

# Submission by the Society for Threatened Peoples



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Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) is an international human rights organisation which campaigns with and on behalf of threatened and persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, nationalities and indigenous peoples. We stand side by side with the victims of crimes against humanity, identifying the individual perpetrators of such crimes and their accomplices by name. And we have no hesitation in speaking out when victims become perpetrators. Because the principle that inspires all our activities is expressed in the slogan "Not Turning a Blind Eye".

## **Group-specific racism increases in Austria**

1. Last year, pejorative terms were often used to discriminate Muslims, Jews as well as Roma people. Also asylum seekers have been put in a bad light. According to Romano Centro's "Antiziganismus" Report from 2013, even though Austrian officials argue that the status of Roma has improved since the recognition as an Austrian minority, Roma are still victims of discrimination in education, employment, housing and health care.

2. For several years the STP calls attention to the situation of Roma and Sinti in Europe and forces the investigation of the alarming situation. Most Roma live segregated from society in poverty. In recent years right-wing extremist's marches are increasing, violations and even homicides against the minority were registered. Beyond that, media agitation is taking place against Roma and Sinti in Austria, in particular the use of social media is noticeable in that matter. In the beginning of September 2013 camping Sinti were threatened in Bischofshofen near Salzburg. In the night of September 2, 2013 about 20 young adults attacked a group of families who were travelling through Austria. According to police they had a permission to stop for the night to camp. The police had to step in to protect the families and their caravans until the early hours of the morning. Six police patrols could avoid physical attacks. Vehicles were damaged, but nobody was hurt. The juvenile offenders formed up via Facebook. Postings on an official Facebook group called to set fire and propagated the „final solution“.

The webpages of right-wing groups are full of articles and postings of antigypsyistic nature, especially on the website unzensuriert.at (=uncensored.at). This right-wing populist platform, founded in the year 2009, is believed to have been started by the FPÖ politician Martin Graf, whose parliamentary staff members also maintain the website according to the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance.

3. After an attack on a group of Roma families who were passing through Salzburg in Bischofshofen, Martina Berthold, a member of the Green Party and of the state government, demanded the creation of short term camping sites for travellers. The article about this on the website unzensuriert.at, published on September 9, 2013, repudiates the suggestion. In the article, it is alleged that such an idea would attract a „horde“ and lead to an „invasion.“ It also alleges that Roma clans are involved in criminal activities. The article proposes to prohibit camping in general, thereby diverting „the problem“ to other European countries. This would lead to „a situation which could have a positive impact on the crime statistics.“ There are many racist and insulting comments posted under the article.

5. In April 2013, there was an incident of agitation against Roma in a Facebook group. A picture of Hitler was shown accompanied by the following text: “Since when is there a bomb testing site in Oberwart?” as well as another picture of Hitler with the call to “clean” the park. In several other postings, there were comments directed against Roma. Oberwart was the site of the 1995 bomb attack which killed four Roma. Charges were filed with the police and the incidents are now being investigated on the grounds of suspicion of incitement in accordance with the Law against Incitement (§ 283 StGB.) The racist postings have since been deleted.

6. The portrayal of Roma and Sinti in the Austrian media is strongly linked to the public discourse on begging. Other themes are the poverty of Roma/Romnja in Eastern Europe and the problem of human trafficking in connection with begging and prostitution. In mainstream media Roma/Romnja are mainly viewed as “problem cases”, what has contributed to an increase in antigypsyist sentiment. Alarming are particularly statements including a historic dimension: they suggest a negative experience with particular groups over a longer period of time and are often used as proponents of a negative political development, as so called scapegoats. In March 2008, the “Neue Kronen Zeitung” carried two articles claiming that Crown Prince Rudolf had contracted a sexually transmitted illness from a “gypsy”, and that Roma did not mind being referred to as “gypsies”.

7. Especially in right-wing populist/right-wing extremist media often racist articles against Roma can be found. Roma/Romnja are portrayed as a “threat” or “plague”. Compared to other media, the right-wing media give lots of space to the subject of “Roma” or “gypsies”, in the form of special editions, for example. FPÖ-close media in particular, such as the weekly newspaper “Zur Zeit” (published by EU parliamentarian Andreas Mölzer), contain insulting and racist articles which were written by active politicians themselves. In the various debates about banning begging, problematic statements have been heard - not only from FPÖ members.

8. In the year 2008, in the course of a police check, a serious racist infringement occurred. A family from Slovakia which was selling newspapers on the Karlsplatz (a large park area) in Vienna was stopped and asked to show their identification. During the procedure, the police was very rough with the family members; they pushed the 18 year old son around and called him names. One policeman told him to get lost and when the young man didn't react right away, the policeman used his baton to push him away. The officer said to the father, "Today is your last day in Austria, I guarantee you that!" The parents were taken to the police station where they had to strip naked. The man was threatened he would be beaten and was asked, "Are you afraid, you filthy Gypsy?" He was called "filthy Gypsy" several times by one of the police officers and was told to repeat the words. The police officer insulted him multiple times and told him that he should remain quiet and that he would never be allowed to return to Austria again. The policeman made fun of the man's stomach and shoved him around repeatedly. The father was told to agree with all the insults and always to answer, "Yes" –even to the statement, "Ugh, you stink, you filthy Gypsy." After this humiliating treatment the family was allowed to dress. The family was fined for eight delicts including smoking, disturbing the peace, making noise and offending common decency, and had to pay 168 Euros. According to the fines, all these delicts were committed simultaneously, namely at 12:55 on the same day. After the incident was documented in the office of the street newspaper "Augustin", the Office for Internal Investigation investigated the case but the family's testimony was not believed.

9. Society for Threatened Peoples calls for:

- Measures against the media agitation against Roma minorities in Austrian print media, television and social media.
- Effective measures to combat discrimination and racism
- A commitment for implementation of effective programs within the National Strategy of the Roma Inclusion until 2020
- Implementation of an adequate monitoring system for racist violence