

PRESS RELEASE



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- Ombudsman Máté Szabó has Completed his Mandate on 24 September

Camp of Tents for Refugees - Findings of the Ombudsman's On-the-Spot Inspection

The number of people requesting asylum in Hungary from January to May this year is more than three times more than the total of last year. Compared to the same period of last year, the number of asylum requests is tenfold. Based on these data, the colleagues of the Ombudsman have conducted an unannounced inspection in the tent camp for refugees established on the premises of the Nagyfa unit of the Szeged Penitentiary and Prison. The on-the-spot investigation has not found any infringement of basic rights in connection with the arrest of illegal immigrants but it has uncovered some anomalies in the camp's management.

According to the plans, the tent camp of the Temporary Reception Centre, capable of accommodating 300 single men, will operate only till 15 October. One of the reasons for choosing this location was that most of the illegal immigrants had been apprehended on the Csongrád County section of the state border between Hungary and Serbia. On the other hand, the penitentiary institution of Nagyfa is located at more than 10 kilometres from the surrounding settlements, and the closest stopping of the bus line operating 4 times a day is at 4 kilometres from the Temporary Reception Centre. Therefore, it was highly unlikely that the residents of the refugee camp operating as an open facility would disturb the local population.

The Commissioner for Fundamental Rights has established that no fundamental right was infringed upon in the course of the illegal immigrants' arrest. The fact that the refugees authority had established a tent camp for the temporary placement of the numerous adult male asylum seekers did not cause any fundamental right related anomalies, either. Such anomalies have been uncovered not in connection with their placement in tents but in connection with its practical execution and with the deficiency of legal regulation.

During some periods in July and August of this year, red alert was issued for the entire territory of the country due to the extreme heat. According to the Ombudsman's findings, the automated weather station of the Hungarian Meteorological Service outside Szeged registered a maximum temperature of 36.5 degrees centigrade. At this time, the conditions for the cooling and the proper storing of the food and water distributed to the foreigners were not ensured in the camp. It caused anomalies not only in connection with the fundamental right to health but also in connection with the right to religious freedom, taking into account that it was during Ramadan, requiring Muslims to fast from dawn until sunset. The Temporary Reception Centre would not assume responsibility for any valuables and cash left in the tents; therefore, the lack of legally required safekeeping also jeopardised the implementation of the fundamental right to property. The fact that the minimal nutritional value of the food provided to asylum seekers was not specified could also lead to the infringement of fundamental rights.

In connection with the above, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights requested the Minister of Interior and the Director General of the Office of Immigration and Nationality to take the appropriate measures.

The Hungarian text of the report/petition may be found at:

<http://www.ajbh.hu/documents/10180/111959/201304321.pdf>

Ombudsman Máté Szabó has Completed his Mandate on 24 September

Jurist cum political scientist Prof. Dr. Máté Szabó was elected Parliamentary Commissioner for Civil Rights back in 2007. He was elected for six years, his mandate expires today, on 24 September 2013. During his tenure in office, in early 2012, the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights was established in lieu of the former fundamental rights protection system of four commissioners. Beside the Ombudsman, two deputies work in this new Office in charge of the protection of the rights of future generations and nationalities living in Hungary, respectively.

At the farewell event organised for the outgoing Commissioner, several speakers spoke highly of the work done by Máté Szabó during his 6 years in office. This period saw the onset of a global and domestic economic and financial crisis whose challenges manifested themselves also in the implementation of fundamental rights – hitting mostly the otherwise most needy. This phenomenon and the growing reputation of this institution protecting fundamental rights were duly reflected in the ever growing number of complaints lodged with the Ombudsman and, as a result of the Commissioner's extended statutory authority, in the increase in the number of petitions submitted to the Constitutional Court. According to some public opinion poll data, by 2012 the Ombudsman institution, propagating the inviolability of human dignity, had been placed above all in the ranking of public trust.

During the farewell event Attila Péterfalvi, President of the National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, former Commissioner for Data Protection, awarded a decoration to Máté Szabó in recognition of his effort aimed at guaranteeing the continuity of data protection. Marcel Szabó, the incumbent and on-staying Deputy Commissioner in charge of the protection of the interests of future generations presented the Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum Award, the most prestigious award of the Ombudsman institution, to the outgoing Commissioner.

A series of projects, a new working method introduced by Máté Szabó and a defining element of his entire mandate, concentrated mainly on the fundamental rights of the needy and the vulnerable. More than forty publications dealt with the analyses and recommendations made by the Ombudsman on the status of implementation of the rights of the child, the world of labour, workers in community employment or in healthcare, people worried about their health or living with disability, the homeless, the elderly and mothers with small children, and with the conclusion that might be drawn therefrom. A project spanning several years investigated various closed institutions, among them Hungarian prison system whose Director General awarded the Commemorative Silver Medal of the Prison Service to the Ombudsman in recognition of the efforts by the Ombudsman and

his Office aimed at improving the situation of the inmates and the staff of Hungarian penitentiary institutions.

Effective of 25 September 2013, the Hungarian Parliament has elected Dr. László Székely as the new Commissioner for Fundamental Rights replacing Prof. Dr. Máté Szabó.

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