

Open letter to

H.E. Andrij Melnyk
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Albrechtstraße 26
10117 Berlin

Berlin, June 27, 2018

Escalating violence against Roma in Ukraine

Dear Ambassador,

Since 21 April 2018, when the Ukrainian extreme right-wing group S14 committed a violent, pogrom-like attack against Roma near the Ukrainian capital, we have been following the situation of the Roma minority in Ukraine with growing concern.

On the night of May 9-10, about 30 masked men burned down a Roma settlement near Lviv. On 22 May, 20 people, some of them minors, raided a Roma camp (seven adults and about 30 children) at Ternopil with firearms. On 7 June, a Roma camp was destroyed in Holosivskyi Park in Kiev.

In a letter dated 7 May, the Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas and RomaTrial e.V. called on you not to tolerate such barbaric attacks and to do everything in your power to ensure that affected Roma and all other Roma in Ukraine feel safe.

In your reply of 25 May you mention the incidents as intolerable and refer to a corresponding statement by your Minister of the Interior. However, possible perpetrators do not seem to have achieved this and it does not help those affected either. The follow-up letter from the Stiftung Denkmal dated 13 June has not yet been answered.

The situation is worsening and reached its tragic climax on 23 June, when one person was killed and four injured in an attack on a Roma camp in Western Ukraine. Masked men attacked the camp near the city of Lviv with baseball bats and knives, the regional police announced on Sunday. Seven alleged participants had been arrested. A woman, a man and a ten-year-old boy were taken to hospitals with stab wounds.

As it turns out, some of the groups from which the right-wing violence against Roma emerges appear to be well known to the Ukrainian state and to be tolerated by the government:

The attack on 7 June was committed by members of the "National Citizens' Army", which was launched in January 2018 by the veterans of the right-wing radical "Azov Regiment". On 6 June they

gave the Roma from Holosivskyi Park on Facebook an ultimatum to leave their settlement within 24 hours. "If the police don't act, the National Citizens' Army will take control," they wrote. Despite the public announcement, the police did not stop the crime. The assault was filmed and transmitted to Facebook. The fact that this case is once again being investigated for "gross mischief" is evidence of a fundamentally incorrect assessment of the crime.

In a programme on 25 June, Deutschlandfunk even mentioned reports that money from the Ukrainian state budget had been allocated to the right-wing radical organisation S14 - including a youth camp - which was involved in the destruction of the Roma tent camp in Kiev on 21 April.

We, the undersigned, see it as our special duty to inform the German and European public about the escalating violence against Roma in Ukraine and to call on the relevant Ukrainian authorities to ensure that those affected are treated fairly. During the German occupation, about half of the Ukrainian Roma population - an estimated 9,000 children, women, men, whole families and communities - were shot dead. These crimes impose a special responsibility on us.

We are deeply shocked and worried that the Ukrainian authorities are not offering the Roma any protection. Beyond the clarification and punishment of previous acts of violence by the police and the judiciary, urgent measures must be taken to ensure the security of the Roma in Ukraine. The activities of groups that are known to have extreme right-wing views must be carefully monitored. It is precisely in this acute and dangerous situation that those affected need practical and moral solidarity.

With kind regards remain

Uwe Neumärker

Director of the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

Hamze Bytyçi

Chairman of RomaTrial e.V.