



ACTIVE voices its grave concern about racist violence against Roma and urges for immediate and strong response

PRESS RELEASE

27.11.2008, Örebro, Sweden

The Roma form a significant minority in Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe. They are one of Europe's oldest ethnic minorities. And as any other minority, the Roma contribute with their centuries old traditions and customs to the cultural richness and diversity of Europe. However, till the day Roma live in the shadow of the modern European society - in poverty, with high rates of criminality and illiteracy, with stereotypes about them all too often being perpetuated by populist political leaders and mainstream media.

To counter this misbalance ACTIVE held an international seminar in the Czech town of Brno (26th October to 1st November 2008), with the title "Tolerance - Harmony in Difference" aiming on teaching and sensitizing its members and shedding some light at the issues of the Roma for a broader public.

With the topic of this study session, ACTIVE proved to be right in place and time. For only two weeks later we had to hear the news that on 17th November 2008 in the Czech town of Litvinov a number of 500 Neo Nazis, many of them members of the Worker's Party (DS), marched against a Roma community, screaming racist slogans and attempting to attack it. The police successfully prevented civil war by containing the far - right extremists, who were armed and threw Molotov cocktails and cobblestones.

Anti - minority propaganda and violence show a pattern in Europe, of which this recent incident is only one example: In the Czech Republic there were several clashes in October already. In Italy numerous outbreaks of anti - Roma violence around the garbage crisis in Naples have been reported. In Slovakia the right - wing government party SNS is frequently using racist anti -Roma statements to catch voters. And in Hungary few weeks ago two Roma were shot as they escaped from their house set ablaze in an arson attack.

In the face of these events ACTIVE calls on the European community not to consider this incident in the Czech Republic yet another one - time event. Racist violence - especially since we all just commemorated the 70th anniversary of the night of broken glass - must not be disregarded and cannot remain unanswered. Systematic measures from the highest political level have to be taken against racist discrimination - be it a marginalized party in the Czech Republic or a government party in Slovakia. "Where a hard core of extremism exists in society and is willing to perpetrate violence, said the UN Independent expert on minority issues Gay Mc Dougall, the full force of the criminal justice system must be used to protect targeted populations."



ACTIVE therefore strongly supports the Czech government in banning the extremist Worker's Party. Also in other European countries right wing extremism has to be fought more emphatically. ACTIVE urges the European Union not to allow any government to use racist statements of any kind for their political purposes.

Moreover, as ACTIVE tried with its seminar this autumn, there have to be stronger efforts from both political decision makers and civil society to pull the Roma out of the shadow into our awareness. ACTIVE General Secretary Kristina Sperkova says that a tolerant multicultural society is a condition for a democratic society. "As long as people do not accept each other and respect each other we cannot achieve a peaceful world." If the EU wants to remain a project of peace among various peoples, it must not allow forgetting the Roma, as it cannot tolerate on - going discrimination against foreigners. Therefore ACTIVE urges for a national and a European - wide response to xenophobia and racist discrimination.

"Active- sobriety, friendship and peace" is a non - governmental organisation gathering European youth organisations working for peace and solidarity, promoting a lifestyle free from alcohol and other drugs. We have more than 25 000 members - 25 000 young Europeans who do not drink alcohol in any amount.

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