

30 August 2011

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg  
European Commission Vice-President in charge of Justice, Fundamental Rights and  
Citizenship Viviane Reding  
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek  
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Independent Expert on Minority  
Issues Rita Izsak

**Re: Effective Response to Escalating Racial Tension in North Bohemia, Czech  
Republic**

Honourable Commissioner Hammarberg, Vice-President Reding, Commissioner  
Vollebaek and Independent Expert Izsak,

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 reports<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> After that, on 7 August Romani customers of a  
gaming room in Nový 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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_2687);

[http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007\\_2746](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](http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_2757).

<sup>2</sup> See: [http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007\\_2755](http://www.romea.cz/english/index.php?id=detail&detail=2007_2755).

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/vypalme-synagogy-zatouzili-sporadani-obcane-rumburku\\_210668.html](http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/vypalme-synagogy-zatouzili-sporadani-obcane-rumburku_210668.html).

indicate that the Government response to date has been inadequate. According to ERRC documentation, on that day 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-Romani 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,<sup>4</sup> although it has been mentioned in media. A local Romani representative informed the ERRC that the march route in Novy Bor passes by a residential building inhabited by a Romani family.<sup>5</sup>

Given the heightened tensions in the Northern Bohemian region of the Czech Republic and the potential for further violent incidents between Roma and non-Roma, the ERRC urges you, within the capacities of your respective offices, to:

- Publicly condemn all anti-Romani violence and other acts to date;
- Monitor, through site visits, the marches planned for 3 and 10 September and denounce any and all further anti-Roma violence or other acts;
- Encourage and monitor the investigation and prosecution of all perpetrators of anti-Roma violence or other acts by Czech authorities to ensure access to justice for Romani victims of ethnically motivated crimes;
- Support Czech authorities to develop targeted, effective plans to defuse tensions and prevent further acts of anti-Roma violence; and
- Call on Czech authorities to provide continuous updates about actions undertaken to resolve the situation for as long as needed.

We respectfully ask to be informed of any and all actions undertaken by your respective offices.

Sincerely,

Robert Kushen  
Executive Director

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

<sup>5</sup> ERRC telephone interview with Mr Dusan Gorol. 30 August 2011.