



Romani CRISS

Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies

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***Italian Authorities Should Report on the Progress Made in Investing
Racist Attack against Roma at the Next OSCE HDIM***

***The OSCE Must Immediately Start Working with Italian Authorities
to Ensure that no Fingerprinting of Roma Takes Place until
the Legality of this Procedure Is Established***

By ensuring impunity for racist attackers and enforcing racist legislation against Roma, the Italian state becomes a serious threat to rule of law and democracy in Europe. Frequent extreme attacks headed against Roma, police violence and racist legislation head Italy to the darkness of extremism.

The extremist attacks conducted by Italian citizens, as well as the repressive and abusive measures undertaken by the Italian state against the Romanian citizens of Roma origin have constantly increased during the last months in Italy. Despite serious criticism by the European Union, the OSCE as well as other international organizations, human rights activists, **the Italian and Romanian Governments lacked and keep on lacking any form of prevention, denunciation and sanctioning policies for these matters.**

Furthermore, this kind of incidents continue and get more serious, while the competent authorities remain passive in what concerns the guarantee of safety for the Roma citizens, who became targets of racism and xenophobia.

Racism and xenophobia in Italy in the last months have reached alarming quota and the actions tend to extend towards other vulnerable groups, particularly foreigners. The lack of a coherent and peaceful speech from the Italian Government headed for this kind of attitudes and violence become a major crisis which can hardly be dealt with.

Thus, **as to the facts**, according to eye witnesses, two Roma camps in Naples, Ponticelli, have been burned down in mid-May 2008. End of May another camp has been burned down. As we speak today, another camp in Ponticelli, in Virginia Wolf street, has been burned only two days ago. Approximately 800 Roma, including children, left the camps of Ponticelli, attacked by the locals.¹

A man of Roma origin has been beaten up by Italian police in the town of Milan, on June 20, 2008. In a purely Stalinist manner, the Italian police have beaten up the Roma parent of a young girl for

¹ On the May 13, the first attack took place, when unidentified Italian citizens, armed with bats and burning bottles, attacked a Roma camp in Ponticelli, destroyed and burned their barracks. That evening, hundred of persons armed with bats and rocks manifested against and threw rocks towards another Roma camp. Things are more alarming due to the fact that among the attackers were young people and children. (information gathered from Roma communities members, during the research visit in Italy, 25-29 May 2008, to which Romani Criss took part).

having presented to the media the fact the child himself has previously been subject to violence the police².

According to Mediafax news agency, on 11th of May 2008, the Roma camp in Via Navora, Milan, was burned down with Molotov cocktails. On 20 November 2007, in Torino, a group of Italians burned down 10 improvised barracks, with Molotov cocktails, on Germagnano Street, where 35 persons lived. (Source: Mediafax, www.mediafax.ro).

Today, one of our colleagues from Italy, could not attend the OSCE SHDM, because he had to remain in Italy. He lives in a Roma camp and he had to stay at home, because the Italian police have announced their action to take fingerprints of all the Roma in that Camp in Rome. This includes children minor of age and is to be carried out these days, as we speak.

The lack of reaction of the Italian authorities is the more so worrying as this year' attacks have not been isolated. In the precedents years, there have been more attacks targeted against Romani population. In Milan, in the evening of 12 November 2007, over 60 barracks from two Romani camps have been burned. On 18 and 19 September 2007, some 30 persons with faces covered, armed with chains, cudgels, stones and bottles, threw Molotov cocktails at a Romani camp from outskirts of Rome. (Source: Mediafax www.mediafax.ro).

Furthermore, Italian Minister of Interior, Roberto Maroni, has recently presented a plan of fingerprinting Roma individuals in Italy, including minors of age. Such extremist, illegal measures are justified in a pervert manner, stating that they actually benefit the Roma themselves. In fact, such measures are the very seeds of 21st century racist laws.

In terms of reactions, even though the frequency of these attacks increased constantly, the Italian authorities didn't take any measure to protect the rights of the victims. Until now, we are unaware of any attacker having been identified or any person having been brought in front of justice, which comes in fierce contradiction with para. 16 and 17 of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of the Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area.

In October 2007, Roma NGOs and activists have expressly drawn the attention of OSCE, the Italian and the Romanian Government to intervene in this situation as in a potential crisis requiring early intervention. In the same occasion, the above mentioned institutions were asked to take immediate measures to curb the emergence of xenophobic, anti-Roma hostility displayed by racist groups, especially in particular Italian communities.

We recall the Italian Government that in democratic societies, justice is the sole responsibility of designated public authorities, not of private citizens or group of citizens (extremists or not). These events seriously endanger the rule of law itself in case of Republic of Italy.

We draw attention to the Italian Government's, the Romanian Government's, to the European and international organizations in what concerns the fact that this situation is a major risk of extremism proliferation. Due to the absence of firm and immediate reactions, the situation tends to become more acute, leaving way for consolidation and multiplication of extremist solutions, damaging the democratic and legal ones.

² For further details see

http://www.everyonegroup.com/EveryOne/MainPage/Entries/2008/6/29_Stelian_Covaciu_was_the_victim_of_a_violent_beating_and_threats_from_policemen.html.

We draw attention to the Italian Government's, the Romanian Government's, to the European and international organizations in what concerns the huge danger of involving young people and children in violent and racist actions. Cultivating racism in the minds of young people was a characteristics used in extremist systems.

Due to the fact that both the Italian and the Romanian Government fail to fight against and firmly sanction the attacks and the abuse against Roma because they are passive, we consider this attitude as encouraging of hostile actions and that it transmits to the Italian society a message of intolerance and discrimination.

Following, we urge the Italian authorities **to start accurate, impartial and efficient investigations in order to assure the sanctions for the attackers, to the extent foreseen 16 and 17 of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of the Roma and Sinti, according to the standards of the European Court of Human Rights.**

We urge the Italian authorities to report on the progress made in administrating justice in racist attacks targeted at Roma, at the next Human Dimension Meeting by the OSCE.

We consider that the highest priority and we call upon the Italian State to immediately and entirely abrogate all racist laws targeted against Romani people and to adopt comprehensive policies to prevent and combat xenophobia, racism, extremism and of the pogroms of Romani people.

We urge the Romanian Government to take the appropriate legal measures to protect its own citizens by having informed, objective reactions in cases with such strong racist and xenophobic nuances. In this respect, we recall the fact that the protection of all Romanian citizens from abroad is one of the main duties of the Romanian State.

We ask for very urgent and span measures in order to ensure the fight against racism and extremism in what concerns the young people and children.

Taking into account the facts presented above, the insecurity in which Romani people live every day on the territory of Italy, as well as the potential ethnic conflicts which may occur, we advise the OSCE to treat the situation as a potential crisis, requiring early intervention.

We urge the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in conformity with its mandate to prevent the conflicts, and in particular the ODIHR and the High Commissioner for National Minorities to respond effectively, in a proactive manner, to ensure the protection of the Roma people at risk in Italy, as stated in para. 113-117 of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of the Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area.

We recommend to **OSCE** by its specialized structures, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, as well to **Council of Europe, to organize a common high level fact finding mission to document the situation of Romani communities** (Italian citizens, citizens from EU countries, citizens belonging to other OSCE member states) **on the territory of Italy.** The report of this high level mission will be submitted to the Committee of Ministries of the Council of Europe and to the Permanent Council and other relevant structures of OSCE.

We urge the OSCE and the participating states to hold morally and politically accountable the states that fail to ensure no impunity of perpetrators of violent racist acts.

We warn the OSCE, as well as the Italian and Romanian fact that the situation in Italy may degrade, leading to Roma being physically abused and even murdered in racist attacks by citizens or police.

In conclusion, nothing can be changed, on the very contrary, thing will become even more grave, if the OSCE and the participating states, just make more commitments, but do not follow them, do not respect and implement them, particularly commitments made under para. 16-17 and 113-117 of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of the Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area.