

Warsaw, OSCE HDIM meeting

The recent anti-Roma protests in Bulgaria are already known to the international community – they were reported by Bulgarian and international media. These events are extremely worrisome from several points of view:

Roma people have become once more (several times in the short 20-year old history of Bulgarian democracy after 1989) a scapegoat for social tensions which had been manipulated by political factors at the time of an election campaign. Several political parties which are known for their racist and nationalist rhetoric mobilized citizens with anti-Roma slogans. The anti-Roma protests were massive; they took place in almost all bigger cities throughout the country. In Sofia and Plovdiv participants were 4,000 and 6,000, respectively. These are significant numbers for the Bulgarian context. The protesters called anti-Roma and anti-Turkish slogans. Racially-motivated attacks on Roma were reported in Pleven, Varna, Blagoevgrad, Plovdiv, and Sofia.

The parliamentary party Ataka, whose leader is running for president at the upcoming presidential elections is most active in inciteful anti-Roma demonstrations. Ataka party organized the dissemination of a free brochure dedicated on “Gypsy crime” in public transportation and in the streets of Sofia and other cities. In the current Bulgarian parliament, Ataka supports the ruling party in parliament and secures parliamentary majority for it.

We are worried by the wave of anti-Roma violence in Bulgaria and the lack of adequate reaction on the part of the state. We did not hear a clear condemnation of ethnic violence by high-ranking public officials.

In the same time, we see another worrisome tendency affecting Roma populations: There is a decline in the integration policies in the region. There is a tendency to shift the blame for the failures of the integration policy from the government to the Roma themselves as well as to Roma organizations – the former are stigmatized as unwilling to integrate, while the latter are stigmatized as corrupt.

We call upon the international and European organizations such as the OSCE, Council of Europe, and the European Union to take a more active role in the dialogue with the national governments in order to support governments’ efforts on the one hand to counteract to anti-Roma attitudes, and on the other, to make integration policies effective.

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