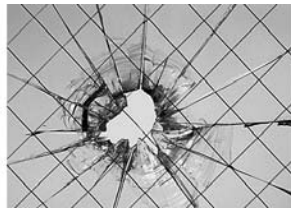


Violence Against Roma



2008 Hate Crime Survey

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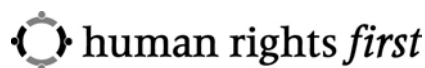
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2008 Hate Crime Survey

Violence Against Roma is an excerpt from Human Rights First's *2008 Hate Crime Survey*, which includes sections examining six facets of violent hate crime in the 56 countries that comprise the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE): *Violence Based on Racism and Xenophobia*, *Antisemitic Violence*, *Violence Against Muslims*, *Violence Based on Religious Intolerance*, *Violence Against Roma*, and *Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Bias*. The Survey also examines government responses to violent hate crimes in sections on *Systems of Monitoring and Reporting* and *The Framework of Criminal Law* and includes a Ten-Point Plan for governments to strengthen their responses. The Survey also includes an in-depth look at the *Russian Federation*, *Ukraine*, and the *United States* and contains a *Country Panorama* section that profiles individual hate crime cases from more than 30 countries within the OSCE.

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Violence Against Roma

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
I. The Context of Violence Against Roma	2
A. Racist Violence as an Obstacle to the Full Exercise of Rights.....	3
II. Individual Country Overview	5
Italy	5
Bulgaria	9
Czech Republic	10
Greece	11
Romania	12
Russian Federation.....	12
Serbia	13
Slovakia.....	14
Slovenia.....	14
Ukraine	14
United Kingdom	15
Section Endnotes.....	16

Executive Summary

Roma, like members of other visible minorities, routinely suffer assaults in city streets and other public places as they travel to and from homes, workplaces, and markets. In a number of serious cases of violence against Roma, attackers have also sought out whole families in their homes, or whole communities in settlements predominantly housing Roma. These widespread patterns of violence are sometimes directed both at causing immediate harm to Roma—without distinction between adults, the elderly, and small children—and physically eradicating the presence of Roma in towns and cities in several European countries.

This report documents violence and other forms of intolerance against Roma in eleven countries during 2007 and 2008. The most widely reported incidents occurred in **Italy**, where efforts to vilify Roma involved high-ranking government officials. Thousands of Roma were driven from their homes in 2007 when mobs attacked, beating residents and burning Roma settlements to the ground, as police reportedly did not intervene in several cases to protect the victims. Some Italian political leaders encouraged a national clamor for Roma to be expelled from cities and deported. Violent incidents have also been reported in **Bulgaria**, the **Czech Republic**, the **Russian Federation**, **Serbia**, and **Slovakia**.

The bias-motivated violence against Roma often occurs in an environment in which local political leaders speak openly of their desire to expel Roma minorities. Even as police and local public authorities are in some cases complicit in driving Roma from their homes and seeking their relocation to other towns or cities—or even their deportation—others holding national public office, too, characterize Roma as outsiders who are less than citizens and are unwanted. The presence of Roma in new places of residence, including as a result of

migration within the newly expanded European Union, is often particularly precarious when anti-immigrant bias turns Roma into a scapegoat for broader societal ills, as is the case in several of the countries profiled in this report.

The discriminatory violence of private citizens and the inadequate responses of governments are manifestations of a broader framework of anti-Roma discrimination. This extends to the full range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Even as public policy and private violence conspire to drive Roma from the shelter they can find in camps and abandoned buildings, pervasive discrimination denies them access to legal remedies for the loss of homes and property and the access to public housing or rental properties that would provide an alternative.

Indeed, the intensity of the recent anti-Roma violence in Italy should serve as a wake-up call to all of Europe. The multiple factors at work: the negative popular attitudes against Roma; the abuses that they experience at the hands of the police; the official and unofficial discrimination in employment, housing, health care, and other aspects of public life; the violent rhetoric of exclusion and expulsion used by public officials; the failure of many states to address the challenges of the marginalization of Roma—all combine to create a potentially explosive situation, with dire human consequences. As this report shows, this combustible mix of factors exists in several European countries. Yet, official monitoring of hate crimes that includes disaggregated public data on violence against Roma is practically nonexistent even among countries that have developed adequate monitoring systems on racist violence. Addressing hate violence against Roma, in the context of their unique situation, should be a matter of priority concern for policymakers and law enforcement officials.

I. The Context of Violence Against Roma

Violent hate crime is one issue among many other forms of discrimination—both public and private—that Roma and Sinti face throughout Europe.¹ The principal reports of harassment against Roma concern abusive treatment by agents of governments. Police ill-treatment is a priority concern of the Roma community that combines with other aspects of state-sponsored and state-tolerated discrimination to create a climate conducive to violence by ordinary citizens.² In situations where local government and police officials can act arbitrarily to violate the rights of Roma, others too expect to do so with impunity. International legal and political bodies have taken up and issued decisions in cases of police violence against Roma, including these recent ones:

- On July 24, 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Committee found, in the case of *Andreas Kalamiotis v. Greece*, that the government of Greece violated Article 2 paragraph 3 (right to an effective remedy) together with Article 7 (prohibition of torture) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The case concerned the lack of an effective investigation into allegations of police brutality against Andreas Kalamiotis, a Roma man, on June 14, 2001. The Committee ruled that Greece must provide the victim with an effective remedy and appropriate reparation, as well as take measures to prevent similar violations in the future.³
- In July 2007, the European Court of Human Rights issued its judgment in the case of *Belmondo Cobzaru*, a Roma man beaten in custody by police officers in Mangalia, Romania, in 1997. The Court ruled that Romania was in breach of the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment, the right to an effective remedy, and the prohibition of discrimination.⁴

The racist violence against Roma that is reported publicly and does not involve state agents tends to concern only the most serious crimes, while even these crimes are generally reported only where nongovernmental organizations are active in protecting the rights of Roma and their communities.

The violence often occurs in an environment where local political leaders speak openly of their desire to expel Roma from their communities. Even as police and local public authorities are often complicit in driving Roma from their homes and seeking their relocation to other towns or cities—or even their deportation—others holding national public office, too, characterize Roma as outsiders who are less than citizens and are unwanted. Many Roma are in fact immigrants from within the newly expanded European Union or the nations of the former Yugoslavia. Their presence in new places of residence is often precarious—in particular when anti-immigrant bias turns to Roma as the scapegoat for broader societal ills.

The language of public discourse on Roma in Europe regularly refers to the *expulsion* of Roma, to *evictions*, to the *dismantling* of settlements, to the *destruction* of Roma homes and communities, to wholesale *incarceration*, or the *deportation* of Roma as a national objective. This is the kinetic language of exclusion that fuels police raids and mob action that place Roma under constant pressure to move on. In this climate, Roma people, reduced to living in camps and abandoned buildings, are attacked by mobs, burned out, their possessions destroyed or stolen by police, constantly uprooted to begin again.

Popular language concerning Roma is also rife with terms reflecting stereotypes portraying Roma as *untrustworthy*, *dishonest*, *dirty*, *lazy*, *violent*, and often as *criminals*, *thieves*, or *kidnappers*. Often when a Romani person is a suspect in a crime in Eastern,

Southern, and Central Europe, the media emphasize the ethnicity of the suspect as a reaffirmation of these stereotypes.

To the people of Europe's Roma communities in some countries, the newly virulent anti-gypsyism is an eerie reminder of the *Porrajmos*, the Romani Holocaust during the Second World War that killed more than half of Europe's Roma population. When senior European political leaders publicly discuss "solutions" to the "Roma problem," advocating the use of dynamite; electrified fences; mug shots; fingerprinting of men, women, and children; and deportations, historical parallels inadvertently come to mind.

Indeed, the intensity of the recent anti-Roma violence in Italy should serve as a wake-up call to all of Europe. The multiple factors at work: the negative popular attitudes against Roma; the abuses that they experience at the hands of the police; the official and unofficial discrimination in employment, housing, health care, and other aspects of public life; the violent rhetoric of exclusion and expulsion used by public officials; the failure of many European states to address the challenges of the marginalization of Roma—all combine to create a potentially explosive situation, with dire human consequences. As this report shows, this combustible mix of factors exists in several European countries. Addressing hate violence against Roma, in the context of their unique situation, should be a matter of priority concern for policymakers and law enforcement officials.

A. Racist Violence as an Obstacle to the Full Exercise of Rights

The discriminatory violence against Roma by private citizens and the state is a manifestation of a broader framework of anti-Roma discrimination. This extends to the full range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The right to education, to housing, to health care, and to due process of law is often a dead letter. Even as public policy and private violence conspire to drive Roma from the shelter they can find in camps and abandoned buildings, pervasive discrimination denies them access to legal remedies for the loss of homes and property and the access to public housing or rental properties that would provide an alternative. Even as Roma are reviled in public discourse for being homeless, they are constantly under pressure to relocate.

This report focuses upon the violent manifestations of prejudice and hatred in which private persons are responsible for hate crimes. In addressing the issue of violence toward Roma, however, the intersections between popular prejudice and public policy, and between private violence and violence by state agents are part of the reality of violent hate crimes; as is the intersection of prejudice and violence with the systemic discrimination that excludes many Roma communities across Europe from the full enjoyment of their human rights. In many areas Roma are confined to segregated camps or ghettos, are denied access to basic education and prospects for formal employment, and may even be refused recognition as citizens in their own countries.

The denial of the full range of rights is enforced and exacerbated by the lawless resort to violence of local authorities and private citizens in what is often described as collective punishment against Roma communities. Whether taking the form of arbitrary police raids or officially sanctioned bulldozing of Roma property without financial compensation or judicial

approval, discrimination and other rights violations take place in tandem with private racist attacks and mob violence. Consequently, stamped as “nomads,” Roma are denied an opportunity to settle down.

Violations of other fundamental rights often derive from the denial of a permanent place of residence to Roma, even when Roma communities have been present in the area for hundreds of years. By denying Roma the personal documentation required to function freely in many societies (from birth certificates to housing permits), local authorities may effectively bar Roma children from attending public schools, exclude Roma families from receiving public housing, health care, and other social services, and make formal employment impossible.

In one example of international attention to this problem, in the February 2007 report on **Ukraine**, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) noted that “the lack of personal and other relevant identification documents effectively deprives many Roma of their right to equal access to the courts, legal aid, employment, housing, health care, social security and education.” To overcome this reality, which can effectively bar many Roma from legal remedy to abuse, CERD recommended Ukraine to “take immediate steps, e.g. by removing administrative obstacles, to issue all Roma with personal and other relevant identification documents in order to enhance their access to the courts, employment, housing, health care, social security and education.”⁵

The constant assertion that Roma “do not fit” in any society also extends to national frontiers. As the largest pan-European minority, Roma are present throughout the region, but have no single European homeland, although most have the citizenship of the European country of their birth or long residence—or the formal right to this. The breakup of the former Eastern Bloc countries and realignment of states initiated a process in which the new states—created out of Czechoslovakia,

Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union—vied to exclude “their” Roma from the new landscapes of citizenship. In the new order of the expanded European Union, in turn, the lifting of restrictions on the movement of citizens within the E.U. brought with it concerns about the fact that tens of thousands of Roma were among those new E.U. citizens seeking employment outside of their own countries.

Some steps have been taken to address these problems. For example, in 2005, the heads of government of **Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia** signed a joint declaration launching the Decade of Roma Inclusion: 2005-2015. In the declaration, they agreed to eliminate discrimination against Roma as well as to close existing gaps “between Roma and the rest of society,” in accord with national action plans. As part of this commitment, the nine governments agreed to support the full participation and involvement of Roma communities in achieving the goals of the initiative—and in measuring progress. In order to facilitate this, Roma activists and researchers have joined forces in DecadeWatch, an organization supported by the Open Society Institute and the World Bank, aiming to produce periodic monitoring reports. In July 2008, **Albania** joined the initiative. **Ukraine** is an outstanding holdout from participation.

In March 2008, a group of eight nongovernmental organizations launched the European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) with a view to press the European Union to develop a coherent policy to counter social exclusion and discrimination against Roma. Goals include the E.U.’s adoption of a “Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion, to be developed in full consultation with Roma communities,” and to mesh with other European initiatives on Roma rights, and in particular the Decade of Roma Inclusion.⁶

II. Individual Country Overview

Hate violence against Roma has several particularly pernicious and disturbing aspects. Roma, like members of other visible minorities, routinely suffer assaults in city streets and other public places as they travel to and from homes, workplaces, and markets. But in many cases, including those involving very serious violence, attackers seek out whole families of Roma in their homes, or whole communities in settlements predominantly housing Roma. This pattern of violence is sometimes directed both at causing immediate harm to Roma—without distinction between adults, the elderly, and small children—and physically eradicating the presence of Roma in towns and communities in several parts of Europe.

The persistence of anti-Roma violence and discrimination by ordinary citizens occurs in the context of abusive patterns of treatment of Roma by police and public authorities. Private violence seeking the expulsion of Roma families and communities sometimes occurs in tandem with official efforts to achieve the same ends. The prevalence of racist anti-Roma rhetoric even by the highest public authorities in some countries further exacerbates the problem. Some of the principal developments in Europe regarding racist violence against Roma involve this combination of public and private prejudice and violence and are outlined in the country sections below.

Official monitoring of hate crimes in most countries in Europe is limited, and disaggregated public data on violence against Roma is practically nonexistent even among countries that have developed adequate monitoring systems on racist violence—like the **Czech Republic** and the **United Kingdom**. Moreover, official statistics on anti-Roma violence based on police data would likely capture only a small percentage of the overall number of incidents because of the particular

distrust of the police among many Roma. Media and NGO reports document primarily only the most egregious incidents of violence against Roma.

This section documents violent incidents in eleven countries during 2007 and 2008, with the most widely reported incidents occurring in **Italy**, where efforts to vilify Romanian immigrants and Roma involved members of the highest levels of government. Thousands of Roma were driven from their homes in 2007 and 2008 when mobs attacked, beating residents and burning Roma settlements to the ground, as police reportedly did not intervene in many cases to protect the victims. In Italy, the Roma became the object of a national clamor for expulsion from cities and deportation encouraged by political leaders.

Italy

In Italy, many national and local political leaders engaged in rhetoric during 2007 and 2008 that maintained that the recent extraordinary rise in crime was mainly a result of uncontrolled immigration. They often singled out a wave of immigration of people of Roma origin from new European Union member state Romania. The new anticrime rhetoric combined and exacerbated fear and hatred of immigrants with longstanding prejudices and stereotypes toward Roma. Italy's estimated 160,000 Roma, about half of which are Italian nationals, were all equally under threat (Roma have lived in Italy for some seven hundred years).⁷

The anti-Roma and anti-Romanian rhetoric became racist at times, even at the highest political levels. The prefect of Rome, Carlo Mosca, in declaring his intent to sign expulsion orders without hesitation, told the press that “the hard line is necessary” to deal with “these

beasts.”⁸ National and local leaders declared their plans to expel Roma from settlements in and around major cities and to deport illegal immigrants. The mayors of Rome and Milan signed “Security Pacts” in May 2007 that “envisaged the forced eviction of up to 10,000 Romani people.”⁹ The clearance and destruction of Roma settlements without prior notice, compensation, or provision of alternative housing was reported throughout the year.

In October 2007, extraordinary anti-immigrant sentiment exploded into violence toward Romanian immigrants and Roma in general. The violence was triggered by the particularly heinous murder of 47-year-old Giovanna Reggiani, a naval captain’s wife, which was attributed to a Romanian immigrant of Roma origin. Reggiani was raped, beaten, left in a ditch, and died the following week. The government responded with roundups of Romanian immigrants and summary expulsions of some two hundred, mostly Roma, disregarding E.U. immigration rules.¹⁰

On November 1, 2007, President Giorgio Napolitano signed a decree providing for the summary expulsion of E.U. citizens “for reasons of public safety,” in direct response to what were described as “episodes of heavy violence and ferocious crime.” The Decree Law, which was in violation of E.U. Directive 2004/38 /EC concerning the rights of E.U. internal migrants, appeared to be directed expressly at Roma. Within two weeks, 177 persons had been expelled under the new order.¹¹ Mayor of Rome Walter Veltroni blamed the increase in violent crime overall on the recent immigration of Romanian Roma, asserting that “before the entry of Romania into the European Union, Rome was the safest city in the world.”¹²

Racist violence in the backlash to the murder of Giovanna Reggiani included a November 2, 2007 attack on Roma living in improvised shelters in a parking lot near the scene of the murder. Up to eight attackers seriously injured three Romanians with metal bars and

knives; one of the injured had deep stab wounds in his back. Another squatter camp in the area in which the attack occurred, housing some 50 to 60 Roma, was bulldozed by city authorities on November 3, 2007.¹³

In other incidents, “a Romanian-owned shop was damaged by a crude bomb, a popular Romanian footballer playing for an Italian team heard anti-Roma chants of ‘dirty Gypsy,’ a Romanian actress visiting Italy was harassed by the Italian police, and messages like ‘Romanians—Go Home’ appeared on walls in the big Italian cities.”¹⁴

In 2008, anti-Roma hate crimes continued, as Roma communities were targeted for arson attacks even as police seized Roma in random searches for illegal immigrants. In early May 2008, following claims that a Roma teenager had attempted to kidnap a child, mobs in several areas around Naples attacked Roma communities, setting homes alight, and forcing hundreds of Roma to flee. Others were escorted out of the camps by authorities, with no prospect of return. On May 11, 2008, newly appointed Interior Minister Roberto Maroni was widely reported declaring that “all Roma camps will have to be dismantled right away and the inhabitants will be either expelled or incarcerated.”¹⁵

On May 11, 2008, attackers set fires with Molotov cocktails in a Roma camp in Via Novara, Milan. On May 13, a mob threw stones and Molotov cocktails at two Roma squatter camps in the Ponticelli district of northern Naples; many of the estimated eight hundred inhabitants fled. On May 14, attackers returned, including scores of young men on motor scooters, armed with iron bars and Molotov cocktails. They moved systematically through the area, burning the camp to the ground. According to press reports, local residents stood by applauding the arsonists, and the police presence did not stop the attackers.¹⁶ Other arson attacks followed. On June 9, according to local monitors, “a settlement of approximately 100 Romanian

Roma in Catania, Sicily, was attacked and burned to the ground by unknown perpetrators.”¹⁷

Although no arrests were reported for the arson attacks on Roma, a series of mass roundups of Roma and suspected illegal immigrants was carried out in the same period, with nearly four hundred detained.¹⁸ In the aftermath of the violence, Interior Minister Maroni was quoted as declaring “that is what happens when gypsies steal babies, or when Romanians commit sexual violence.”¹⁹ Umberto Bossi, a cabinet member who also heads the extremist Northern League, was an apologist for the camp burnings, declaring that “people do what the state can’t manage.”²⁰

In May 2008, on-site research on the situation in Italy was undertaken by a nongovernmental coalition including the Open Society Institute, the Center on Housing Rights and Evictions, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Romani Criss, and the Roma Civic Alliance in Romania. The resulting report, *Security a la Italiana*, found a dramatic rise in both the frequency and seriousness of attacks on Roma since the government of Silvio Berlusconi took office in April. The report found further that Italian authorities had “failed to condemn acts of violent aggression against Roma and not one person has yet to be held legally accountable for at least 8 incidents of anti-Romani pogroms leading to the razing of Romani camps with Molotov cocktails in Italy.”²¹

The new government of Silvio Berlusconi, who described illegal immigrants as “an army of evil” in his election campaign, introduced a new “security package” on May 16, 2008, that provided for dismantling Roma camps; appointing “special commissioners for the Roma emergency” in Rome, Naples, and Milan; new border controls; and the summary deportation of immigrants “who cannot show they have a job or an ‘adequate’ income.”²² The security package provided for Roma encampments in the three cities to be placed under a “state of emergency,” opening the way for prefects to

exercise special powers to expel the residents and destroy the camps.

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg criticized Berlusconi’s proposal, saying that “arrests should be used against criminals, which immigrants are not.”²³ In another statement, Hammarberg declared that “the whole Roma community has been made a scapegoat for crimes committed by only a very few.”²⁴

On May 21, the government issued a decree declaring a state of emergency for one year “in relation to the settlements of the nomad community in the regions of Campania, Lazio and Lombardy.”²⁵ The decree was based on 1992 legislation empowering the government to establish states of emergency in the event of “natural disasters, catastrophes or other events that, on account of their intensity and extent, have to be tackled using extraordinary powers and means.” The premise of the decree was that the presence of Roma communities alone, because of their precarious conditions, was the cause of situations of “extreme critical nature” and “serious social alarm” that could have further serious repercussions for public order and security “for local populations.”²⁶

On May 30, Prime Minister Berlusconi issued further executive orders for the implementation of the special measures in the regions of Lazio (including Rome), Lombardia (Milan), and Campania (Naples). The wording of the decrees echoed the May 21 decree and referred expressly to measures of civil protection “in relation to settlements of the nomad community” in the three regions: the “nomads” in question were to be the object of police actions to protect others.

The Lazio ordinance, which employs language almost identical to the others, attributes the measures to the determination that the region, in particular Rome and its surroundings, was in an extremely critical situation, “because the presence of numerous irregular and nomadic citizens from outside the community is

endangering stability.” The “extreme precariousness” of the settlements had created a situation of “serious social alarm, with possible serious repercussions in terms of public order and security for the local populations.”²⁷ The implication was that the “nomads” in question were both foreigners and criminals, whether housed in official camps or irregular settlements.

The ordinances designate the prefects of Rome, Milan and Naples as emergency commissioners with extraordinary powers to address the emergency. These include measures to identify camp residents, to include fingerprinting, and to facilitate the expulsion from settlements or deportation through administrative or judicial measures. The prefects were authorized to set aside legal provisions for the protection of the rights of those in question, “for instance the right to be informed when subject to an administrative procedure such as fingerprinting and the requirement that persons be dangerous or suspect or that they refuse to identify themselves before undergoing identity screening involving photographing, fingerprinting or the gathering of anthropometric data.”²⁸

In June 2008, the new mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno, expelled the first group from a settlement that had been present in the city for decades.²⁹ On June 8, Carlo Mosca, Rome’s newly appointed Commissioner for Roma, reportedly declared that “Gypsies would be monitored, and a census would be carried out” and that “Gypsies would also be fingerprinted and photographed and this would allow the authorities to identify them.”³⁰

As part of the measures, the interior minister of the interior stated repeatedly that the purpose of taking fingerprints “is to carry out a census of the Roma population in Italy,” and that to this end he intended to allow the fingerprinting of all Roma living in camps, including minors. The planned campaign was intended to register all Roma in Milan, Rome, and Naples by October 15, 2008. The European Parliament denounced these measures and called for an immediate halt to

mass fingerprinting of Roma, noting in particular that with regard to children it was unacceptable “to violate their fundamental rights and to criminalize them” in the name of protecting them.³¹

The emergency measures were formalized even after a series of interventions by European and regional human rights authorities expressing concern over the government’s proposals. On May 18, 2008, the Organization for Security and Cooperation’s (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) issued a press statement expressing concern at attacks on Roma communities in Italy, urging protection for vulnerable populations and an end to anti-Roma rhetoric by public officials and the media. Ambassador Christian Strohal, the director of the ODIHR, acknowledged frustrations about high crime levels, but said that “the current stigmatization of Roma and immigrant groups in Italy is dangerous as it contributes to fuelling tensions and increases the potential for violence.” The head of the ODIHR’s Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, Andrzej Mirga, described a “worrying rise of anti-Roma and anti-immigrant rhetoric in recent months across Italy,” and said there should be “no place for racial stereotyping and inciting hatred and violence in a tolerant democratic society.”³²

Similarly, European Union Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimir Spidla told the European Parliament that “the Roma people ... need to have the same liberties, the same rights as the others. They are not third country immigrants, they are citizens of the European Union and they should not be discriminated against.”³³

In a report of his findings from a visit to Rome on June 19 and 20, 2008, the Commissioner for Human Rights Hammarberg expressed “deep concern” at the “extremely violent” actions against Roma and Sinti in Italy, including the burning of Roma camps, “reportedly without effective protection by the police which has also carried out violent Roma camp raids.” In addition, Hammarberg expressed concern at discriminatory

statements by national leaders, and at legislation that conflated foreigners with criminals and identified the problem of security with “specific groups of population.” The commissioner recommended a prompt reaction by authorities “to condemn strongly and publicly all statements, irrespective of their origin, that generalize and stigmatize certain ethnic or social groups, such as Roma and Sinti or migrants,” while ensuring that government initiatives, including new security packages, “cannot be construed as facilitating or encouraging the objectionable stigmatization of the same groups.”

A further recommendation was for the government to fulfill its obligations “to prevent and effectively protect Roma and Sinti populations from violent acts by private individuals that put, inter alia, their life and limb in real danger.” To this end, the government must ensure that such incidents “always be subject to effective investigations, in accordance with the established case law of the European Court of Human Rights.”³⁴

At the end of July 2008, Interior Minister Maroni told Italian legislators he indignantly rejected Hammarberg’s assertions that “violent acts were perpetrated against Roma encampments without effective protection by the police forces,” and that police carried out violent raids on settlements. Maroni added that “these are outright lies, the police have never committed any act of violence of this nature.” A ministry note issued at the same time declared that the Council of Europe had been provided “all the data that show how the worries about the lack of human rights are completely groundless.”³⁵

Attacks on individuals and families continued even as Roma camps faced continued raids and destruction. On June 17, 2008, two men, aged 35 to 40, attacked the Covaciu family in the Gianbellino area of Milan. Twelve-year-old Rebecca Covaciu, her 14-year-old brother Inoi, and their parents were beaten and pursued into a public park; bystanders offered no assistance.³⁶

On June 13, 2008, a march protesting the “scapegoating” and persecution of Roma in Italy was held in Rome, as the first evictions from longstanding Roma settlements were reported. In what was described as the first protest of its kind in Italy, participants included “Roma women dancing in traditional dress, Italian intellectuals and slow-marching Jewish survivors from Germany’s death camps,” wearing “the same black triangle bearing the letter Z as worn by Gypsy inmates at the camps.”³⁷

Bulgaria

On the night of August 12, 2007, a group of an estimated dozen skinheads assaulted six Roma—three men and three women—as they were returning to their homes in Fakulteta, a predominantly Roma neighborhood of Sofia. Four victims were injured and one of them required hospitalization. The victims were interviewed by the Romani Baht Foundation, a Roma rights organization, which said the victims had telephoned for help to the district police but that police had refused to send a patrol car.³⁸

This attack has been identified as the incident that triggered Roma protests and disturbances beginning the following day. In an initial incident on the night of August 13, Roma reportedly smashed up a café in the Krasna Polyana district and attacked four suspected skinheads. On August 14, three to four hundred Roma gathered in the same area, some reportedly armed with sticks and farm implements, in apparent response to rumors that skinhead mobs were going to attack the Roma community. The *Sofia Echo* cited one “elderly Roma” in the crowd who complained that his community “was constantly tortured by the skinheads.” He said “skinheads were beating elderly Romani persons, children and pregnant women.” The same source said the protest lasted about four hours.³⁹

Members of the crowd reportedly clashed with police and caused some property damage, while acting in a threatening manner toward ethnic-Bulgarian observers.⁴⁰

A representative of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee said “there are many elements in it—ethnic tension, social problems, severe discrimination against the gypsy ghettos. ... The ghettos are like powder kegs which need just a small incident to explode.”⁴¹

On August 20, Sofia Mayor Boyko Borissov, announced a proposal that Roma individuals accompany police patrols in the city, participating in security measures in parts of the city “where conflicts between the Roma and Bulgarians occur on a regular basis.” He had also called for an enhanced police presence in these areas.⁴²

On August 22, the Romani Baht Foundation hosted a meeting between Roma community leaders and the Interior Minister that aimed at both identifying the underlying causes of concern among the community and agreeing to concrete measures to address them. In addition to agreeing to hold monthly consultative meetings in the future, the Interior Ministry reportedly agreed to provide increased police protection aimed expressly at protecting the Roma community. This was to include a 24-hour police presence in the largely Roma-inhabited Krasna Polyana and Fakulteta districts, as well as attention “to ‘vulnerable’ spots—terminal stops of the public transportation system, catering shops and others,” with special police centers to be created in those districts.⁴³

While developments in the capital received national and international attention, attacks on Roma continued to occur elsewhere in the country. In Samokov, on August 21, 2007, a verbal encounter between a group of ethnic Bulgarian boys and Roma teenagers in the town square led to a fight and the beating to death of a 17-year-old Roma boy named Asparuh. A local Roma leader told the press that the boy had been with a group of Roma friends “when a group of Bulgarians approached them and beat them for no reason.” Some one thousand Roma demonstrated in the square the next day to protest the killing.⁴⁴ According to the Bulgarian news agency *Mediapool*, psychologist Hristo Monov stated

that the Bulgarian teenagers attacked the Romani youth because “they thought that Gypsies must not be let into the central part of the town.”⁴⁵ Four ethnic Bulgarian teenagers were detained in relation to the incident, but local authorities rejected claims that the incident was founded on ethnic prejudice. The Roma community expressed concern with the possibility of further violence.⁴⁶

The early August incidents, in which Roma took to the streets in Sofia, were taken as an opportunity by extreme nationalist groups and parties in Bulgaria, who cited the disturbances as evidence that Roma posed a threat to ordinary Bulgarians. On August 20, Vladimir Rasate, leader of the far-right Bulgarian National Union (BNU) announced the formation of a National Guard Party tied expressly to xenophobic fears of Roma. “We are witnessing how Bulgarians have been terrorized by Roma for the past 17 years and all governments are to blame for that because there is no punishment for the perpetrators,” declared Rasate, as 12 prototype militiamen paraded in uniform. On August 21, however, Interior Minister Roumen Petkov declared that “there will be no such thing as a national guard,” while threatening punishment for those who “disturb public order or cause ethnic tension.”⁴⁷

After meeting with Roma leaders, Sofia Mayor Boyko Borissov told the media that the BNU National Guard idea was “complete nonsense,” and announced his plan to begin police patrols with Roma participation. The agreement reached by the Interior Ministry and Roma leaders on August 22 formalized a national commitment for a 24-hour-a-day police presence in crucial districts.⁴⁸

Czech Republic

In Olomouc, on August 24, 2007, a group shouting anti-Roma epithets attacked two young Roma Czechs, aged 18 and 23, at an open air cinema. The younger victim received facial injuries while the other, who was

knocked to the ground and kicked, suffered a broken nose and a concussion.

A few months earlier, in April, a criminal complaint was brought concerning a statement by Deputy Prime Minister and Christian Democrat leader Jiří Čunek. As mayor of Vsetín, Čunek was cited as declaring that “in order to be entitled to state subsidies like Roma, other people would need to get a suntan, behave in a disorderly way and light fires in town squares before politicians would regard them as badly off.”⁴⁹

Also in April, the Czech Senate declined to strip Senator Liana Janáčková of her parliamentary immunity in the context of an investigation under hate speech laws for racist statements concerning Roma. Janáčková, who is also mayor of Mariánské Hory and Hulváky district of Ostrava, was recorded as suggesting that problems in a Romany settlement could be resolved with “dynamite,” that Roma had too many children, and that she believed they should be held behind an electric fence:

Unfortunately, I’m a racist, I disagree with the integration of gypsies and their living across the district. Unfortunately, we’ve chosen Bedřiska [locality], therefore they will be there, behind a tall fence with electricity.⁵⁰

As in other new E.U. member states of Eastern Europe, 2007 saw the creation in the Czech Republic of a formal paramilitary structure expressly founded on anti-Roma and anti-immigrant foundations. In December 2007, the extreme nationalist National Party announced that it would begin recruiting members of a paramilitary National Guard in response to “the growing fear of the behavior of unadaptable minorities and immigrants,” and the failings of the national police. The creation of the guard was announced at a demonstration on October 28, 2007. Interior Minister Ivan Langer said the group was “unacceptable” and would be under close police surveillance.⁵¹

In a March 2008 summary of submissions from nongovernmental organizations for the Universal

Periodic Review of the Czech Republic, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted concerns over both “private individuals and State actors who have threatened the lives of Roma.” Amnesty International, in particular, had stressed that “incidents of violence against Roma are reported to have been perpetrated by youths with extreme racist views;” even when involving repeat offenders, attackers received “only light or suspended sentences.” Thomas Hammarberg, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, in turn, was cited expressing his hope that increased awareness of racial motivations in crimes of violence by police and prosecutors would lead “to additional prosecutions and to the imposition of sanctions which are proportionate to the gravity of this type of crime and sufficiently dissuasive for the future.”

The same OHCHR report cited submissions on the virulent “hate speech” that accompanied direct and indirect discrimination against Roma. According to NGO submissions, including those of the European Roma Rights Center:

The regular and systemic human rights abuses against Roma in the Czech Republic are aggravated by the fact that anti-Romani hate speech is a regular part of public discourse in the country. Anti-Romani statements are a standard and often unquestioned part of public life in the Czech Republic, and officials as high-ranking as the Prime Minister, the President, Senators (including members of the Senate’s Human Rights Committee), other members of the cabinet, and many local officials have either made anti-Romani statements or failed to counteract speeches denigrating the dignity of the Roma.⁵²

Greece

In Greece, appalling housing for Roma and arbitrary actions expelling Roma from settlements were condemned by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, after a December 2006 visit. The Commissioner had also condemned the apparent relation between government inaction and

threatening behavior of ordinary citizens who rejected Roma presence near their communities. In a letter made public in 2007, to which Greek authorities made no response, Hammarberg described his visits to Roma settlements and the seeming indifference of police to the threatening behavior of people hostile to Roma:

I saw Roma families living in very poor conditions. Also, I met with a family whose simple habitat had been bulldozed away that same morning. It was obvious that the “procedures” for making them homeless were in total contradiction to human rights standards. ... I was also disturbed to notice that non-Roma people appeared on both sites during my visit and behaved in an aggressive, threatening manner to the extent that my interviews with some of the Roma families were disturbed. I had expected that the police would have offered more obvious protection.⁵³

Romania

The explosion of anti-Romanian and anti-Roma sentiment in Italy in November 2007 led to protests by European Union institutions and leaders, and considerable tensions between Italy and Romania. Some Romanian political leaders who stood up for the plight of their conationals in Italy, however, qualified their stance with an echo of Italian anti-Roma sentiment, in some cases vilifying Romanian Roma in much the same terms as their Italian counterparts.

While demanding the respect and rights accorded all E.U. citizens for Romanians in Italy, the implication of the statements of Romanian leaders was that they distinguished their Roma citizens from other nationals. Some presented Roma as an embarrassment to Romania, while others questioned whether Roma who carried Romanian passports should really be considered Romanian.

Foreign Minister Adrian Cioroianu, for example, in a press conference shortly after the crisis broke, expressed concern over “violent crimes committed by Romanians and ‘so-called Romanians’ of Roma origin

who are labeled as Romanians only because they carry that country’s passport.”⁵⁴ On November 4, 2007, at the height of the crisis in Italy, Cioroianu told *Antena 3* television that he was considering “buying a piece of land in the Egyptian desert to send there all the people who tarnish the country’s image.”⁵⁵

President Traian Băsescu was widely quoted after an incident on May 19, 2007, in which he insulted journalist Andreea Pana, dismissing her by asking “don’t you have anything to do today?” and commenting: “how aggressive that stinky gypsy was.” (He subsequently apologized).⁵⁶

On October 23, 2007, President Băsescu publicly apologized for the nation’s role in the Roma Holocaust, the Porajmos, in the first statement of its kind by a Romanian leader. Speaking in part in the Romani language, he also called for the story of the Nazi genocide of Roma to be taught in schools. Băsescu awarded three survivors of the Porajmos with an Order for Faithful Services.

Russian Federation

Stereotyped as criminals, Roma have become a preferred scapegoat for criminality in parts of the the Russian Federation, as in Central and Eastern Europe. The public face of Russian internal security policy since the 1990s has associated particular national groups with the challenges of terrorism, corruption, and “the war on drugs.” The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) observed that “the ‘war on drugs’ gradually generated, during the 1990s, the image of the typical drug dealer, namely, the ‘Gypsy.’” The result was that “the identification of the Roma with drug dealing has reached a point of near synonymous usage in the media.”⁵⁷

In the 2006 report on racial profiling in Russia, the Open Society Institute identified the stereotyping of Roma in the context of the larger pattern of racist stereotyping and discrimination against migrant workers:

Despite the labor shortage and the economic necessity of migration in Russia today, the media negatively depicts migrant workers as taking jobs from Russians. More odiously, the media stereotypes minority ethnic nationalities as criminals and drug dealers. Roma, in particular, have been singled out for unsubstantiated accusations of involvement in the drug trade.⁵⁸

In practice, this disparaging public posture is echoed by the operational policies of public authorities and police. This includes persistent racial profiling in police stops and searches, sometimes extending to raids of entire Roma communities, during which homes are damaged or destroyed, property stolen, and individuals are subjected to police brutality and extortion. This occurs in the context of a general bias within the criminal justice system that translates into persistent police violence against Roma at the time of arrest and while in custody as well as a pattern of disproportionate arrests and prosecutions.

Victims of police abuse and official discrimination have little prospect of remedy for private violence as well. As a result, Roma victims are hesitant to file formal complaints of hate crimes against them, feeling a lack of confidence in public authorities and fearing further abuse. The European Roma Rights Center (ECCR) notes that racial discrimination against Roma “creates an environment in which both public officials and private actors feel confident that they will be absolved from responsibility for racially motivated violence and abuse and exposes the victims to further violence and abuse.”⁵⁹

In one particularly horrific incident of anti-Roma violence, on September 10, 2007, masked men broke into the home of the Lyalikov family in Ordzhonikidze, Ingushetia, and shot dead the father and two adult sons. Police told the media the crime was motivated by “ethnic hatred.”⁶⁰

Serbia

On the night of August 10, 2007, at least five young men went to a park in Novi Beograd, where they shouted insults at Roma living there, and set fire to a nylon sheet covering the hut of a Roma woman. Roma confronted the attackers, and the woman was reportedly seriously injured in the ensuing fight. Police had reportedly identified five of the attackers, including a minor, and were filing charges of “inflicting grievous bodily harm and inciting ethnic, racial and religious hatred and intolerance.”

In Belgrade, on the night of August 16, 2007, three men armed with chains attacked Femija Bajrami, a 45-year-old Roma man, knocking him to the ground and beating him. Bajrami, a resident of the suburb Zemun, required medical attention. Roma community members in Zemun told the media that anti-Roma assaults were frequent, and radio station B92 said that Belgrade police had recorded five attacks on Roma in the first two weeks of August alone.⁶¹

In a statement on August 24, 2007, the head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe mission in Serbia, Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, expressed serious concern over hate crimes against Roma in Serbia and called upon authorities to apprehend the suspects, prosecute the perpetrators, and prevent further such attacks. He said that “assaults on Roma, destruction of their homes and hate speech graffiti represent attacks on the integrity of the Roma and violate their basic human rights.” He expressed concern regarding the situation of “several hundred Roma families living under the Gazela Bridge in Belgrade,” in the face of city plans to destroy the settlement, and called on city authorities to ensure alternative housing.⁶²

Slovakia

In May 2007, in Záhorská Ves, five masked men dressed to imitate policemen attacked the Sarközy family in a makeshift shelter at the site of the family compound that was destroyed in a similar attack in 2003. The attackers reportedly beat members of the family, including a mother and child, with wooden clubs and iron rods and destroyed all of their furniture.⁶³

The Sarközy family had been under threat since September 29, 2003, when masked men attacked the compound of the Sarközy and Malik families in Záhorská Ves, beating members of the two extended families—then totaling 16 persons—with baseball bats and other weapons, causing serious injuries and destroying property.⁶⁴ These and subsequent incidents of violence were investigated by a special unit in Slovakia's Police Presidium only after "allegations arose regarding the possible involvement of local government officials and the failure of local police to accept testimony and evidence relating to the case. Roma activists also alleged that local officials attempted to relocate victims to another village."⁶⁵

The U.S. Department of State's report on human rights in the Slovak Republic in 2007 concluded that "Roma were particularly singled out for violence," with "skinhead and neo-Nazi violence against Roma and other minorities continu[ing] to be a serious problem." While noting that police "detained numerous individuals for attacks against Roma motivated by racial hatred," there were also reports that police mistreated Roma. Incidents cited in the report included an assault on April 8, 2007, when three men broke into a Romani home in Trebišov and assaulted several family members; it said the three were arrested and charged. In another incident reported by the Department of State, on August 30, 2007 "a Romani man and his wife were attacked and seriously wounded in Detva." Although suspects were detained, no charges were brought, and human rights

groups "asserted that the police did not investigate the case properly."⁶⁶

Slovenia

Nongovernmental organizations in January 2007 lodged a complaint with the official equality body, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, concerning the forced expulsion through mob action of an extended Roma family from the village of Ambrus, near Ljubljana, in October 2006. The mob set fire to the compound of the Strohan family as police stood by and forced over 30 residents to flee. The Advocate had failed to produce an opinion on the matter by the end of 2007—the petition claimed the family was the object of direct discrimination by reason of its ethnic origin.⁶⁷

Ukraine

The U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), in the January 2008 concluding observations on the implementation by Ukraine of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, identified as a matter of concern reports of the failure to provide effective protection against discrimination and violence against Roma, as well as anti-Roma police abuse. Moreover, it stressed "the reluctance of the police to investigate properly such incidents, and the tendency to prosecute and sentence perpetrators of such acts under lenient criminal law provisions on 'hooliganism.'"

In the *Third Report on Ukraine*, released in February 2008, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), said it had continued to receive reports that police "illegally arrest and harass members of Roma communities," and that "Roma do not receive an adequate response from the police when they are the victims of crime." ECRI restated the recommendation of its previous report that Ukrainian authorities:

Address manifestations of unlawful behavior on the part of law enforcement officials generally, and to take meas-

ures to ensure that the police react promptly and effectively to all crimes, including those committed against Roma and to ensure that the racist element of such offences is duly taken into account.⁶⁸

In *Proceedings Discontinued: The Inertia of Roma Rights Change in Ukraine*, a report released in December 2006 and incorporating research conducted from 2004-2006, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) described a pattern of mob violence that occurred in the face of the general indifference or acquiescence of local authorities. It said attacks can take the form of “random violence against individual homes or pogrom-like assaults against entire communities,” their purposes including “to terrorize, to force a move out of a neighborhood, or vigilante acts of vengeance for crimes associated with Roma.” Police, in turn, “rarely interfere,” creating an environment of impunity in which violence against Roma is encouraged.⁶⁹

United Kingdom

High levels of racist violence in the United Kingdom extend to the Roma community. Minority Rights Group International has reported that there have been racist attacks on campsites in the U.K., many of which are not reported to the police.⁷⁰

Police in the United Kingdom have made considerable efforts to reach out to victim communities and have established some of the most comprehensive hate crime reporting systems in Europe, although still recognize high levels of underreporting. Police do not record separately violence targeting Roma.

Gay McDougall, the U.N. Independent Expert on Minority Issues, noted in connection with the United Kingdom’s *Gypsy, Roma, and Traveler History Month* that the some 300,000 people who belong to these communities “face serious discrimination, exclusion, poverty and even violence. The equation is a simple one: ... the violations of the rights of members of these communities, in all walks of life, are due to the pervasive effects of racial discrimination and centuries of marginalization and exclusion that persist today. Negative and inaccurate reporting by certain sectors of the media has fuelled hostile attitudes towards Gypsies, Roma and Travelers.”⁷¹

Section Endnotes

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