



Romani CRISS

Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies

Bucharest, October 1, 2011

STATEMENT ON THE RACIST VIOLENCE AGAINST ROMA IN EUROPE

prepared for the OSCE – HDIM meeting

*“If you stay neutral in situations of injustice,
you have taken the side of the oppressor.”*

Desmond Tutu

(1) Romani CRISS strongly urges the OSCE to work with participating states and international organizations and to come up with a concrete common plan to ensure Roma are not subject to violence and that their security and the security of the societies they live in are properly defended, pursuant to chapter VII – point 114 of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of the Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area.

(2) A clear distinction must be drawn between mandates and responsibilities for integration policies and racist violence, in the sense that Roma share no blame for being subjected to violent behavior and pogroms.

(3) Romani CRISS strongly urges the OSCE and other international organizations to have a firm reaction against governments which form ruling coalitions with the extremist parties, be these coalitions overt or covert.

CONTEXT

An ever-growing wave of racist violence and insecurity is sweeping away many Roma communities throughout Europe. In countries such as the Czech Republic and Hungary Roma are targeted and killed in their own homes¹. Bulgaria is witnessing riots, racist extremist anti-Roma demonstration thousands-strong and ethnic violence, after a Bulgarian young man was killed and a Roma were accused for this, in the village of Katounitsa, on September 23.² An angry mob destroyed and burnt 3 houses belonging to a Roma leader.

¹ See Roni Stauber, Violence against Roma Minority in Hungary and the Czech Republic and its Repercussions, Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism, Tel Aviv University, at <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/articles/roma.pdf>.

² The Sofia Echo, Katounitsa Controversy, at http://sofiaecho.com/2011/09/30/1165961_katounitsa-controversy?ref=rss.

One preliminary signal and a fueling factor to the violence against Roma has undoubtedly been the wide-spread increasing racist speech against Roma. Under the false pretext of “sincere talk” and of eliminating “political correctness”, many mainstream politicians unleashed their racist and extremist thoughts, fueling anti-Roma sentiments and supporting concrete anti-Roma actions, including violence. Election campaigns in many European countries were bore the marks of anti-Roma discourse and programs. International institutions such as the OSCE or the Council of Europe warned against the fostering of anti-Roma public discourse and the spreading of racist violence.³

Indeed, in the context of the financial crisis (which did not limit its effect to the financial and economic fields, but has caused significant social turbulences), widespread anti-Roma prejudice and stereotyping, “liberalization” of anti-Roma speech and action, development and support of extremism, and the poor or lack of antiracist action by Governments and civil society are the major reasons for the current racist violence and pogroms in many European countries.

On October 1, 2000 Bulgarians gathered in Sofia to protest against “criminality” which they linked to the Roma⁴. Similar “protests” were organized in other major Bulgarian cities since the Katounitsa incidents. Whilst many Bulgarian citizens might disagree with these racist initiatives, their voice is not expressed. In the face of this sinister injustice, Bulgarians remain largely neutral. So the questions remains, how many Bulgarian citizens marched in the street in support of peace and against racist violence? How many have talked to their friends and acquaintances to help them not fall victims to the disease of extremism? How many will vote for non-extremist parties and candidates?

INTEGRATION VS. ETHNIC VIOLENCE

A clear distinction must be drawn between mandates and responsibilities for integration policies and racist violence. As for the failures of the Roma integration policies in various countries, the role/responsibility/guild of the Roma leadership can be subject to discussion and analysis, in conjunction with that of the EU and most importantly that of national Governments.

As for the racist violence, some put forward the idea of the responsibility of the Roma, arguing Roma misconduct fuels such violent reactions. Even some Roma put forward this idea. This is untrue and unfair. No individual conduct can justify blaming and terrorizing an entire community. This is not just about combating extremism. This is terror. These are acts of terrorism. In a democratic society it is the police and the courts of justice that are supposed to deal with criminality, regardless of the ethnic appurtenance of the perpetrator. Accepting and justifying this kind of violent behavior substituting the courts of justice leads us to back the Stone Age.

³ E.g. The ECRI – European Commission against Racism and Intolerance in its 2009 report on the Czech Republic warned: “ECRI is concerned to note that since its third report, anti-Roma hate speech has become an increasingly regular feature of public discourse in the Czech Republic. In recent years, high-ranking politicians, including government ministers and elected local officials, as well as candidates for office, have made widely publicized anti-Roma statements. Anti-Roma slogans have been used as part of election campaigns, especially at local level, and inflammatory statements against the Roma appear at times to have been rewarded by appointments to higher office” (para 43); in its 2009 Report on Bulgaria “ECRI regrets that on the political front, an extreme right-wing political group makes speeches against Roma, among others, on its private television channel, and rarely incurs penalties” (para 80).

⁴ BBC, Bulgarian Rally Links Roma to Organized Crime, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-15140291>

**EXTREMIST GOVERNANCE VICIATES DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES,
BE THIS GOVERNANCE OVERT OR COVERT**

Another important issue pertains to the support the extremist parties get from mainstream politicians. Leaving aside the widespread use of racist rhetoric and action by mainstream politicians, ruling coalitions in many countries (such as Bulgaria) rely on extremist Parliamentary parties to form the majority. International pressure led to the dissolution of the Government which included Jorg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria. Yet today, many countries rely on extremist and neo-Nazi parties to govern their countries.

The principle is of it should be the same. Overt or covert, the involvement of extremist parties in the governance of a society is what it is. An extremist governance. Indeed, it can be no other form of governance for it is formed of an extremist party which makes decisions behind the curtain and a party that would rather cooperate with extremists than with other parties which have different ideologies to their own, but which have democratic ideologies. To sum up, no form cooperation – overt or covert – must be established with the extremist parties.

**THE OSCE AND THE PARTICIPATING STATES
MUST KEEP THE PROMISES THEY MAKE TO THE ROMA**

The OSCE should not limit its intervention to addressing the question of the fulfillment of the political commitments by participating states or to making appeals to calm and ethnic peace. Such should be the role of NGOs or others. The OSCE is well-equipped to do much more than that. And not only is it well-equipped, but it is under the obligation to do so. The OSCE and the participating states have committed (and this commitment was also made to the Roma communities) *“to respond effectively in crisis situations to ensure protection of Roma communities at risk.”*

This is why, Romani CRISS strongly urges the OSCE to work with participating states and international organizations and to come up with a concrete common plan to ensure Roma are not subject to violence and that their security and the security of the societies they live in are properly defended, pursuant to chapter VII – point 114 of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of the Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area.

Romani CRISS urges those participating states who have first-hand experience in dealing with ethnic conflicts, such as Romania, to make such experience fully available for other participating states and for the OSCE.