



EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE

1386 Budapest 62, P.O. Box 906/93, Hungary
Phone: (36-1) 413-2200; Fax: (36-1) 413-2201

E-mail: office@errc.org

<http://errc.org>

22 May 2007

To: Mr Victor Biryukov
Director, portal "www.petrovka38.ru"
Petrovka 38, Moscow, 127994, Russia
Fax: + 7 495 6986731

Cc: Mr Vladimir Pronin
Chief of the Municipal Department of Internal Affairs of Moscow
Petrovka 38, Moscow, 127994, Russia
Fax: + 7 495 6986731

Dear Mr Biryukov,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation, which 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 advices, reffered on your portal "www.petrovka38.ru", which obviously encourage the anti-Romani sentiments in society.

Thus, for example, in the report "Mysterious nation – the Roma" (9 November 2006) the following actions advised against Roma who wander on the streets:

"Thus, nevertheless, what to do if Roma have sticked to you on the street? Never talk to them and even more with unfamiliar people. Even when they ask you "What time is it now?" and you, as a good-minded person cannot refuse – do not answer them ... Do not apologize, simply give a shrug of the shoulders and pass by with courage. Namely "with courage", because Roma are psychologists and choose the victim according to these characteristics. Do not let them to touch you. While talking with you a Romani woman will try to induce a bright feeling of fear or joy. While taking your hand and asking certain questions, Roma may regulate your emotions and reactions ... If a Romani woman is very insistent and unable to leave you, then do not be afraid to be rude and harsh."

According to unofficial statistics, the number of Roma living in Russia is more then 1 million,¹ but given advice the above, your audience would be lead to believe that all Roma are the

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

hypnotists of criminal nature and that in communication with them, other people should be “sharp and rude”.

Your portal frequently contains the references to Roma ethnicity of the persons, whose guilt is not proven yet. And this trend, among the other ones, may contribute to the perpetuation of a stereotype about alleged addiction to a criminal activity amongst Roma. In particular, the authors of reports write “the staff of a private security agency has detained a Romani pickpocket” (22 September 2006), “The woman has been detained. She happened to be a Roma, who came from Ryazan.” (23 August 2006), “as it turned out, the robbers were two Romani women, mother and daughter” (15 June 2006).

Regrettably, the foregoing is not a comprehensive list of such reports.

Dear Mr Biryukov, the ERRC is concerned that the messages appearing in your news portal contribute to the development of hostile attitudes toward Roma. The ERRC would like to draw your attention to “Methodical recommendations on the use of special knowledge in the issues and materials on violation of ethnic, racial and religious equality by mass media”, elaborated by the Prosecutor General Office of the Russian Federation. The authors of recommendations, among the other characteristics of propaganda of ethnic, racial or religious exclusiveness, intolerance, and hatred, refer to:

- shaping and strengthening of a negative ethnic stereotype, the image of a nation;
- the association of various negative characteristics and wickedness of individual representatives with the whole ethnic group;
- laying of blame and responsibility for the actions of individual representatives on the whole ethnic group.²

We also recall that 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 color or ethnic origin, [...]”

We urge you and the staff of your agency to take a firm stand against anti-Romani hate speech and to refrain from publishing reports that may incite further intolerance of Roma. We welcome further discussion of these matters with you.

Sincerely,

Vera Egenberger
Executive Director

² The Recommendations published in the analytical report of the Russian Academy of Science “Overcoming of xenophobia in mass media”, available at:
http://www.igpi.ru/bibl/other_articl/1101820840.html.