



30.8.2012

## NOTICE TO MEMBERS

**Subject:** Petition 1365/2011 by Jiri Focht (Czech), on behalf of the 'Za rozvoj Kruzberka' Association, bearing three signatures, on decline in the Moravice region

### 1. Summary of petition

The petitioners are protesting against the social decline of this area, caused by, *inter alia*, the social policy of the Czech Government, which tends to move deprived sections of the population there, including many members of the Roma minority.

### 2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 20 April 2012. Information requested from Commission under Rule 202(6).

### 3. Commission reply, received on 30 August 2012

The petitioners, who are Czech citizens and inhabitants of Moravice region, are complaining about the social decline of their region, caused by, *inter alia*, the intention to create a ghetto by "entrepreneurs" - owners of buildings/flats who intend to move deprived sections of the population there, including many members of the Roma minority. The quite generous social protection system of the Czech Republic, which allows also for the social housing allowance, is often misused by these owners of buildings/flats.

Many Roma are often the victims of racism, discrimination and social exclusion from essential areas of live. Especially Roma living in socially excluded localities – ghettos are in risk of poverty and social exclusion with worse access to social services, healthcare and decent housing. Low education levels, discrimination in labour markets and still not fully removed demotivation set in the social benefits system have led to high unemployment. Better integration of Roma is therefore both a moral and an economic imperative, which moreover

will require a change of mindsets of the majority of the people as well as of members of the Roma communities.

The Member States have the primary responsibility and the competences to change the situation of marginalised populations, so the action to support Roma lies first and foremost in their hands. *[It is also necessary to keep in mind that due to the de-centralisation solving the problems of ghettos is primarily the responsibility of municipalities, and in fact the government can only change the setting of the social protection system to avoid such misuse of social benefits.]*

To support Member States in addressing this situation, the EU has made available a wide range of legal, policy and financial instruments.

On Monday 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2012, the European Commission adopted its first assessment report of the National Roma Integration Strategies submitted by the Member States as response to the EU Framework for Roma integration presented in April last year.

The EU Framework calls on the Member States to address the social and economic exclusion of Roma in 4 key areas – education, employment, health and housing while ensuring that Roma are not discriminated against but treated as any other EU citizens with equal access to fundamental rights.

All Member States including the Czech Republic submitted the national strategy which shows that there is a strong political commitment to tackle this issue. However, much more needs to be done when it comes to securing sufficient funding for Roma inclusion, putting monitoring mechanisms in place and fighting discrimination and segregation.

The Czech government in 2009 adopted the Roma Integration Concept for 2010-2013 and submitted it to the European Commission on 19 February 2012. The measures for Roma inclusion proposed by the Czech government in 4 key areas (education, employment, health and housing) are welcomed, however, higher emphasis is required on early childhood development and desegregation measures in education, accessible and targeted social services for Roma job-seekers to improve their chances of integration in the labour market. The strategy could be further improved by concrete measures to provide non-discriminatory access to healthcare and housing.

In June 2012 the Council adopted the Council Recommendation on the Czech Republic's 2012 national reform programme and opinion on the Czech Republic's convergence programme for 2012-2015. It is recommended to the Czech Republic to take additional measures to significantly increase the availability of affordable and quality pre-school childcare, strengthen public employment services by increasing the quality and effectiveness of training, job search assistance and individualised services, including of outsourced services, and also to establish an improvement-oriented evaluation framework in compulsory education. All these recommendations are highly relevant to Roma.

The staff working document supporting these recommendations mentioned the problem of the socially excluded communities, such as the ghetto in question. In fact, improving the situation of such localities and their gradual elimination is seen by the Commission as one of the main potential contributions of the Czech Republic to the EU target on reducing the poverty by 20

million people by 2020.

Moreover, the Commission is providing financial assistance to reach this target in the field of poverty and social exclusion by means of the structural funds. There are several Czech operational programmes that are making interventions to tackle social exclusion and to improve the situation of Roma, including addressing socially excluded localities.

### Conclusion

Drawing up the national strategies is the first step into the right direction. Now they need to be implemented by the Member States. The main objective should be to put in place truly integrated measures and ensure the effectiveness of interventions that very often have little value for significant financial resources spent. The European Commission will monitor this regularly.

The European Commission expects the Czech government to address the priorities pointed out in the report. The European Commission will review annually the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies, reporting to the European Parliament and the Council, as well as under the framework of the Europe 2020.

The Commission is reviewing the National Reform Programmes of the Member States and the progress on recommendation addressed to them annually.

As the socially excluded localities (ghettos) are the main places of poverty, social exclusion but also socio-pathological phenomena and crime, the Commission will pay attention to addressing this problem in the future also by means of structural funds, i.e. it expects that it will be addressed substantially by the new operational programmes to be elaborated by the Czech Republic in 2012-2013.