



Bohuslav SOBOTKA

Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

Prague, 17 March 2014

Dear Commissioner for Human Rights,

Thank you for your letter of 28 February 2014 in which you raised the issue of anti-Roma demonstrations announced in several cities in the Czech Republic. I am grateful for your support of the steps that the Czech Republic has taken to ensure the safety of its citizens during anti-Roma demonstrations. I also share your view that more than this needs to be done to prevent the further spread of events motivated by hatred or prejudice. I am resolved to ensure that the Government continues its efforts to implement the measures already taken to address the underlying causes of such events and to consider the adoption of further measures which may be necessary.

Building a tolerant society is one of the priorities of the Czech Government in the area of human rights. The Government will stand up to any form of violence, hostility or discrimination, such as anti-Gypsyism. In cooperation with the Czech Government ministers, I am dedicated to taking measures to tackle the root causes of the marginalization and discrimination of Roma in the Czech Republic. This is one of the main goals of the new national Roma Integration Strategy up to the year 2020, which is currently being prepared, as well as the priority of the Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs.

It is also essential to deal with the frustration experienced by a part of Czech society caused by current difficult socio-economic conditions and clearly state that it is unacceptable to air such emotions through anti-Roma demonstrations and marches. In this respect, the Government is determined to implement its economic programme, based on promoting business, functional and transparent state administration, an effective job market, a sustainable system of pensions, social peace and investments in education, science and research.

On a local level, the Agency for Social Inclusion works with local partners to combat social exclusion and put into practice the Government's goals concerning social housing, social assistance and field work, the social benefits system, inclusive education, employment, the tackling of insolvency and debt, the availability of free legal assistance and the prevention of abuse of the social system, which takes the form, for example, of "poverty business" in overpriced hostels. In 2014, the Agency for Social Inclusion will spread its activities into nine new localities, including Ostrava. It is also worth adding that the Agency provides advice and guidance to local authorities on how to deal with anti-Roma protests.

We have recently witnessed examples of good practice in dealing with anti-Roma demonstrations in the Czech Republic. In August 2013, the city of České Budějovice repeatedly banned a notified demonstration after coming to the conclusion that the underlying aim of the event was to encourage violent and illegal behaviour. I strongly believe that the example of České Budějovice will be followed by other Czech towns and cities and that a growing number of local representatives will find the courage to ban and dissolve such demonstrations. The Czech Government will fully support them in such actions. At the same time, we will continue our cooperation with international organizations in this matter, for example in connection with the current monitoring of planned demonstrations conducted by the OBSE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several vertical strokes followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Mr Nils Muižnieks
Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe
Strasbourg
France