

**To:** Francois Hollande, the President of France

**To the attention of:** Jose Manuel Barosso – The President of the European Commission  
Viviane Reding – Commissioner for justice, fundamental rights and citizenship  
His Excellency Francois Saint-Paul, the Ambassador of France in Bucharest

## **THE POLITICIANS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FRENCH STATE ENCOURAGE VIOLENCE AGAINST ROMA**

Dear Mr. President Hollande,

In February this year, Romani CRISS drew your attention to the fact that the threat of violence against Roma in France is a real and pressing concern. Furthermore, we argued that French State policy in this matter enables and may implicitly encourage these acts of violence. At that time, we requested that your government take a firm stand against these events and review French State policies often directed against Roma.

More specifically, in the open letter sent on 6 February 2014, Romani CRISS stated that: *Fortunately, to date, there are no reported losses of human lives, but we think you do not have to wait until that moment. We are concerned for the fact that the risk of violent, racially motivated attacks is becoming a reality for the Roma living in France. And we are concerned that high ranked French official not only do not publicly and firmly condemn these events and sanction them, but also promote public policies against Roma that are based on the same kind of feelings.* Although we had sent this letter officially in February 2014, we have not received a response so far.

As you are aware, Darius, a young 16 year old Roma, was kidnapped from his own house, taken to an isolated area, and beaten by a group of unknown individuals. He is now in a coma, struggling between life and death. We would like to call your attention to the fact that the case prosecutor decided to refrain from considering that there may have been an ethnic motivation for the crime. Without thoroughly investigating this possibility, the racial component of the crime was eliminated as a factor to be investigated. The case prosecutor's decision was contrary to the standards of the European Court of Human Rights.

*Mr. President*, your condemnation of these actions is a step in the right direction. However, we are writing to express our regret that, despite our earlier warnings, it took a teenager's near-death for you to change your position and explicitly oppose violence against the Roma. We appreciate your remarks criticizing those responsible and your insistence that the perpetrators are found and prosecuted for their actions, but we respectfully argue that this is not nearly enough. To eliminate the danger of violent attacks against Roma, more needs to be done. There should be both a fair and prompt administration of justice, as well as the replacement of anti-Roma public policies with inclusive ones designed to encourage and support Roma integration into society rather than exclude them.

One of the specific factors that encourage these incidents is the authorities' and politicians' position against the Roma. The policy of "dismantling" camps and returning Roma to Romania and Bulgaria, contrary to the European law, sends the French public opinion a signal that Roma are not wanted in France, that they are incompatible with the French

society, and that we need to remove them. These messages are reinforced by your statements or your failure to speak out against such sentiments. Discrimination towards the Roma is more explicitly supported by Prime Minister Valls', claim that Roma are "different" and we can take measures against them that cannot be taken against other European citizens: chasing, rejecting, and removing them from the French territory.

Furthermore, the Roma have made contributions to and are part of the political discourse about the Roma community. At the same time, this can hardly still be referred to as political discourse, both during the campaign and afterwards, because it serves more as a, tool for politicians in their race to affirm and occupy public function in the French government. For petty personal advantage, many French politicians (reminding us of, among others, Mr. Szarkozy and Mr. Valls) demonize an entire ethnic group and condemn it to public opprobrium. This populist and racist tactic has massively fueled the violence against Roma in France, sending the message that Roma are not our equals, they do not enjoy the same rights, and that, ultimately, we can treat them differently – that is, worse - than others.

We are deeply worried that your racist policy of rejecting Roma from the life of French society may continue, and because we believe that if the French Government will not radically change its position towards the presence of Roma in France, the violence against Roma will increase and get worse.

For these reasons, ***we respectfully request you to go through with your position and abolish these racist practices of destroying Roma camps and their collective expulsion, since these policies fuel violence against Roma.***

The signatory organizations:

Romani CRISS - Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies  
ADIS - Association for Development and Social Inclusion  
CEDS - Center for Education and Social Development  
Roma Center "Amare Romentza"  
National Union of Roma Communities  
Sanse Egale Association  
O Del Amentza Association