To:

Nikolaos Toskas
Alternate Minister of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction
4 P. Kanellopoulou St., GR-101 77, Athens, Greece
pressoffice@yptp.gr

Municipality of Acharnes, Yiannis Kassavos, Mayor
Filadelfeias Avenue, 87 & Bosda str.
PC 136 73
info@acharnes.gr

Lieutenant General, Konstantinos Tsouvalas
Chief of the Hellenic Police
4 P. Kanellopoulou St., GR-101 77, Athens, Greece
press@hellenicpolice.gr
Cc:

Álvaro Oliveira
European Commission Legal Officer, DG Justice
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200 1049 Brussels
Belgium
alvaro.oliveira@ec.europa.eu

Pia Lindholm
European Commission Legal Officer, DG Justice
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200 1049 Brussels
Belgium
pialindholm@ec.europa.eu

Dora Husz
European Commission Policy Analyst, DG Justice
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200 1049 Brussels
Belgium
dora.husz@ec.europa.eu

Andreas I. Pottakis
Ombudsman of Greece
17 Halkokondyli St. 104 32 Athens, Greece
ombudsman@synigoros.gr
press@synigoros.gr
Dear Sir/Madam,

We the undersigned organisations are writing to you in response to anti-Romani mob violence and arson attacks that began on 10 June 2017 in a Romani neighbourhood of the city of Menidi, Attica (Greater suburb of Athens).

According to information compiled from media sources, on 10 June 2017 an 11-year-old non-Romani boy was killed by a stray bullet of unknown source during celebrations on the occasion of the ending of the school year. A 23-year-old Romani man was apprehended as a suspect by the police and on 12 June 2017 was convicted to a suspended 40-month sentence for the use of a weapon. In response, the local Roma community were collectively blamed for the death of the boy. In the immediate aftermath, an angry mob, of about 1500 participants, has gathered in the Romani neighbourhood of Menidi and thrown Molotov cocktails in front of the house of the 23-year-old suspect’s Romani family.

A video posted on social media by far-right groups shows arson attacks on 12 June on the homes of the Romani suspect as well as hundreds of supporters of the Independent Maeander Nationalists and Combat 18, marching and chanting “gypos, pigs, murderers”. The footage later shows another arson attack on a second home belonging to the Romani suspect’s family and crowds chanting “gypos, cunts, shops of cops”. The video ends with a threat of more violence against the Roma in Menidi. Both homes were burned extensively but no arrests have been made.

On 11 June the anti-Roma protest continued and outbreaks of violence occurred in Menidi. There was an attempt by the mob to break through police lines and attack the Romani inhabited area. During the rally, some people threw self-made firebombs at Romani houses destroying two of them. The police has responded with tear gas, triggering a clash with the mob.

On 12 June, an anti-Roma march was initiated in the area of Menidi. The rally lead to outbreaks of violence as the angry mob more threw self-made bombs and stones at police at the train station, in an area bordering the Romani neighbourhood. The police has responded with tear gas and stun grenades. At 10.30 pm the rally had reached the Romani inhabited area. The intervention of the police has so far stopped further outbreaks of violence against the Roma.

---

3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQq0Y5onv8w
On 13 June, non-Romani residents of Menidi initiated anti-Romani riots in front of the Citizen Protection Ministry. When authorities reportedly failed to launch a criminal investigation, the Greek Helsinki Monitor filed a complaint with the Hellenic Police’s Division to Combat Racist Violence on 16 June. On 20 June, GHM has been briefly informed that Hellenic Police had launched a criminal investigation on these events.

We urgently call on your respective authority to fully investigate and prosecute (if appropriate) the individuals involved in this incident once order is restored. The clear presence of deeply entrenched anti-Gypsyism in the county requires that this be undertaken, not only to secure the rights of the individuals affected, but also for the protection of the entire Romani community. We would remind your office, it is indispensable to investigate the potential for racial motivation in order to fulfil your legal obligations under the EU Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA, particularly Article 8, as well as Article 14 read with Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

We urge the Minister of Interior and the Mayor of Menidi to ensure the safety of its Romani citizens in Medini as Neo-Nazi groups rally continue threatening the life and security of the Romani people in the city and in the country. We call your respective authorities to address the issues of marginalization of Greece Romani citizens and the obviously heightened dangerous level of anti-Roma sentiment in the city and society.

Given the gravity of the situation, we in accordance with the applicable domestic and international safeguards regarding disclosure of personal data, requests, in accordance with article 5 (Access to documents—Πρόσβαση σε έγγραφα) of the Greek Administrative Procedural Code (Κώδικας Διοικητικής Διαδικασίας), Law 2690/1999 regarding the free access to information of public interest - your office to provide us with the following information in writing.

We, the undersigned organisations, would like to highlight that the information requested concerns the institutional response to alleged hate motivated incident rather than any data of a personal nature:

1. Has an ex officio investigation been launched concerning the violent arson attacks against the Romani community, and if so when? Has the complaint filed by the Greek Helsinki Monitor been addressed and if so when?
2. What measures have been undertaken by your office to determine the cause(s) of the incident?
3. Have any suspects been identified?
4. Have witnesses been summoned to testify?
5. Has anyone been accused of being responsible for this incident, and if so, what charges were brought against this person(s)?
6. Has the highly likely racial motivation of the incident been investigated and / or taken into consideration during any investigations?
7. What measures (if any) are planned, or have already been taken to rehouse the victims of the arson attack?
8. What measures are envisaged to ensure the safety the Romani inhabitants in the Menidi neighbourhood?

We will be carefully monitoring the situation, and institutional responses. We are available for further information or clarification if it is needed. We look forward to your response via email to atanas.zahariev@errc.org, or by post to the European Roma Rights Centre, Wesselényiutca 16, H-1077 Budapest, Hungary.

Yours sincerely,

Đorđe Jovanović
European Roma Rights Centre

Panayote Dimitras
Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)

Vasilis Tsarnas
Coordinated Organizations and Communities for Roma Human Rights in Greece (SOKADRE)

Epaminondas Farmakis
Solidarity Now

Nafsika Papanikolatou
Minority Rights Group – Greece (MRG-G)