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OSCE Mission to Skopje — 1000 Skopje
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Brussels, 6th July 2026

Attempted Murder of a Romani Minor in Čento, Gazi Baba Municipality

Dear Investigating Authorities and Public Prosecutors,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is a Roma-led international public interest law organisation monitoring and protecting the human rights of Roma in Europe. We write with grave concern regarding the attack on a fourteen-year-old Romani boy on the evening of 22 June 2026 in Čento, Gazi Baba municipality, and urge proper legal classification, effective investigation including any possible bias motivation, and victim protection measures consistent with North Macedonia's international obligations.

Summary of facts

On 22 June 2026, a fourteen-year-old Romani boy from the Madžari neighbourhood was lured via telephone call to a park near Finska Street, where three adult men (since identified by police as J.J., V.A., and V.S.) carried out a coordinated assault. According to the victim's mother, speaking to Sloboden Pechat and Libertas, one attacker struck the boy on the head with a firearm, a second beat him across the body, and a third stabbed him seven times in the back with a knife. The attackers left the boy unconscious in the park; a passer-by found him and called emergency services. He underwent urgent surgery and has since been discharged, though his mother reports he does not feel safe. Three suspects are in custody and, as of 6 July 2026, we have seen no official statement

from the Public Prosecutor's Office clarifying the intended legal classification of these acts. We understand that SVR Skopje's Unit for Violent Crime has submitted a criminal complaint to OJO Skopje against J.J., V.S. and V.A. for the offence "violence against a child" under Article 201 a of the Criminal Code.

Urging legal classification of Attempted Murder

Attempted murder is punishable under Article 123 read with Article 19 of the Criminal Code. The facts below — particularly the cruelty and coordination of the attack — also engage the aggravated forms under Article 123(2), which include killing in a cruel or treacherous manner. The following factors support classification as attempted murder rather than lesser bodily harm offences:

1. Use of multiple deadly weapons (firearm and knife) by three coordinated adult attackers against a single minor.
2. Seven stab wounds to the back, indicating sustained, targeted violence.
3. The assault rendered the victim unconscious, demonstrating lethal capacity.
4. The attackers abandoned the unconscious child without rendering aid, creating substantial risk of death.
5. The use of a phone call as a lure indicates pre-planning rather than spontaneous confrontation.

Current police language characterising the incident as "physical attack" and "injuries with a sharp object" appears inadequate to the gravity of the documented facts. We respectfully urge the Prosecution to file charges reflecting the full severity of the offence.

Effective investigation including into possible hate motivation

The ERRC notes that Article 2 (Right to Life), Article 3 (Prohibition of Torture) and Article 14 (Prohibition of Discrimination) of the European Convention of Human Rights require that the State authorities carry out effective investigation into similar cases of violent attacks by private individuals.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has repeatedly ruled that for the investigation to be considered effective, it should meet the criteria of independence and impartiality, adequacy, promptness, public scrutiny and victim participation (see e.g. *El-Masri v. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* [GC], no. 39630/09, §§ 182-185). Moreover, the states have a positive obligation to take all reasonable steps to unmask any racist motive and to establish whether or not ethnic hatred or prejudice may have played a role in the events (*Nachova and Others v. Bulgaria*). Failure to do so constitutes a violation of Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 2 (right to life) and Article 3 (prohibition of torture) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The victim is confirmed to be of Romani ethnicity, from the Roma-majority Madžari settlement, verified through independent community sources. While no media source explicitly documents racial slurs during the attack, the victim's Roma identity, the severity of violence, and the apparent absence of any prior conflict between the parties warrant systematic investigation of bias motivation.

Under Article 39(5) of the Criminal Code, the court shall consider whether the crime was committed against the victim "because of his or their sex, race, skin colour, membership in a marginalised group, ethnic background," or other protected characteristic. Article 122(42) defines a hate crime as a criminal act committed "entirely or partially because of the actual or presumed characteristic of the person that refers to race, colour of skin, nationality, ethnic origin," or other protected ground. If Article 39(5) is not applied, the court is obliged under Article 39(6) to explain its reasons.

Per OSCE/ODIHR guidance on bias indicators ("Using Bias Indicators: A Practical Tool for Police," 2019), we urge investigators to examine whether racial motivation might have played role in action of the attackers and, in particular, to examine: victim selection based on Roma identity, correlation with residential segregation patterns in the Čento/Gazi Baba area, any hate-motivated language during interrogation, social network links to anti-Roma extremist groups, and any prior incidents targeting Roma in the vicinity.

Failure to investigate potential bias motivation would engage North Macedonia's obligations under the ECHR (Articles 2, 3, and 14), the ICCPR (Articles 2 and 26), UN CERD (Article 6 — the right to effective protection and remedies against acts of racial discrimination), the UNCRC (Articles 2, 6, 19, and 39), and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Articles 4 and 6), as well as ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15 and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.

Specific requests

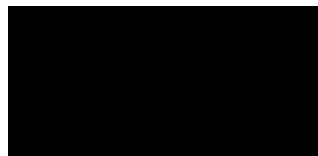
The ERRC respectfully urges authorities to:

1. File criminal charges asserting attempted murder under Article 123 read with Article 19, alongside any secondary charges (unlawful possession of weapons, etc.) supported by evidence.
2. Carry out effective investigation as required by the European Convention of Human Rights.
3. Conduct a comprehensive bias indicator investigation in line with Article 39(5), Article 122(42), and OSCE/ODIHR methodology, and apply hate-based aggravation under Article 39(5) if substantiated.

4. Provide formal written communication to the victim's family explaining charged offences, anticipated timeline, and available protective measures.
5. Assess the victim's ongoing safety needs and arrange psychosocial support referral through municipal social work centres, as well as apply the child-specific protective measures mandated by the Law on Justice for Children and Article 109 of the Criminal Procedure Code:
 - Limit official interviews with the victim to two occasions unless exceptional circumstances require otherwise;
 - Conduct all questioning in a child-friendly setting with a psychologist or guardian present;
 - Audio-video record the victim's statement for evidentiary use at trial to avoid repeated testimony;
 - Preserve the victim's anonymity in all public communications;
 - Notify Municipal Social Work Centres for ongoing psychosocial support and safety monitoring.
6. Issue a public statement, when appropriate, clarifying the legal qualification of the case.

We look forward to your response by email to [REDACTED] or by post to the European Roma Rights Centre, Avenue de Cortenbergh 71, 4th floor, Brussels 1000, Belgium.

Yours sincerely,



Đorđe Jovanović

President
ERRC

