

**Association Council between the European Union
and the Czech Republic
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**CZECH REPUBLIC :
Impunity Of Racially Motivated Attacks
And Police Violence Still Prevails**

**Document presented by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
and the League of Human Rights in the Czech Republic (LLP)
Prepared by the League of Human Rights in the Czech Republic (LLP)**

The present report focuses on elucidating the systemic roots of the serious human rights abuses against the Roma minority in the Czech Republic, the sufferers of which unfortunately continue to seek asylum in several EU countries. One of the main causes of this problem is, according to our observations, insufficient protection of the Roma in cases of serious racially motivated attacks, the slow investigation of such attacks, and the lack of follow-through on the part of the authorities, just as in specific cases of police violence against the Roma, for which see PART I. PART II briefly reports on the slow-moving problems with ratification of the Rome Statute to the International Criminal Court in the Czech Republic.

PART I

1. Introduction

The most recent Association Council conclusions (of 20 November 2001) state in part 2:
“With regard to the Copenhagen political criteria, the Association Council welcomed the efforts of the Czech Government to improve the situation of the Roma minority by implementing the Government's Roma strategy, and stressed the importance of continuing these efforts.”

The League supports the conclusions of the EU-Czech Association Council on the implementation of the government's strategy; however, we would like to present our serious concerns about such implementation without the corresponding implementation of certain systemic changes. These concerns are documented in alarming cases (from June and July of this year) in which our lawyers have begun to provide free legal aid. As far as the League is informed, the Czech government is doing its best to support programs helping to integrate the Roma into society and also working on projects to improve their social situation. When comparing their situation to that of other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, it is also necessary to remark that Roma in the Czech Republic enjoy one of the highest levels of social standards in the region.

Nevertheless, there is a basic problem in the fact that the state organs have ineffectively protected and continue to ineffectively protect the Roma in several brutal cases where their physical integrity was threatened. This is particularly true in cases of racially motivated attacks and police violence against the Roma. When Roma are threatened with death or serious injury under the jurisdiction of the state organs of the Czech Republic, generous social support allowances do them no good. It is therefore no wonder that, despite the security offered in the Roma community by what are usually its strong family ties and social roots, many Roma continue to seek a safer country where they could live without the daily fear of attack.

Besides writing up general strategies and a legislative framework, the Czech government should also endeavor to improve the situation by supporting the successful investigation and resolution of concrete, serious cases of violence, especially those where no one has been sentenced for serious attacks against Roma and neither a punishment nor a appropriate amount of compensation to the victims or their bereaved has been enforced. Unfortunately, the practice of several state organs (in particular the Police) differs greatly in some serious cases from that required by law and international standards.

2. Racially motivated attacks and the institutional racism of the Czech Police

Even though the Czech Republic has made definite progress since its establishment in 1993 as far as investigating racially motivated crimes is concerned, the effort is still not sufficient at all levels. The approach of the police is an unprecedented example; the police in some regions are known for their institutional racism and their insufficient follow-through when investigating racially motivated attacks committed against Roma. Of course, the police themselves are the most important organ in the first phase of investigation when all the important facts and evidence are ascertained.

Case study 1: In the town of Orlová in North Moravia in July 2002, attackers with baseball bats beat a Roma citizen for no reason and smashed all the windows on his car.

When two Roma friends wanted to buy refreshments at a gas station they were attacked for no reason by three racists. One of the Roma, Mr. E. P., succeeded in running away and calling the police while the attackers beat his friend and kicked him as he was lying on the ground. After the police arrived, the Roma, still afraid of their attackers, did not want to describe the problem as having been as serious as it was and preferred to drive on to the next gas station. Of course, the attackers followed them, approached the car with baseball bats while both Roma were sitting in it, and started to smash in the windows. Again Mr. E. P. succeeded in running away, but Mr. M. K. was struck in the face with a baseball bat, dragged out of the car by his ears, racially abused, and had his head beaten against the concrete until he lost consciousness. The result was a completely bruised body including serious injuries to his face.

During the first interrogations of the citizen who had been injured (who decided, despite his fear, to report the event to the police after being convinced to do so by his mother) the police did not want to mention the serious circumstances of the attack on the Roma in their report. Thanks to several interventions by Roma activist and a League lawyer, the proper start of an investigation of the case was made. The beaten Roma citizen had never broken the law and had never been sentenced for a crime; despite that, he was afraid of the police interrogation and refused to attend it without the presence of his lawyer.

A typical example of institutional racism in this case is that the police officer addressed the Rom with the informal (and therefore impolite) form of the word "you" (Ty) while addressing all others present with the formal form (Vy), even though the Rom who had been attacked was, for example, older than his legal representative from the League, who was treated with courtesy. After several interventions it is reasonable to expect that in this case charges will be filed against the attackers. Despite the fact that there is a strong Roma community in the towns of North Moravia, such as Orlová, many Roma have expressed that for the most part they are afraid to leave their homes after dark for fear of becoming the target of attacks. The League considers this situation to be serious.

3. Police violence against Roma and the absence of an independent investigative mechanism

Police officers in the Czech Republic are sure of their impunity because there is no independent, thorough monitoring of the police in the Czech Republic. The League has already illustrated this fact through its reports of specific cases of police violence and their non-investigation when the cases concerned even socially weaker groups than are the Roma. The seriousness of this problem was also confirmed by the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the United Nations Committee Against Torture last year. The Czech Republic would greatly assist the resolution of this problem for the Roma minority if it would begin to uphold the recommendations of these expert international institutions. The problem of monitoring the police is systemic, legally complex, and therefore demands, in the opinion of the League, a longer legal explanation including legal examples. The government is behaving as if it had already solved this problem through a cosmetic change in the jurisdiction of state attorneys according to the Criminal Procedure Code, which so far has brought no results, as the case of the death of a Roma citizen at a police station in June 2002 shows.

Although the government does proclaim in its preliminary platform that it will uphold its international obligations in the area of human rights¹, not a single one of the recommendations of the Human Rights Committee from July 2001 and the Committee against Torture from May 2001² related to police activities has been followed so far—not even in the sense of the barest of measures or new legislative proposals.

The League of Human Rights has to declare that **the system of investigation of complaints against police and crimes committed by police officers still lacks objectivity and credibility and seems to facilitate impunity for police involved in human rights violations, even in cases which have ended in death at a police station.** Those who are most affected by this system are socially weak groups and minorities; **representatives of the Roma community are in the forefront of those affected.**

3.1 The system of investigating crimes committed by police officers

Criminal offences committed by police officers are investigated by the Interior Ministry Inspectorate, which is itself composed of police officers. An amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code no. 265/2001 Coll., effective since January 1, 2002, extended the powers of the state attorney in this field: the Inspectorate should now only formally act in the role of an operative body under the state attorney's jurisdiction. We must note that similar powers existed before this amendment (the Czech equivalent of the state attorney "supervised" the Inspectorate's activities). The Czech state authorities are trying to present this formal increase in the state attorney's powers as the creation of an independent body for the investigation of police officers.

In reality however, *the so-called investigation according to the Criminal Code* on the part of the state attorney does not begin until long after the Inspectorate has carried out all of the initial observations. According to the Police Act, the Inspectorate has the competence to investigate and verify all facts which bear witness to the commission of a crime by a police officer, that is, competence over the entire initial phase before any "investigation according to the criminal code" begins. This two-track arrangement effectively renders genuine investigation null and void as far as the Police Act and the Criminal Code are concerned, and lead to the preservation of a system of impunity for police officers. The Inspectorate's activities are especially relevant during the first phase of investigation—the most important phase, where the site of a suspected offense is searched, all the evidence is acquired, forensic reports are prepared, etc.

The Inspectorate is deeply entangled with the Police and the Minister of the Interior both politically and in terms of competencies. The system as currently arranged also collapses due to the district state attorneys' lack of time (the Czech Republic is short of attorneys by 20%). Even when state attorneys reopened insufficiently investigated cases (e.g., in cases of police violence against people detained during the IMF and World Bank demonstrations in Prague in 2000), they were not able to press the Inspectorate to fulfill their instructions. Investigations of police officers' criminal acts, especially in the areas of violations of human rights and of persons' personal integrity, are given minimal attention.

The result of this state of affairs is that no police officer has ever been punished in even the most serious cases that human rights organizations have monitored since the fall of the communist system in November 1989, and police officers are sure they are exempt from punishment.

¹ In Chapter 3.2. of the new government's platform statement from August 2002, regarding human rights, it is stated: The government considers its aim to be ensuring equal access to all rights guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and human rights treaties ratified [by the Czech Republic]. **It has decided to thoroughly realize the concrete recommendations of the supervisory bodies for human rights agreements, with the aim of further improving the level of protection for human rights on the domestic level, while simultaneously continuing in constructive dialog with such bodies.** The government will also create domestic mechanisms to put into practice the decisions of all supervisory bodies for human rights agreements in individual cases.

² CAT specifically also expressed concern about the following:

The allegations of the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials during and after demonstrations, particularly alleged instances of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of persons arrested and detained as a result of the demonstrations during the IMF/World Bank meeting in Prague in September 2000.

The lack of an external control mechanism over police work.

The lack of adequate guarantees of the rights of persons deprived of liberty to notify a close relative or third party of their choice, to have access to doctors of their choice and to have access to counsel as from the outset of their custody.

The Committee against Torture recommends that:

(a) The State party continue its efforts to counter all forms of discrimination against minorities and to implement its long-term policy aimed at the integration of the Roma population through legal as well as practical measures, and, in particular, to increase efforts to combat and adequately sanction police ill-treatment of minorities and their failure to provide them with adequate protection;

(b) The State party ensure the independence and thoroughness of investigations of ill-treatment in general and in connection with the IMF/World Bank meeting in September 2000 in particular, and to provide the Committee in its next periodic report with information on the findings and measures taken, including prosecutions and compensation to victims, as appropriate;

(c) The State party take appropriate measures to ensure the independence of investigations of offences committed by law enforcement officials by introducing a mechanism of external control;

(d) All persons deprived of their liberty should be guaranteed the rights to notify a close relative or third party of their choice, the right to have access to a lawyer of their choice, as from the very outset of their custody, and the right to have access to a doctor of their choice in addition to any medical examination carried out by the police authorities.

The above-mentioned amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code no. 265/2001 Coll. has also curbed the Ombudsman's powers; the Ombudsman is not allowed to examine the Interior Minister Inspectorate's defects any more.

Case Study 2: Alleged Suicide of a Roma citizen at a Brno Police Station in June 2002

The Legal Observers Project of the League of Human Rights is currently handling a highly serious case which bears out the above-mentioned imperfections in the Czech criminal investigation system. This case contains many elements which international institutions and NGOs, the UN Human Rights Committee and UN Committee Against Torture among them, have warned the Czech government about; it concerns the behavior of the police towards Roma, and the lack of interest in proper investigation of police behavior, especially that which sometimes ends in death at the police stations. This case clearly shows that the formal introduction of the above-mentioned jurisdiction of the state attorney has been proven ineffective.

Mr. Vladimír Pecha, a Roma citizen of the Czech Republic, allegedly jumped from the window of a police station to his death. This incident occurred on July 19th, 2002 at a police station on Malátova street in Brno, the country's second largest city. Vladimír Pecha allegedly died from the aftereffects of falling from the window of the station³. To date, the Inspectorate has, according to the fragmentary information already available in the media, accepted as correct the police version, according to which this unfortunate incident occurred on the way from the bathroom: the Roma man (170 cm high and weighing 58 kg) allegedly bowled over two policemen and jumped out of the window. From the outset the case was investigated by an inappropriate authority, the Department of Control and Complaints instead of the Interior Ministry Inspectorate. The Inspectorate did not start to investigate until the aggrieved filed a criminal complaint. The Inspectorate needed forty days to undertake three brief interrogations of three policemen, and took three snapshots of the place of the incident five days after it occurred, which allowed the Inspectorate to stop the investigation. There were no people interrogated other than police officers, (e.g., neither the doctors nor the ambulance service). There was no reconstruction done of the event! The position of the body is not mentioned anywhere in the report, and there is nothing mentioned about the clothes of the deceased (such as whether or not they were damaged). An autopsy ordered by the chief of the concerned police station (who has no authority to order such an autopsy concerning an event at his police station) did not examine any other injuries than those caused by the fall. There was no possible motive found for Mr. Pecha to have thrown himself out of a window; he was not influenced by alcohol or drugs; he was financially solvent; for four days he had known that his partner was expecting a child; and lastly, there is practically no occurrence of suicide in the Roma community when compared to the majority Czech population. During the preliminary investigation, the Interior Ministry Inspectorate did not (despite being asked three times) allow the aggrieved parties to access the dossier on this serious case. The aggrieved, who is expecting a child conceived with the deceased, has been refused her fundamental rights by the Inspectorate's staff from the very start, police and was denied access to the case dossier. According to Section 65 of Act no. 141/1961 Coll. of the Czech Criminal Procedure Code, the aggrieved and his or her legal representative have the right to examine dossiers, take notes on them, and prepare, at the aggrieved's own cost, a copy of all dossiers in whole or in part. Access to a dossier can only be denied for especially important reasons, such as cases where it would impede an investigation. The reason that was given for the refusal (staff holidays) is not among those named in the Criminal Procedure Code and is not in accord with the underlying principles of a state based on the rule of law. The aggrieved's legal representative fears that the police officers at the Inspectorate who are investigating the case of their colleagues from the police station in Brno may manipulate the materials in the dossier during the period in which they are not being permitted to examine it. In his opinion, the case shows a dangerous similarity to previous serious failures by the Inspectorate⁴.

Other state authorities playing a significant role in this case are the health-care facilities, which have been refusing

³ According to the aggrieved—the mother of his child—there is no reason why Mr. Pecha would have taken such an unconsidered action, because two days before his death, he had discovered that he was to become a father.

The most-read Czech daily, *Mladá fronta DNES*, published, as early as July 23rd, the following passage related to this case: *"the Malátova street station is legendary for its terror. For them, inspections are schminspections. You'll spend twenty hours there like I did, served with a hefty helping of beatings. I know of broken arms, fractured noses, lightbulb burns, and people being thrown down staircases," said a graffiti artist who had been caught in the investigative gears of this station's officers..."*

⁴ The following are the similarities in question:

1. The death of a person of Roma origin at a police station. A 1994 case also began with a Roma citizen—Mr. Červeňák—coming to a police station. According to the police authorities' very doubtful version of the events, this Roma pulled a policeman's pistol away from him and then shot himself using it. **Even though the ballistics report confirmed that the bullet wound could not have been the result of his shooting himself, no police officer was convicted in this case, which evidently will remain forever unsolved.**

2. The particular event in question. In that it involves a leap from a window, this case is similar to the case of an American woman from September 2000: after she had been violently arrested without cause (the arrest was filmed on videotape; the footage of the groundless arrest was seen not only by NGO's, but also by the media) and detained for several hours, she jumped out of the window of the police station in Prague's Braník district. The reason for her jump was, according to her testimony, her violent treatment and her having been denied all basic rights by the police. Her description of her treatment was corroborated by the testimonies of five other detainees. Here too, no punishment for even such a minor offense as negligence of duty was given, and the case still remains unsolved. Her spinal injury and crushed ankle have had a permanent effect on her health.

3. The course of the investigation. Over the course of the investigation, the case became similar to another known case of uninvestigated police violence after peaceful demonstrations in 2000 in Prague. At the station on Ocelářská street in Prague's Vysočany district, Polish citizen Arkadiusz Z. suffered violence, even getting his tooth knocked out by the police. Just as in Mr. Pecha's case, the Inspectorate immediately performed some formalities after criminal charges were quickly filed by a Legal Observers Project lawyer, and found that the tooth truly did belong to Arkadiusz Z. But then the Inspectorate tried for several months to suspend the case without requesting testimonies from the injured parties and witnesses. Our lawyers submitted several complaints against this and themselves located Mr. Z., whom the Inspectorate had not been capable of bringing to the stand. Furthermore, after Mr. Z recognized one of the officers who had beaten him in the collection of tiny passport photographs of police officers which was presented to him in lieu of a lineup, the Inspectorate closed the case, stating that it "had not found any concrete offender"!

from the very start to provide the relatives of the deceased with the death report and autopsy report. The conflict between the Ombudsman (the official public defender of rights) and the Ministry of Health over the transfer of the death report has been ongoing for quite some time. (*As stated above, the Ombudsman has no authority in the area of investigation of police officers' criminal offenses.*) The relatives of the deceased thus remained, until the intervention of the League, hostage to a "secret investigation of the secret death of their family member by the state authorities" for more than 40 days. It was not until a League of Human Rights lawyer took over the case and began to pressure the state through the media that it became possible, on a fourth attempt, to see the dossier. Even though the League's complaint about the non-investigation of the case meant that the state attorney had to comply and, as is now traditional, return the matter to the Inspectorate in order to complete the investigation (since the case had indeed gone uninvestigated and the police investigative organs had behaved with unbelievable incompetence), it is not reasonable to expect that the case will be solved. The state attorney has no interest in punishing the police officers from the Police Complaints Department and Interior Ministry Inspectorate who did not investigate the case and committed so many improprieties; it was now more than two months after the event, the corpse of the deceased had long been buried, and considering the false solidarity of police officers, there is very little chance that the case will ever be cleared up.

The illegal transfer of this case from the Inspectorate to the Police Complaint Department in no way differs from the uninvestigated cases of police brutality during the IMF and World Bank demonstrations in 2000, and the formal increase in the powers of the state attorney, which is supposed to investigate the crimes of police officers, is just built to impress international institutions: the state attorney only intervenes in a case *after* the Inspectorate has closed the first and most important phase of the investigation; *after* the Inspectorate has said there were no improprieties on the part of the police; and *after* the aggrieved, with the aid of a human rights organization, files a complaint. This is always a month or more after the event, when there is practically no probability remaining that the event will ever be satisfactorily explained.

3.2 Recommendations of international institutions must be accepted and thoroughly implemented

In the opinion of the League of Human Rights, the Czech Republic still suffers a situation where, in certain cases, persons who are detained at police stations for any reason—or no reason—can become the victims of inhumane treatment by police officers. In the majority of cases, both the witnesses and those aggrieved are also afraid to take legal action against the police and are not willing to make their experiences public. The approach the state authorities have taken to date, one in which they generally guarantee that officers are exempt from punishment, shows that their declared interest in solving the problem of police violence and discrimination towards Roma citizens, something emphasized directly by the European Commission⁵, remains, in reality, empty words.

Moreover, this cosmetic change does not affect the investigation of those police officers' actions which are considered to be only at the level of misdemeanors. These continue to be investigated by the police organs of complaint and monitoring; in many cases the Inspectorate turns over even very serious complaints to these organs, as if possible felonies were not even concerned. Therefore, in the Czech Republic there has not yet been established any sort of basis for an independent organ for the investigation of "all complaints against police officers," as, for example, the UN Human Rights Committee demands.

The Czech Republic has taken no steps which would lead to the incorporation of basic standards for preventing inhumane and degrading treatment at police stations, such as **the possibility of medical examination by a non-police doctor** (recommended by the CPT in 1997 and the CAT in May 2001) as well as **the presence of a legal representative from the beginning of the proceedings. The League of Human Rights will continue to demand the renewal of action on a new Police Act which would reflect European democratic standards. One such proposal was unfortunately rejected by the current Interior Minister after he took office in 2000, and since then there has been no other legislative effort in this direction.**

⁵ In the **European Commission's last evaluation report for 2001**, it wrote the following in the **section on civic and political rights**: "There has been strong NGO criticism of the treatment of protestors detained by the *police* during the IMF/World Bank meetings in November 2000, with concerns about violations of human rights being raised. The Inspectorate and the Police Presidium carried out investigations but concluded that only 4 cases were found to be justified and no police officers were charged with committing a criminal act. This outcome has raised some questions about the effectiveness of the existing police complaints procedures. As regards *police detention*, persons in detention continue to be unable to notify a third party of their situation." **The section on minorities** goes on to state the following: "More generally, efforts need to be continued to strengthen respect within administrative bodies, law enforcement authorities as well as in the majority population for cultural and ethnic diversity. The central government should avail itself of the necessary means to be able to ensure that all levels of administration, including regional and local, fully abide by and implement the legislation in place as regards minority rights. *Inter alia*, an effective appeal system, which may lead to appropriate compensation and sanctions, is required in order to deal with cases of discrimination. Equally, the police and judiciary have a key role to play in ensuring impartiality in their dealings with the Roma community. Over and above the measures taken by the government and which have been reviewed above, the challenge of improving the situation of the Roma community will need to be pursued resolutely and vigorously."

4. Conclusion

The League provides free legal aid in other cases of police brutality against the Roma than those mentioned in the case studies⁶, just as it does in cases where the Police regularly do not investigate racist attacks against the Roma⁷. It is precisely the absence of this sort of protection on the part of the state organs (and sometimes even direct aggression on the part of the police organs) that forces Czech Roma to continue to request asylum in the states of Western Europe.

THE LEAGUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS RECOMMENDS THAT CZECH STATE ORGANS SHALL:

- properly investigate and punish all police officers who commit violence against the Roma and other socially disadvantaged groups of citizens, as well as police officers who do not properly investigate racially motivated attacks against the Roma;
- introduce within the ranks of the Czech Police a detailed training program which will focus on getting rid of the serious problem of institutional racism in the police, not just for students at the Police Academies, but especially at the stations where older police officers work who have been in the system a longer time;
- establish an independent organ for the investigation of all complaints against police officers;
- incorporate basic international standards for the prevention of ill-treatment of detainees by the police into our legal system;
- establish an independent preventive observers system in places where peoples' personal liberty is curtailed during detention;
- ratify an act on free legal aid which will guarantee the possibility of effective and professional help to socially disadvantaged groups including the Roma.

⁶ Another very serious case being handled by the LLP is for example that of the assaulted Rom Karel B., who was attacked on May 13, 2001 in Karlovy Vary by four police officers. The case was transferred to us for assistance after the Rom did not succeed in finding legal representation for himself, which had been promised to him for several months. How did the entire event take place? The police officers, after unnecessarily checking the identity of the Rom, drove him into the forest where they brutally beat him, swore at him and urinated on him. It is only thanks to the activity of the doctors who treated his wounds that the case was investigated by the Interior Minister Inspectorate. During the course of the investigation the police officers were first charged only with abusing the authority of a public official, then with the crime of violence against a group of inhabitants or individuals. According to the representatives of the local Roma such behavior on the part of the police towards the Roma is normal; they most often hear words like: „*You gypsy, I'd kill you if I could.*“ from the mouths of the police. The main problem in this case remains the fact that for more than a year no court has been found which is willing to initiate proceedings against the police officers. The judge in the Cheb court was not sure if the matter should not be handled in Karlovy Vary and requested an opinion from the higher district court in Plzeň. This court transferred the case to the regional Karlovy Vary court, whose judge recused himself for the reason of conflict of interest. The regional court in Plzeň, as the next highest court, had to decide about the transfer of the case back to the court in Cheb. Karel B. has been concerned for more than a year that he will be harassed by the police again and says he would feel safer in prison.

⁷ The League tries to improve the human rights situation in the Czech Republic through the necessary free legal aid, despite the fact that a law on free legal aid such as it exists in EU countries has not been introduced yet in the Czech Republic.

Information regarding actual problems with the ratification of the Rome Statute and establishment of an NGO coalition on the International Criminal Court in the Czech Republic

In view of the situation in the Czech Republic which, along with Malta and Lithuania, is one of the last accession countries not to have ratified the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court (ICC), over the last few weeks several more local Czech non-governmental organizations have supported the efforts of the International Coalition for the ICC and the League of Human Rights to get the statute ratified.

After the June 2002 elections in the Czech Republic and the establishment of the new coalition government (which included an obligation to ratify the Rome Statute as part of the coalition agreement) an NGO platform composed of two Czech human rights organizations (League of Human Rights and Amnesty International) and two Czech humanitarian organizations (the Czech Red Cross and People in Need) began their efforts to change the situation of the Statute's non-ratification in the Czech Republic.

Chances to ratify the Statute were missed in May 2000 and October 2001, when parliamentarians (particularly from the Communist and Civic Democratic parties) rejected the minor constitutional changes necessary for the Statute's proper ratification. Then as now, political rather than legal arguments played a decisive role for the parliamentarians, who otherwise were quite well-informed about the ICC. Even though the representatives of the NGOs which are now active in this issue agree for the most part with the legal arguments for ratifying the Statute made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, much negotiation needs to take place at a political level. The lukewarm efforts of the Czech government since the mid-nineties to ratify the ICC (the Czech Republic otherwise is formally considered to be a "like-minded country" to those which have ratified the Statute) forced the NGO coalition to take into consideration the fact that, alongside traditional political arguments about loss of sovereignty made by some members of the two above-mentioned political parties, the Czech Republic is being influenced by the hostile position towards the ICC of the USA, with whom the Czech Republic traditionally has enjoyed quite a superior relationship.

At the beginning of this election period, ratification of the Statute is not the government's priority, and it will not become a priority until after the NATO summit takes place in Prague at the end of November. The efforts of the Czech government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are evidently focused on not risking their relationship with the USA, which is sharing in the preparations for this significant NATO summit; on the other hand, the government is, of course, strengthening its efforts to enter the EU, which in the past has even financially supported several information campaigns regarding support for the ICC in the Czech Republic.

The NGO coalition will pressure for a third attempt at presenting those necessary constitutional changes which would facilitate a legally sound ratification of the Statute to the Chamber of Deputies in Parliament. In order to reach the necessary two-thirds majority, the NGO representatives will personally present arguments for the acceptance of these changes to the individual political parties.

The League of Human Rights is a non-governmental, non-profit organization made up of lawyers and psychologists engaged in the promotion of human rights. Its work is based on the defense of human and other public interests by legal means; legal and psychological aid in specific cases of domestic violence; the rights of children; child abuse; police brutality; racist attacks; and the interpretation of international human rights obligations. The League of Human Rights in the Czech Republic was established in August 2002 from the previous human rights programs of the Environmental Law Service, an independent non-governmental environmental legal organization which has enabled the League's human rights programs to develop since 1999 under its auspices without losing its transparency, objectivity or independence.

One of the first actions taken by the League of Human Rights after its establishment was to initiate a coalition of Czech NGOs to support ratification of the Rome Statute. The League was the first-ever representative of the Czech NGO sector to the Coalition for the International Criminal Court.

The Civic Legal Observers Program of the League of Human Rights monitors cases of illegalities and human rights infractions by police officers; in the most serious cases, it also offers free legal aid, particularly for victims who are members of the Roma minority. Representatives of the Civic Legal Observers program took part (while still under the auspices of the Environmental Law Service) as the first and sole representative of the Czech NGO sector in the session of the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva in July 2001, at the invitation of FIDH (the International Federation of Human Rights), and presented its complex report there.

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The **International Federation for Human Rights** is an international non-governmental organization dedicated to the world-wide defense of human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Founded in 1922, the FIDH has 115 national affiliates in all regions. To date, the FIDH has undertaken more than a thousand international fact-finding, judicial, mediation or training missions in over one hundred countries.

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