



Group for International  
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Wednesday, November 7, 2007

**European motion to oppose the phenomenon of discrimination  
against the Gypsies in Italy.  
Presentation of the Romanesia Project to encourage the  
integration of Gypsies into Italian and Romanian society, the  
development of their traditional activities and the divulging of  
their history and culture.**

Prepared for  
**Parliamentary Assembly**  
Assemblée parlementaire

Prepared by  
**EveryOne Group**  
Roberto Malini  
Matteo Pegoraro  
Dario Picciau

**Please note:** on the suggestion of Matt T. Salo, President of the Gypsy Lore Society (USA) and our consultant, we have used the expression “gypsies” when referring to the ethnic group - mistakenly defined as “nomads” - in the general sense. When we are referring to specific groups (Roma, Sinti, Ludar and Traveller) we have used the group name.

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Presented by

 **EveryOne**

Group for International Cooperation on Human Rights Culture

**European motion to oppose the phenomenon of discrimination against the Gypsies in Italy.**

**Presentation of the Romanesia Project to encourage the integration of Gypsies into Italian and Romanian society, the development of their traditional activities and the divulging of their history and culture.**

The persecution the Italian institutions are perpetuating against Gypsies, described perfectly by Barbie Nadeau in the article “New Union, Old Prejudices” (Newsweek, October 5, 2007) has become even more brutal.

The murder of Giovanna Reggiani by a Gypsy has triggered off a terrible racial campaign led by Italian politicians and the Italian media. The day after the crime, the decree was approved and published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale which foresees the possibility of driving away European citizens for security reasons. In fact, tragic clearances of Gypsy camps and deportations have begun all over Italy. It has effected the weakest who live on the fringes of the cities: nomad families thrown out onto the streets in the middle of winter, surrounded by racial hatred of ordinary people influenced by a vast media campaign aimed at criminalizing Gypsies.

The Romanian Foreign Office has made an official complaint against xenophobia in Italy, particularly after a punitive expedition in Rome carried out by a gang of armed racists, who, their faces covered, attacked four Gypsies, savagely beating them up and leaving one of them in a critical condition.

The nomad is now in Viterbo hospital. In the meantime, the leaders of the Left and Right have contributed to stirring up hatred with their declarations. Gianfranco Fini, the leader of Alleanza Nazionale and party representative in the Casa delle Libertà, has put forward as the solution to the problem the “destruction of the camps and deportation of those who have no means of support”.

This means that the thousands of poor, 50% children, without any health care, undernourished, poorly-dressed and often sick, are supposed to find within three months of their arrival in Italy a permanent job and lodgings suited to the number of people in the family: a condition that only a few fortunate Italians are guaranteed.

But most of the Italian politicians, both Left and Right wing, tend to follow the same line. An exception are the groups that are traditionally linked to battles for human rights. Fini himself in the “Corriere della Sera” published November 4, 2007 gave an interview in which he calls for, against the Gypsies, “a policy made up of intransigence, deportations, order and legality”. And he clarifies his crusade: «We have to be clear about integration: there are those who don't want to integrate because they refuse to accept the values and principles of the society they live in. I ask myself how it is possible to integrate people who consider theft almost admissible and not immoral. People who consider it admissible not to work, because it is the women's job, at times resorting to prostitution. People who have no qualms about kidnapping children or generating children destined for begging on the streets. Talking about integration for those with a “culture” of this kind does not make sense».

Fini produces against the Gypsies the same prejudices used by Nazi-Fascist propaganda, and in centuries past by the Inquisition - among which the Gypsy bogeyman who kidnaps children. Over the last 100 years in Italy there is no record of one sentence being inflicted on a Gypsy for kidnapping a child. In a moment of great tension between Italian citizens and Gypsies, the media continues to foment hatred.

Roberto Calderoli of the Lega Nord declares: «Patrols are the only possible form of legitimate self-defence available to citizens. Patrols I myself would take part in”. In a civilized country, “not administrated by friends of Gypsies, terrorists, criminals and

rogues, these above-mentioned Gypsies would immediately be driven away, metaphorically speaking, with a kick up the backside»

The Romanian who was brutally beaten up by a gang of racists in Rome is still in hospital, yet the “Corriere della Sera” is publishing a survey by Renato Mannheimer, aimed at presenting Gypsies as the most “odious” ethnic group among those living in Italy.

The journalist writes: “If one asks the Italians what the first thing that comes to mind is when I say the word ‘Rom’ or ‘Gypsy’, the most frequent reply (more than one in four) is ‘thief’ followed by ‘nomad’. Faced with this situation it is not surprising that 70% of Italians consider it difficult, if not impossible, to live alongside Gypsies”.

Walter Veltroni, the Mayor of Rome and leader of the PD, calls for “emergency action. We cannot ignore the problem, it is an important national issue that concerns all the large cities.”

Veltroni is referring to police intervention with camp clearances and deportations towards poverty and death in Romania (or to countries where nomads are still persecuted) and not humanitarian aid for a people reduced to conditions of such hardship that their life span is now down to 47 years compared to the 80 years of other European citizens. The declarations of the Rome Prefect Achille Serra, published in the November 5th edition of Newsweek proved emblematic. Finding himself in a gypsy camp in which he noticed the absence of women, he turned to a journalist from the Corriere della Sera and said: “Perhaps they’re on the Metro pick-pocketing, while the men are asleep after spending the night breaking into homes”.

We must also emphasize how Italy is exploiting the EU law 2004/38/CE on the freedom of circulation for EU citizens through legislative decree 30 from February 6, 2007, which is, in fact, a racial law, because both “removal for a lack of means of sustenance” and “removal for reasons of security” are in violation of all the Conventions on Human Rights and Protection of Ethnic Minorities (among which the Copenhagen Declaration in 1993).

The “social dangerousness” of the people removed is decided by authorities who do not have an antiracist culture (see the case of the Livorno fire, in which, in spite of a racist group claiming responsibility for the murder of four Gypsy children, the authorities imprisoned and condemned the parents of the young victims - parents who now risk deportation as they are considered “dangerous” !) At the same time

the poverty caused by discrimination and the lack of projects to help them integrate in the world of labour cannot be used as an excuse for their deportation.

Gypsies in this racist Italy do not have any chance of finding a job and decent lodgings, and the only course of action should be that of defending their rights in obtaining means of support and lodgings. *Everyone Group* is well aware of the problems, we find huge obstacles when we attempt to find a job and home for the Gypsy people - in spite of self-financing the first three-months rent and endless emergencies.

The same goes for the anti-racist and humanitarian work of a few associations committed to defending the rights of the Gypsies. The Church does very little, the State does nothing. Italy has always persecuted Gypsies, forcing them to live in the dirtiest, most-polluted and degraded areas. Amnesty International has denounced the abuse carried out on the Gypsies by the police, especially where children are concerned. The Italian press has for many years been conducting a slanderous and ignoble campaign against nomads, presenting them as thieves, exploiters of children, idlers, child kidnappers and violent.

As we said before, the Gypsies have no chance of defending themselves before the magistrates, and to avoid being sent to prison they are often forced to plea bargain for crimes they have never committed.

When a camp is cleared, a procession of desperate, emaciated families, with inadequate clothing, often barefoot, without food and medicines, are forced to wander around until they find another squalid shelter, from where they will again be driven away by the authorities, using harsh methods against men, women and children. Gypsies are peaceful people. For centuries they were slaves in Romania and persecuted throughout Europe. From 500,000 to 1,000,000 of them perished during the Holocaust. Post-Fascist Italy and post-Nazi Germany then failed to return the thousands of homes and properties confiscated from them, and the right to live in camps, (there were 10,000 of them in Italy, some of them had been camps set aside for nomads for centuries).

We are now witnessing a new Holocaust that is taking place among total indifference, one that institutions and media – which is becoming more and more racist – are hiding, covering each other's crimes against these people. There are thousands of Gypsy children, women, and men dying in this hidden extermination, yet no one speaks or writes about it. The few human rights associations that fight

for nomads' rights undergo all kinds of pressure and threats: newspapers, television and radio censor their efforts to divulge the news.

The lecturers in the Rom, Sinti and Kale culture at the University of Paris, Marcel Courthiade (section head) and Saimir Mile (member of the department of Rom, Sinti and Kale culture and rights of *EveryOne Group*) agree with the analysis of the Italian situation reported on various occasions by our group and affirm that there are "many similarities with the early stage of fascism".

It is necessary for Europe to intervene with serious inspections and harsh measures in order that the persecution Italy is carrying out against Gypsies, in violation of the most basic human rights, becomes unacceptable in a democratic and civil world. That is why we are requesting urgent intervention from the European Council and the European Court of Human Rights.

**EveryOne Group, in consideration of all the points laid out in this motion, and acting as promoter of initiatives aimed at opposing discrimination against gypsies and encouraging a dignified integration into Italian and European society urgently requests intervention from the European Council and the European Court of Human Rights in order that Italy:**

**a)** is asked to withdraw the emergency decree of November 1st, 2007, number 181. on the matter of urgent dispositions involving the removal of Gypsies from Italian territory for security reasons:

**b)** is asked to adhere to the European policy that admits expulsion only on grounds of national security and terrorism (on condition that the sentences issued against the Roma, Sinti and Travellers are based on proven crimes and not just on prejudice, as often happens unfortunately in Italian courts);

**c)** asks that the competence on the matter of expulsions be returned to the magistrates, and not the mayors and prefects:

**d)** asks for a reintroduction of the regulations contained in the Mancino law with specific dispositions on racism;

**e)** asks for European and ministerial funds to be granted for projects aimed at

improving the conditions of the Gypsy population both in Italy and their country of origin. EveryOne Group is promoting throughout Europe the Romanesia Project, a brief description of which is attached. The Romanesia Project was created in synergy with experts in gypsy culture and lifestyle and with important figures in the Roma world. It was created to finally encourage a serious and positive integration of the Roma and Sinti into Italian society. The project is an attempt to create suitable structures in Romania (for Romanian gypsies) to develop the traditional activities in which gypsies excel, mainly agriculture and animal farming with houses, on collective farms suited to their domestic and social habits. This is a new idea developed after a careful study of the needs of the Gypsy people: the Romanesia Project, which EveryOne Group is willing to discuss and explain in greater detail to interested parties.

**f)** asks that training and refresher courses that make use of experts on the subject of fighting discrimination (including the EveryOne Group and its consultant) and prejudice against the Gypsies be offered to the Italian institutions, Police Force, Carabinieri and the authorities in general;

**g)** asks that socio-cultural educational awareness programmes be set up directed at Italian citizens, starting from children and young people. Programmes which have the aim of teaching respect for the Gypsy peoples and a correct knowledge of their history and culture while promoting the protection of their fundamental human rights. In this sector EveryOne Group backs the proposal for a Memorial Museum in Italy which will also serve as an observatory dedicated to the Roma, Sinti and Kale culture, as well as to Gypsy history and the Porrajmos - the Gypsy Holocaust. Concerning this initiative, EveryOne Group is asking for donations of exhibits, documents, art objects, old and new photographs to form the basis of the collection of the memorial museum. It is also offering its contribution towards its creation and its educational and antiracist objectives.

**h)** asks for a campaign to be addressed to the media in order that it becomes aware of, respects and follows an ethical protocol and avoids the diffusion of racist ways of thinking against Gypsies through the press, radio and TV – something which has been taking place in a serious manner in Italy for many years. EveryOne Group is willing to collaborate on the writing up of this ethical code if necessary by contributing its experience and competence in the subject;

**i)** asks that the brutal clearance of non-authorized camps and summary expulsions cease immediately until concrete integration projects are underway, socio-

employment projects with social assistance and health care that will allow Gypsies on Italian territory to enjoy equal opportunities, equal dignity and equal rights to those of other EU citizens.

I) we ask that regular inspections be carried out by European authorities and organizations that defend the rights of ethnic minorities in order to prevent further acts of discrimination, persecution and criminalization of the Gypsy people in Italy.

Signed

***EveryOne Group***

**Roberto Malini**

**Matteo Pegoraro**

**Dario Picciau**

**Salvatore Conte**

**Saimir Mile**

**Ahmad Rafat**

**Aisha Ayari**

**Arsham Parsi**

**Laura Todisco**

**Glenys Robinson**

**Steed Gamero**

**Fabio Patronelli**

**Alessandro Matta**

**Christos Papaioannou**

**Stellian Covaciu**

**Udila Ciurar**

***Promoters and Consultants***

**La voix des Rrom** (Paris)

**Gypsy Lore Society** (Usa)

**Group of Migrants & Refugees of Salonica**

**Yakaar Italia Senegal** Association

**Union Gypsy**

**Gypsy Studies in Paris**

**Roma Right Watch**

**Union Romani**

**Opera Nomadi**

**Cingeneyiz Association** (Gypsies in Turkey)

**Romani Yah**, Association and Newspaper of Romas from Transcarpathia

**Roma Virtual Network**

**Tamara Deuel (Israele)**, Holocaust survivor, activist against discrimination against gypsies

**La Route de Elissa**

**Mercedes Lourdes Frias**, Italian Republic Deputee (Rifondazione Comunista - Sinistra Europea)

**Etudes Tsiganes (Paris)**

**Alain Reyniers**, cultural anthropologist at the de Louvain-La-Neuve University (Belgium), researcher of Rom, Sinti and Kalé culture

**Centre for Gypsy Research**

**European Roma Information Office**

**Roma Diplomacy Programme**

**John Pearson**, Secretary, Democratic Socialist Alliance,  
UK

**Gady Castel (Israele)**, film director, director of the  
Festival of Jewish Cinema and Culture "Jewish Eyes" of  
Tel Aviv, documentary maker on the Holocaust

**Cristina Matricardi**, founder of the first Asilo Interetnico  
(Interethnic kindergarten) "Oasis" - Genoa

**Maria Eugenia Esparragoza**, cultural mediator, member  
of Comitato Tecnico Ministeriale Intercultura

**Professor Matt T. Salo**, researcher and editor, expert in  
gypsy culture

**Emiliano Laurenzi**, journalist

**Paolo Buconi**, Yiddish e Klezmer musician

**Marius Benta**, Seven Times publisher (Romania)

**Ted Coombs**, Director of the Hilo Art Museum  
(Holocaust and Genocide art)

**Steve Davey**, Co-Director of the Hilo Art Museum  
(Holocaust and Genocide Art)

**Mirjam Pinkhof**, Shoah survivor, Holocaust's heroine,  
she saved 70 Jewish children from the Nazi

**Halina Birenbaum**, Shoah survivor, writer and teacher

**Oni Onhaus**, Witness of the Holocaust

**Manzi Onhaus**, Auschwitz survivor

**Elisheva Zimet**, Auschwitz survivor

**Alice Offenbacher**, Bergen Belsen survivor

**Mirko Bezzecchi**, Italian Rom, Porrajmos survivor

**Antonia Bezzecchi**, Italian Rom, Porrajmos survivor

**Hanneli Pick-Goslar**, friend of Anne Frank, Holocaust  
survivor

**Michael Petrelis**, veteran Human Rights Advocate (Usa)

**Stichting Buitenlandse Partner**

**Professor Saimir Mile**, Roma of Albanian origin, jurist,  
lecturer in Roma Sinti and Kale culture at the University  
of Paris, Secretary-general of the Centre of Research  
and Action Against all Forms of Racism in France,  
member of the EveryOne Group

**Marcel Courthiade**, emeritus professor, holder of chair  
in Roma, Sinti and Kale languages at the University of  
Paris.

**Kibbutz Netzer Sereni**, Israel

**Antonia Arslan**, essayist and writer

**Caffé Shakerato** - Intercultura - Genoa

**Simona Titti** -Caritas Livorno

**Gazeta de Sud**, Cotidian al oltenilor e pretutindeni  
(Romania)

**Oana Olaru**, Journalist (Romania)

**Jacques Stroumsa**, violinist, writer, Auschwitz survivor



Group for International Cooperation on Human Rights Culture

## Romanesia Project.

**The institutionalised discrimination against Gypsies living in Italy, results in considerable sums being spent to discourage their presence and not to activate programmes designed to improve their living conditions.**

Italy provides ever increasing budget funds to induce purge actions: i.e. censuses followed by the clearing and demolition of camping sites, shelters where they live. It is proposed to invest further millions of Euros of public funds to be spent in the racial war against Gypsies.

The case of Rome is exemplary: Tens of thousands of Euros are spent each year in an attempt to destroy all Gypsy sites and to persecute their families. It is estimated that there are about 8 to 10 thousand Gypsies in Rome, where for the same sum, or even less (suffice that the goodwill of local enterprises could be encouraged to collaborate by offering them tax incentives and the like, in exchange for their labour) the total sums could then be destined to set up about 50 permanent sites each to accommodate 40 families. These would allow them to have a fixed official address with all the conveniences, water, electricity, etc., that would allow the Gypsies to progressively integrate into the work force of the capital.

The implementation of schools with special courses would eventually integrate the families which might even be able to afford rent, possibly with some kind of subsidy and would eventually allow admittance of the children to state schools. (Integration would reduce discrimination, since the life-style would slowly approach that of the Italians).

Instead, there are and there will continue to be, forced demolition of sites or removal to alternative inadequate and ever worse conditions. However, the nomads cannot just disappear from sight and if extradited to Romania (if Romania is prepared to repatriate thousands of them), they will be forced to try to re-enter Italy, because of the lack of any assistance in their own country. This racist folly cannot bring about anything good, only chaos and an increased mortality among the Gypsies.

*EveryOne Group* which strives for the Welfare and Rights of the Gypsies, Rom, Sinti and Kale , has conducted a study of possible solutions to be adopted in Italy, also valid for Romania, for the re-integration of Romanian Gypsies in Romania.

The Romanesia Project is to establish collective farms in Romania where Gypsy families can live and carry on their traditional activities, such as biological agriculture and breeding horses, cattle and other farms animals. The idea of Romanesia – explains Roberto Malini, expert in the history and culture of nomadic populations and founder member of the *EveryOne Group*, was conceived after meeting several nomads during the demolition of a gypsy camp in Milan near the Triboniano area where several Romanian Gypsies had settled. An Italian woman by the name of Jesmine, married to a Romanian Gypsy with two children, told me that the Gypsies love Romania very much and the only reason they migrate is because of the poverty and the impossibility of finding work in Romania. Therefore, we thought of creating an ideal strip of land, piece by piece, mainly in Romania, but also in Italy with farms and living quarters, with crop growing and animal husbandry.

Romanesia is a geographical name connected to the origin of their language, 'Romanes'. The scheme developed thanks to the synergies of scholars of the nomad culture and traditions, experts in economic organisation, sustainers of Human Rights and above all, of Gypsy families.

It is hoped that the Italian and European institutions will sponsor and be involved in the realisation of this scheme by investing in the Project.

Meanwhile, *EveryOne Group* started the scheme by collecting private donations. *EveryOne Group* has donated valuable art works that will be sold directly or offered by auction in several venues in Italy.

## Art for Human Rights

**To create the first farm which will accommodate 5 Romanian Gypsy families who are now living in Italy, Gruppo EveryOne organized an auction of important contemporary art works. There is a need, however, that the initiatives already underway by the few private citizens and associations serve as an example and intermediary for major institutional interventions.**

The revenue obtained from the auction will go entirely towards the creation of a collective farm in Romania (Romanesia 1). This online auction will be followed by other auctions and exhibitions in prestigious centres, starting with the Broletto Room in Pavia. It is very important that the local citizens actively participate at the auction or give donations via a bank account, so that from then on, Gypsies may initiate a new life-style reserved for nomadic peoples (Rom, Sinti and Kale), without further ethnic conflicts, evacuations which leave poor families out in the road, violent racist patrols, camps being set on fire, intolerance and discrimination.

We must remember that the conditions Gypsies live in right now have lowered their average life expectancy to just 47 years, against the 80 years of other European citizens, while the infant mortality rate is six times that of the average. Also to be remembered is hunger, hardship, inclement weather and secular lack of care has undermined the health of many Gypsies, who are affected by chronic illnesses, some of them serious. It is also very important that the institutions adhere to the Gypsy Project whose aim it is to create jobs and living conditions for Gypsies in Romania, with non-refundable investment funds and facilitated loans, as long as the humanitarian aspect is always the prime concern and never the speculative one. Only with the contribution of all the components of Italian society will it be possible to transform this vision into a concrete reality, which can change the pain of a people into a hope for life and the maintenance of age-old traditions. The first Online Auction for the Gypsy Project begins with works of great artistic value, works worthy of mention in the most prestigious collections of contemporary art; every work of Graphic Art will come with a Certificate of Authenticity, certified according to

controls made from the most important art catalogues and publications, the catalogues and publications cited on the certificates themselves.

**Henri Matisse**, “Nude Woman”, lithograph, 1949, 28 x 38 cms, signed “H. Matisse”, on the back, original text from the graphic art magazine *Derriere le Miroir*; Publisher: *Derriere le Miroir/Maeght Editeur*, May 1952. Perfect condition.

**Pablo Ruiz Picasso**: “Portrait of Man”, lithograph, signed in green pencil (next to the signature, a “lip” sketch in green pencil), 39, 5 x 30, 5 cms from the series “40 drawings by Picasso en Marge du Buffon”, Paris: Berggruen, 1957, first edition, number 228/2226. Paris, private collection. Folio, 89 pages with text in French, 40 lithographs. Ref: Bloch 326; Baer 1028/B/a; Goeppert/Cramer 84; Berggruen 272.

**Marc Chagall**, “Ange bleu sur Vitebsck”, lithograph, 1951, 28 x 38 cms, signed, on the back, original text from the graphic art magazine *Derriere le Miroir*, Publisher: *Derriere le Miroir/Maeght Editeur N° 27*, 1950.

## Oriental Art

**Ando Hiroshige** (Ukiyo-e artist, 1797-1858, also known by the name of: Utagawa Hiroshige, Ichiryusai Hiroshige), “Mondo fluttuante”, silograph ukiyo-e, 15.5 x 22 cms, circa 1830 – 1835 (Tokugawa period); original graphic art of Hiroshige, one of the most important Maestri of all times of Japanese art . Katsushika Hokusai (1760 – 1849), “Paesaggi del Giappone”, silograph ukiyo-e, 16 x 24 cms, circa 1825 – 1830; delicate impression by the greatest Maestro of Ukiyo-e art.

## Graphics: International Modern Art.

**Picasso** (no. 2),

**Matisse** (no. 2),

**Marc Chagall** (no 1),

**Antoni Tapies** (no 2),

**Hans Arp** (no 1),

**Calder** (no 1);

## Graphics: Italian Modern Art

**Alberto Giacometti** (no 2),

**Franz Borghese** (no 1),

**Franco Gentilizi** (no 1),

**Francesco Messina** (no 1),

**Virgilio Guidi** (no 1),

**Domenico Cantatore** (no 1),

**Ennio Borlotti** (no 1).

Other artists, amongst which the original works of **Jasmine** (Gypsy artist) and **Roberto Malini**, who together painted the “*Wheels*” for the series “*Carovan of Fire*”.

Drawings by Great European Schools

**Pierre Auguste Renoir** (school of, no 1),

**J:T:W: Turner** (school of, no 1)



Group for International Cooperation on Human Rights Culture

**Racist Italy Persecutes the Gypsies**

# Newsweek®

Newsweek has published an article about the persecution the Italian authorities (with the complicity of the media) is carrying out against the Gypsy people.

EveryOne Group, Opera Nomadi and a few other groups are leading a difficult campaign for the lives and rights of these minorities, and against the increasing racism that is ruthlessly killing innocent men, women and children.

The case of the Livorno fire is symbolic of the violations that are being carried out by the authorities against the gypsies: four children were killed by a gang of racists - who later claimed responsibility for the attack - but the authorities arrested and imprisoned the parents of the young victims instead, separating the fathers (who were detained in a squalid prison) from the mothers (under house arrest in an apartment).

One of the fathers, Victor Lacatus, attempted suicide twice, but in spite of this he was kept in prison and his wife was not allowed to visit him. The mothers were even denied permission to take flowers to their children's graves. And finally, the two devastated fathers were obliged to plea bargain in order to leave the prison (the sentence was suspended seeing they had no previous convictions).

And all this despite the "Campaign for the release of Victor and Menji" carried out on an international level by Gruppo EveryOne. According to Avocats Sans Frontiers, without the intervention of Gruppo EveryOne, the men would have been sentenced from six to eight years' imprisonment. It sounds incredible: their children were murdered, yet the mourning parents were the ones who received the prison sentence for "abandonment of a minor".

## New Union, Old Prejudices

*The plan was to rid Italy's streets of squeegee people and panhandlers. What went wrong—and what it says about the country's attitude toward the nomads known as Roma.*

**Newsweek** - October 5, 2007, By Barbie Nadeau.

Oct. 5, 2007 - Anna doesn't know her last name. She says she was born in Romania in 1971, but without documentation to prove it she enjoys none of the benefits that European Union citizenship should bring. Instead she lives in a reeking squatter camp under Rome's Ponte Milvio bridge, surrounded by dirt and the harsh smell of urine. "We have always been here," she says defensively as she emerges from the Tiber's underbrush at 7:30 one recent morning. "We have never bothered anyone."

Many Italians would disagree. In recent weeks Italy has declared itself under siege by the people they call zingari and sinti, pejorative local

terms for Roma, who also sometimes call themselves gypsies. Headlines from the leading newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, scream about "The Invasion of Nomads," Rome's daily *Il Messaggero* begs "Help!" and *La Repubblica* complains on its front page, "There Are Too Many! Rom Emergency." (Rom is the term used by Italians for the Roma to avoid confusion with the name of their capital.) Walter Veltroni, the mayor of Rome, told a recent press conference that Rom have been found guilty of 75 percent of all petty crimes in the city so far this year. So grave is the situation, he says, that he has asked the ministry of the interior to adopt special regulations that would classify nomadic gypsies as illegal immigrants, allowing the expulsion of even legally resident Romanians and Bulgarians from the country if they are deemed a threat to security.

In addition to asking for help from the national government, Veltroni is taking aggressive steps to get the gypsies off the street. As have the mayors of cities like Venice, Florence and Turin, he has banned once-ubiquitous panhandlers—almost all of them Rom—from washing windshields at traffic intersections. In some cases Rom minors are now treated as adults in the criminal courts, even though Italian minors who commit similar offenses are not. "The situation of public order in Rome is much worse after the massive entrance of Romanians," says Veltroni. "We hope that we can stop this brutal criminality that the city can no longer tolerate."

Removing the squeegee people, however, hasn't worked out quite as well in Italy as it once did for former mayor Rudy Giuliani's anticrime battle in New York. Indeed, stripping the panhandlers of one of their means of support seems to have backfired, sparking a wave of violence inside the Rom community. Last week in Rome a group of Rom from one encampment murdered a 20-year-old Rom man and injured two others in a subway underpass in the residential area of Trieste. Their address was published as the "Terzo Mondo" or "Third World" encampment along the Aniene river in Rome. The week before, two raids on Rom camps around the city garnered a weapons cache with Molotov cocktails, knives, guns and explosives. When the police

raided, the camp's residents lit the makeshift huts on fire. In a similar incident in the northern town of Livorno, four Rom children burned to death when Rom residents torched their camp during a police raid. Europe's nomads, of course, are no strangers to persecution. Long stereotyped as beggars and thieves, the Rom were said to be "opposed to all forms of work when it is laborious and demands great effort" by 18th-century German historian Heinrich Moritz. Almost 200 years later Adolph Hitler rounded them up and sent off to concentration camps alongside the Jews. No one knows for sure how many died at the Nazis' hands; some estimates put the figure as high as 500,000. Prejudices still linger throughout the continent, but they may be harshest in Italy, which has the highest number of nomads in Europe and has been cited by the European Commission as one of 14 countries still practicing discrimination against them. The Censis statistical agency estimates that there are 160,000 Rom in Italy, of whom only 30,000—those from Balkan countries and the former Yugoslavia—are illegal. The remaining 130,000 are either Italians whose roots in the country can be traced back to the 1400s, or else from Bulgaria and Romania, both EU members whose citizens are allowed to live and work in any other EU state.

That status, however, has done little to prevent the community from being treated as a segregated underclass. In recent years the Italian government has spent nearly 15 million euros setting up prefabricated huts in bleak settlements that offer amenities like water and electricity—but also enforce a nighttime curfew. Rome has nine of these encampments, but most Rom prefer to live in the 20 or so makeshift camps scattered around the city. "The city camps are prisons," says Misa, a young woman who panhandles in front of the Santa Maria in Trastevere basilica. Misa, who brings along a different baby every few days to rouse sympathy when she begs, lives in an encampment under the Ponte Sublico along the Tiber River. "They say you can leave [the government camps], but I know people who went there who were just sent back to Romania."

Not everyone excoriates the Rom. Roberto Malini of the EveryOne Group, an advocacy organization that mediates between the gypsies and the government, describes Italy's treatment of them as "dangerous persecution" and warns that it has lowered the life expectancy of the country's Rom community to 47, compared to 80 for Italian citizens. "In other words," he says, "genocide." Groups like Opera Nomadi have been working for decades to integrate the Rom into local communities and have Rom children admitted to local public schools. Massimo Converso, the president of the organization, has launched an initiative with local governments to turn abandoned farmhouses into homes for the group. So far they have managed to place a dozen families in houses near Venice. Some government ministers have also adopted a more moderate tone. "We need to have the courage," says Immigration Minister Paolo Ferrero, "to say to the public that all of the Rom who live in Italy could be integrated."

That's a message the public doesn't seem ready to hear. Asked by NEWSWEEK recently if they would be willing to employ a legally resident Rom, a small group of shopkeepers in Rome's ancient Trastevere district responded with laughter and refusals before launching into tales of thefts by "Zingari." Even more revealing were the remarks by Achille Serra, the prefect of Rome, after his visit to one of the Rom encampments. "There were no women there," Serra told an editor from Corriere della Sera. "Maybe they were all on the Metro pickpocketing. The men were all there sleeping after spending the night robbing houses." With attitudes like that, Italy's Rom are unlikely to be enjoying *la dolce vita* anytime soon.

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