

30 August 2011

TO:

Mr. Jaromír Dvořák
Mr. Milan Boček
Mr. Martin Louka
Mr. Jaroslav Sykáček
Mr. Josef Hýbl
Ms. Eva Džumanová
Ms. Alice Zemanová
Mr. Jan Kubice
Mr. Petr Lessy

Re: Effective Response to Escalating Ethnic Tension in North Bohemia

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), an international human rights organisation combating anti-Romani racism and discrimination in Europe, is writing to express its concern about the increasing tension in North Bohemia between Roma and non-Roma, particularly in the towns of Rumburk, Novy Bor, Sluknov and Varnsdorf.

According to media reports¹ and ERRC field documentation, since July 2011 several racially motivated actions against Roma living in North Bohemia have taken place. In July and early August, ethnic Czechs committed two arson attacks against Romani people living in Býchory and Krtý.² After that, on 7 August Romani customers of a gaming room in Novy Bor attacked other customers and staff after staff refused to pay out their winnings. On 21 August 18 Roma reportedly beat up six ethnic Czechs. Four ethnic Czechs brutally beat up an innocent Romani man with baseball bats in front of his pregnant girlfriend on 22 August. In the midst of this tense situation, some local authorities in the region have made public statements which may worsen public sentiment about Roma. For example, on 26 August the Mayor of Rumburk called for the need to regulate the influx of “inadaptable” persons (a well-known term used in the Czech Republic for Roma) and ban their residence.³

The ERRC notes that the Czech Ministry of Interior, responding to calls by local authorities, deployed 120 special police units to Rumburk on 23 August due to the increasing ethnic tension in the region. However, incidents occurring on 26 August indicate that the Government response to date has been inadequate. According to ERRC documentation, on that day

¹ Sample media coverage of events: http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_2687; http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_2746; and http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_2757.

² See: http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_2755.

³ See: http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/vypalme-synagogy-zatouzili-sporadani-obcane-rumburku_210668.html.

approximately 1,000 local residents and rightwing extremists undertook an unauthorised anti-Roma march in Rumburk. During the march, local residents and rightwing extremists walked to the Romani settlement shouting anti-Roma and racist slogans and destroyed fences around two Romani houses. Local and state police were unable to stop the crowd from reaching the Romani settlement or guarantee the safety of the Romani residents.

The ERRC is deeply concerned about escalating ethnic tensions and threats to the physical safety of Roma in North Bohemia, particularly in view of anti-Roma marches planned in Varnsdorf on 3 September by Svobodná mládež, a rightwing extremist youth organisation, and Novy Bor on 10 September by the Workers' Party. Varnsdorf authorities informed the ERRC that no formal permission has yet been requested for the march.⁴ A local Romani representative informed the ERRC that the march route in Novy Bor passes by a residential building inhabited by a Romani family.⁵

The ERRC recalls that under international and domestic law, Czech authorities are obliged to protect the life and personal integrity of all its citizens. The Czech Charter on Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, a component of the constitutional order, guarantees the right to life and personal integrity.⁶ Moreover, the Czech Republic is party to the European Convention of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantee the right to life and the right to respect for private and family life.⁷

In view of the above, the ERRC hereby calls on each of you, within the powers of your respective offices, to

- Publicly condemn the anti-Roma riots in Rumburk on 26 August;
- Refrain from making public anti-Roma remarks which further escalate an already extremely tense situation;
- Reach out to the organisers of the upcoming marches in Varnsdorf and Novy Bor, and any other location announced, to defuse ethnic tension and calling on participants to conduct themselves in a non-violent and non-racist manner;
- Deploy mediators to the region to address rising ethnic tensions through non-violent means;
- Re-route marches running close to Romani neighbourhoods to prevent anti-Roma violence;
- Deploy adequate numbers of State and other police to relevant locations to guarantee the physical safety of Romani residents;
- Properly investigate and prosecute all persons found responsible for illegal acts against Roma, including destruction of Romani property and threats of or actual acts of violence against Romani persons.

We respectfully request to be informed of any and all actions undertaken by your respective offices in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Robert Kushen
Executive Director

⁴ ERRC telephone interview with a local official at the Varnsdorf town hall. 30 August 2011.

⁵ ERRC telephone interview with Mr Dusan Gorol. 30 August 2011.

⁶ Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, Articles 6 and 10.

⁷ European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Articles 2 and 8. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 6 and 17.

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