



PRIMÁTOR MESTA KOŠICE

Košice, 15 August 2013

Dear Mrs. Vassiliou,

Allow me to thank you again for visiting Košice and supporting the events organised within the European Capital of Culture 2013 project which is of extraordinary importance for our city.

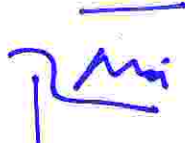
At the same time allow me to react promptly to your urgent request related to the construction of the segregation wall in Košice. The construction of the segregation wall in the vicinity of Roma dwellings was an unpleasant surprise for us as well, and we, just like you, Commissioner, have been informed only after the wall had already been constructed. The wall was not constructed by the city of Košice, but by the city part Košice Západ, which is an independent legal subject that decides independently from the city. The wall has been constructed without the permission of the city of Košice as well as without the permission of competent building and construction authorities. The segregation wall has thus been constructed illegally and appropriate legal actions against the city part in question shall follow. The city part is headed by a directly elected representative Rudolf Bauer (former Mayor of the city supported by the Christian Democratic Party - KDH), who represents the political opposition against the current city leadership. Therefore we think that he had initiated the construction of the wall in order to follow his personal interests and achieve his political aims.

I want to reassure you that we do realize that we all are jointly responsible for the integration of our fellow Roma citizens into the majority community; so that we understand each other and can live in one city without mental or physical barriers. In our position we also realise the weight of the European Capital of Culture title and we try to do everything that is within our power. The Roma ethnic group has formed an inseparable part of the European civilisation for more than a millennium and no mental or physical barriers can change that. Together with them we have been writing the story of a unified Europe and with them we also are developing the successful European Capital of Culture 2013 project. Their specific culture, folklore, tradition, and versatile talent continue to amaze not only the visitors, but also the inhabitants of Košice, and their engagement in the European Capital of Culture 2013 project was indeed based around that fact. The Roma ethnic group played an important role in the ECOC Opening Ceremony, and the city welcomes the Roma who come to attend residential stays, and organises dancing, painting, fashion, theatre and culinary performances that meet with great response. What we consider to be of greatest contribution is our communication with various organisations which make effort to include the Roma into the society: the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities, the Roma Press Agency and the representatives of institutions and non-governmental organisations who have been cooperating with the Roma in Slovakia for many years.

Following the extraordinary success of a festival called Rozmanitosť (Variety) organised for the very first time last year aimed at the coexistence with the Roma minority, this year on October 6th to 13th we are organising the second year of the festival directly at Luník IX - a settlement which accommodates the biggest Roma community in Slovakia. Rozmanitosť is one of the cultural events of key importance within the European Capital of Culture project - please allow me to invite you most cordially to join the event.

I wish to emphasise once again that the construction of the wall had been initiated by the city part Košice Západ headed by the mayor Rudolf Bauer and performed illegally, without the necessary permits, and without informing the city of Košice. I agree with you completely, Commissioner, on the fact that there may be no place for the construction of such barriers neither in the European Union nor in a city that prides itself on the title of the European Capital of Culture. In accordance with Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union and Article 21 of the Charter of the Fundamental Rights the city of Košice shall always fight against racism and xenophobia to support multiculturalism and ethnic diversity in its area. Respect for human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and human dignity are the fundamentals of our joint project - the European Capital of Culture 2013.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Raši
Mayor of Košice

Cc: H.E. Mr. Ivan Korčok
Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the EU

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