



Ref: CommHR/NS/sf 006-2013

Mr Bohuslav SOBOTKA
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

Strasbourg, 28 February 2014

Dear Prime Minister,

I have learned with great concern about the anti-Roma demonstrations which have been recently announced for 1 March in Ostrava, 16 April in Prague and 1 May in Ústí nad Labem.

These announcements come as a worrying continuation of the anti-Roma manifestations of last year, which were held in České Budějovice and several other towns. Reports indicate that no less than 22 Roma became victims of last year's attacks. They also echo the earlier waves of anti-Roma demonstrations in 2008 and 2009, as well as those of 2011, which ended in riots and arson attacks.

I should like to share with you my deep concern about the pattern that emerges from these events. Many of them are led by racist extremist groups and are organised simultaneously in many localities across the country. They appear to start as demonstrations during which anti-Roma hate speech is used and the public is encouraged to defend themselves against alleged misconduct by Roma citizens. They are often followed by marches to the Roma neighbourhoods and attempts to intimidate and attack members of the Roma population.

These events have required the heavy mobilisation and intervention of the police. While I welcome the measures taken by the Ministry of the Interior to protect citizens from violence, the increased frequency of these events and the consistent targeting of Roma call for a more comprehensive response by your authorities.

I should like to recall the Strasbourg Court's considerations in the 2013 case of *Vona v. Hungary*, where the Court found that the dissolution of an organisation involved in anti-Roma rallies and paramilitary parading was not contrary to Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court noted that the events had been held in various parts of the country, in particular in localities with large Roma populations, and calls had been made for the defense of the ethnic majority against so-called "Gypsy criminality". These activities amounted to racist intimidation of citizens of Roma origin. The Court stressed that states are entitled to take preventive measures to protect democracy against associations if a sufficiently imminent threat to the rights of others undermines the fundamental values upon which a democratic society rests and functions.

I have noted with satisfaction that domestic courts have made similar decisions in the past. I urge your authorities to continue to give effect to the Council of Europe standards and those contained in the 1966 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, especially Article 4 concerning the effective sanctioning of racist organisations and of activities promoting and inciting racial discrimination. The authorities could consider, as a first step, banning demonstrations in the vicinity of Roma neighbourhoods where there are indications that the participants intend to march towards these neighbourhoods with the aim of targeting Roma communities.

I should also like to reiterate the recommendations I made in the report following my visit to your country in November 2012. The widespread discrimination and violence against Roma requires overarching efforts to promote tolerance and anti-discriminatory attitudes throughout the majority population. Measures taken should tackle the root causes of the marginalisation and discrimination of Roma. In this context, I would like to stress the essential role played by politicians' rhetoric and action at national and local level in the efforts to eradicate anti-Gypsyism and promote respect for human rights and social cohesion. I call on the Czech authorities to clearly reassert their condemnation of racist manifestations, including ethnic hatred, and to take measures to ensure zero tolerance towards, and effective sanctioning of such manifestations, in order to prevent the recurrence of hate crimes against members of minority groups.

I look forward to receiving your reply and to continuing a constructive dialogue and co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Nils Muižnieks