact that the report is concerned with charitable activities. A report dated 25 April 2007 referred to the Romani origin of a woman detained a day earlier by State Drug Control Service employees, although the woman had not been found guilty of any crime by a court.

Regrettably, the foregoing is far from a comprehensive list of reports appearing on the “[www.kuzinform.ru](http://www.kuzinform.ru)” website in which Roma are associated with crime.

Moreover, these so-called news reports are far from an unbiased representation of local activity and sentiment; rather, the reports, in their tone and selective reporting of ungrounded beliefs, contribute to a reproduction and incitement of racist beliefs targeting Roma. A kuzinform.ru report dated 17 November 2006 entitled “The majority of Kuzbass residents do not consider themselves as the followers of any particular ideology,” the results of a public survey are given, and a widely disproportionate amount of ethnic bias towards Roma, as compared to other minorities, is seen. It is obvious that regional and local media – including especially reports such as those mentioned above – have played a role in shaping these prejudiced attitudes.

Dear Ms Rylenkova, the ERRC notes that the Directorate of the Russian Federal Surveillance Service for Compliance with the Law in Mass Communications and Cultural Heritage Protection (Rosohrancultura) and experts involved in the process of a working meeting dated 21 February 2007 have expressed concern regarding the rise of ethnic and religious intolerance in the Russian mass media.<sup>2</sup>

We also recall that Article 29(2) of the Constitution of the Russian Federation prohibits propaganda instigating national or racial hatred. In addition, Article 4(a) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which the Russian Federation is a party, binds states to “declare an offence punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin, [...]”

We urge you and the staff of your agency to take a firm stand against anti-Romani hate speech, to review the policy of the portal toward persons belonging to certain nationalities, in particular Roma, and to refrain from publishing reports that incite further intolerance of Roma. We welcome further discussion of these matters with you.

Sincerely,

Vera Egenberger  
Executive Director

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<sup>2</sup> Chronicle of Moscow Bureau for Human Rights (January-February 2007), available at: <http://antirasizm.ru/news.php?page=1>