

The *latest* public enemy: Romanian Roma in Italy

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Contents:

- Moral panic and racist attacks: a background
- The role of media and political parties
- Camps and forced evictions
- Crime, prison and stereotyping
- Latest development and possible futures
- Some conclusions

Moral panic...

- Molotov bombs and violent attacks against camps and their inhabitants (the latest episode was the same day the emergency decree was published)
- Extreme rightwing groups organising rallies and demos
- Media hysteria (use of impressionistic and stereotypical images)
- Politicians searching for electoral gains – ‘zero tolerance’ etc.
- Short term measures to temporary remove ‘the problem’ – extreme municipalism

Statements reported in the media in the last week:

- ‘Death penalty for the bastard’ (banner outside ‘Regina Coeli’ prison where the Romanian citizen suspected for the murder of Mrs Reggiani is in custody)
- *It is clear that there is no control on the territory, we should deploy the army*
- *The leftwing government is responsible for the invasion of Italy by millions of people*
- *If the government doesn’t get rid of the camps, we will do it ourselves! [Forza Nuova]*

Political participation and media representation of Roma and Sinti



«New small lies from Alemanno. While in Rome in five years 8,000 people were moved out of illegal settlements and tens of Romani camps have been closed. Berlusconi's government, of which Alemanno was a minister, allowed uncontrolled arrivals without rules and border controls».

- Between Jan 07 and Sept 07 the Municipality of Rome evicted **5.241** people from illegal settlements, most of them Romanian Roma (Source: Rome city council).
- 880 have been reaccommodated in the 'villages of solidarity' built in isolated areas outside Rome's main ringroad.



Forced eviction as a short term 'solution'

Honourable Excellencies,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and osservAzione are writing today to request your urgent intervention in the wake of "Pacts for Security" in Rome and Milan, signed by various authorities on 18 May 2007, which reportedly foresee the forced eviction of more than 10,000 Roma from their homes.¹ The Pacts were signed in the midst of racist media statements by the same authorities, apparently intended to fuel anti-Romani attitudes in Italy and secure broad support for the impending illegal actions.



Crime, prisons and stereotypes

- On 11 August 2007, four Romanian Romani children aged between 4 and 10 died in a fire that burned down for reason as yet unknown the hut where they were temporarily living with their parents in Livorno, following their forced eviction from Pisa in May 2007. The parents are **currently** in detention [!] charged with abandonment of minor and parental negligence. The magistrates are still investigating the causes of the fire – including the allegation that it was caused by a anti-Gypsy fire bomb attack.
- According to a judge (Governatori, 2000), stereotypes can have an influence on the judges' decisions in different stages of the trial, both as a parameter for the evaluation of circumstances and through the principle that all Roma act in the same way, for example, that all Roma mothers exploit their children for begging.

Emergency decree (181/2007) [I]

EU citizens can be repatriated if they are deemed to be a threat to:

- national security
- public order
- public security
- (imperative threat) public security

The decree expanded the previous list.

EU citizens without an indefinite leave to remain (resident in Italy less than 5 years) can be repatriated for any of those reasons. Longer residents are more 'protected'.

- But was it really **necessary and urgent** as the Italian Constitution requires?

Emergency decree (181/2007) [II]

The prefect – the higher representative of the central government in the localities – has got the power to expel EU citizens for reasons of :

- public security
- (exceptional threat) public security*

In the other cases the decision is taken by the Minister of the Interior

*when the risk for public security is deemed **IMPERATIVE**, the decision of the prefect is immediately implemented with the deportation of the subject.

Emergency decree (181/2007) [III]

- The definition of what an IMPERATIVE threat is, is extremely vague, leaving too much room for interpretation.
- While waiting for deportation, a EU citizen can be kept in custody in a detention centre – the first time that **administrative** detention is applied to EU citizens.
- By law, the decision must be an *ad personam* procedure, the risk is that it becomes a tool for mass expulsion (currently the decree establish weak appeal instruments)

Following the publication of the decree:

- police has raided shanty towns (or illegal settlements) all over Italy in search of 'dangerous' Roma – hundreds have been fingerprinted (even if only a few were eventually charged!)
- Local authorities ordered several forced evictions followed by the demolition of huts and shacks (even if inhabitants were not a threat to national security).
- *Roma have principles which make them impossible to integrate in our society and to our values... all the Roma camps should be torn down and 100,000 to 200.000 people expelled* [Mr Fini, ex-deputy PM]

Some **conclusions**

- Mobilise international attention / Europeanization of the issue [pros and cons]
- Closely monitor the implementation of the emergency decree
- Actively promote a better image of Roma [Dosta-like initiative]
- Monitor media representation of Roma and, if necessary, intervene
- Sharpen the **legal instruments** to fight both direct and indirect discrimination in Italy
- Inclusion of Roma and Sinti in the list of national/linguistic minorities
- Actively promote Roma political participation