

Torture highlighted a number of allegations of ill-treatment by police officers that were received by the Committee's delegates during their visit to Cyprus in September and October 2013. The allegations mainly concerned ill-treatment of foreign nationals during their transportation or interviews at police stations. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture also received a number of allegations concerning physical ill-treatment, verbal abuse and inappropriate use of tear gas by police guards against migrants held at the Menoya immigration detention facility. Similar allegations were received by the UN Committee against Torture.

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1. Cyprus: Abusive detention of migrants and asylum-seekers flouts EU law (Press release)
www.amnesty.org/en/news/cyprus-abusive-detention-migrants-and-asylum-seekers-flouts-eu-law-2014-03-18

CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech Republic

Head of state: **Miloš Zeman**

Head of government: **Bohuslav Sobotka**

Roma continued to face widespread discrimination. The European Commission initiated infringement proceedings against the Czech Republic for the discrimination against Roma pupils in education. The ill-treatment of persons with mental disabilities in state institutions was exposed. Muslims faced growing public hostility.

BACKGROUND

In October, the police announced an investigation into allegations of the manipulation and buying of votes of Roma citizens in the local elections held the same month. According to NGOs monitoring the elections, the practice of vote-buying was

used by a number of political parties in several regions.

DISCRIMINATION

Roma

In June, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights criticized the authorities for the large number of Roma pupils in so-called "practical schools" (former special schools), designed for pupils with mild mental disabilities. The Committee called on the government to abolish practices that lead to the segregation of Roma pupils and to phase out practical schools. It recommended that mainstream schools should provide inclusive education to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and Roma pupils.

In September, the European Commission initiated infringement proceedings against the authorities for breaching the prohibition of discrimination in education set out in the EU Race Equality Directive.

In August, over four years after the government's apology for the enforced sterilization of Roma women, the Human Rights Minister announced a draft law offering financial compensation of between 3,500 and 5,000 euros to individual victims. According to the NGO Czech Helsinki Committee, almost 1,000 women were forcibly sterilized between 1972 and 1991 and should be entitled to financial remedy.

In November, the government acknowledged that Roma continued to face discrimination regarding access to housing, education, health care and labour market. The government-commissioned report on the situation of the Roma minority highlighted obstacles in accessing affordable housing, including discrimination by private landlords. The report also highlighted the over-representation of Roma children in practical schools.

Hate crimes

In October, the Constitutional Court rejected an appeal by two perpetrators against the length of their sentences for an arson attack

against a Roma family in April 2009. The attack had left a two-year-old Roma girl with burns to 80% of her body.

Muslims

The media reported occasional acts of vandalism on the Prague mosque, including daubing of islamophobic messages. The police were still investigating these incidents at the end of the year.

In September, over 25,000 people signed a petition calling on the authorities not to grant “enhanced rights” to the registered Association of Muslim Communities. The Law on Churches allowed religious organizations, which had been registered for 10 years, to apply for enhanced rights, including the right to teach religion in state schools and the recognition of religious wedding ceremonies. The petition called on the government not to permit the opening of Muslim schools and not to allow the teaching of Islam in state schools or Muslim worship in prisons. By the end of the year, the Association of Muslim Communities had not applied for “enhanced rights”.

In September, the Public Defender of Rights (Ombudswoman) held that a secondary school for nurses had discriminated against two women, a refugee from Somalia and an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan, by prohibiting them from wearing headscarves. The Public Defender clarified that the law did not restrict the use of religious symbols in schools and that the seemingly neutral prohibition of any covering of the head was indirectly discriminatory. A complaint by the Somali student to the Czech School Inspectorate was rejected.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Patients with mental disabilities continued to be ill-treated in mental health institutions. In June, the Mental Disability Advocacy Center and the League of Human Rights called on the government to immediately prohibit the use of net beds and other inhumane restraint techniques. In a report which assessed the situation in eight psychiatric hospitals, the

NGOs provided evidence of the continuous use of restraint techniques, such as net beds, bed straps as well as the unregulated use of excessive medication. In response to the NGO report, the Public Defender of Rights visited six hospitals in August and also found evidence of the use of restraint techniques. She criticized the lack of effective monitoring of their use and called for legislative changes introducing greater safeguards.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In October, during a “week against anti-racism and xenophilia”, the websites of the NGOs Czech Helsinki Committee and Life Together (Vzájemné soužití) were attacked by far-right hackers. The personal email of the co-ordinator of an Amnesty International group in the city of Brno was also attacked by the hackers, who published the members’ internal communication on their websites. The Czech Helsinki Committee announced that it would submit a criminal complaint against the hackers.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Despite initial plans to start a small resettlement programme for Syrian refugees, the government decided in October to restrict its support to the provision of humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees with acute medical needs in Jordan.