

STATEMENT

ERIO condemns the climate of anti-Roma hate and violence in France

Brussels, 5 April 2019

ERIO is deeply concerned by the recent acts of violence that took place in France against the Roma community. The alarming rise of fake news based on hatred and prejudices is highly worrying and illustrates the preponderance of racism and anti-Gypsyism in Europe.

Rumors of child abductions by Roma, in the periphery of Paris, were spread through various social media. As a consequence, in mid-March, two Roma were attacked in Colombes. The situation escalated in the night of 25 March. In Clichy Sous Bois over 20 people armed with sticks attacked a house occupied by Roma. At the same time, in Bobigny, around 50 persons, armed with sticks and knives, attacked a Roma settlement. The police also got numerous calls reporting armed people around Roma camps in the area of Aubervilliers, Bondy and Noisy-le-Sec. The next day, 2 more Roma were attacked and had to be hospitalized. The police tweeted a statement reasserting that the rumors were not founded, calling for people to stop spreading fake news and to stop calling for violence. Benjamin Griveaux, at the time spokesperson for the French government, denounced *“absolutely unacceptable drifts that target particularly the Roma community”*. To this day, 12 young people are awaiting trial. Moreover, ERIO is assisting some of the victims in their legal action against the perpetrators of these racist acts of violence.

Many of the Roma victims feared for other attacks and fled the area. Some of them, Bulgarian Roma, chose to go to Bulgaria, some went to settle in other parts of France leaving behind their homes, schools and jobs. Those staying, report being terrified, many of them are not leaving their house, children cannot go to school and the community has to organise patrols during the nights in order to keep guard. This climate of hatred and violence is making Roma living conditions even more difficult and uncertain. ERIO is particularly concerned as this event is not isolated. Rumours based on racist stereotypes targeting Roma are widespread in Europe, they lead to a stigmatisation of the community and can often trigger dreadful hate crimes against innocent victims.

As ERIO's executive director Ivan Ivanov says: *“This case is one in many examples of the wide dangers of anti-Gypsyism. As a society, we need to stand against these acts of hate speech, hate crimes, discrimination and racism and we need to stand together to protect and support the most threatened minority in Europe.”* ERIO urges the French government to carry a full and fair investigation where the dignity and the fundamental rights of the Roma victims are ensured.

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Note to the editor:

The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) is a European advocacy organisation which promotes political and public discussion on Roma issues by providing information to the EU institutions, civil society and governments. Through its wide network, it aims to combat racist discrimination against Roma through awareness raising, lobbying and policy development.