



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Roma

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 25, 2013

Mr. Chairman, I take the floor to convey my government's concern about several recent reports of incidents that highlight the need for decisive, broad-based action by participating States to address both the causes and manifestations of anti-Roma sentiment.

It has been reported that on June 29, in Southern Bohemia, a locally organized anti-Roma protest of approximately 500 persons attracted extremists, including a small group of neo-Nazis. Following the protest, the extremists attempted to march on an apartment complex housing a large number of Roma. However, police intervened, stopping the march but sparking a conflict with the extremists. Over the past year, there have been reports of dozens of rallies against Roma in the Czech Republic, some of which involved large numbers of local inhabitants and resulted in violence.

Thus, the call by extremist groups for anti-Roma demonstrations on August 24 in nine towns throughout the Czech Republic is worrisome. We join ODIHR Director Lenarcic in commending the actions of Czech law enforcement officials to prevent further escalation of racist violence, and in highlighting the need for steps to address the core problems facing members of the Roma minority in the country including "the persistence of segregation in education and the divisions it causes within Czech society."

On July 3, a Roma settlement in Kyiv was attacked, according to an eyewitness. The witness said that two unknown individuals approached the camp, threatened the people living there, and then set fire to the camp. Romani rights activists reported that police initiated an investigation but declined to classify the attack as a hate crime. In May 2012, another Romani settlement in Kyiv was burned to the ground by unknown perpetrators. Romani rights activists reported that police declined to investigate the May 2012 attack since no criminal complaint was filed, and authorities took no further action to investigate the attack. The lack of adequate response by law enforcement to crimes against Roma contributes to a climate of impunity and discourages Roma from seeking justice. At the same time, we note Ukraine introduced its Strategy on Roma Inclusion on April 8 and is now developing its National Action Plan, which aims to prevent discrimination and improve Roma access to education, health care, housing and identity documents.

On June 19, in Moldava nad Bodvou, Slovakia, it was reported that 50 masked police officers began searching houses in a Roma settlement without any prior announcement. Thirty residents, including children and reportedly one infant, were injured in the raid, and a non-governmental organization provided photographic documentation showing property damage and what it maintains are signs of bruising from police truncheons. An investigation is underway, and police officials have denied any misconduct. We would note that a 2009 case

involving claims of police abuse involving Romani boys aged 10-16 arrested for robbing a woman – which involved troubling video images of those youths while in custody – remains unresolved.

According to a survey by the European Fundamental Rights Agency, most incidents of assault, threat and serious harassment of Roma are not reported to the police because Roma victims believe that nothing would change as a result of reporting incidents, that such incidents are common, and because of fear of -- or previous negative experience with -- police. Systemic improvements are needed to ensure proper, effective, and timely investigation and prosecution of violence and hate crimes against Roma, including of any abuse perpetrated by law enforcement.

The 2003 OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area includes salient recommendations on these issues, as well as on the underlying core challenges to which Director Lenarcic alluded in his statement. Thus, we look forward to the SHDM in November focusing on implementation of the plan, and urge participating States to send representatives from capitals to ensure a productive discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.