



# MOB JUSTICE

COLLECTIVE  
PUNISHMENT  
AGAINST ROMA  
IN EUROPE



european roma rights centre

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**COVER:** A member of the Ukrainian neo-Nazi group, C14, watches as the remains of a Romani dwelling burn to the ground. On 21st April, C14 drove fifteen Romani families from their makeshift homes in Lysa Hora, Kyiv. Armed with weapons they chased down fleeing parents carrying small children, threw stones at them, and then set fire to their homes. Serhiy Mazur posted this photo to Facebook boasting that they had driven the 'gypsies' from the area.

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# SUMMARY

**Y**ou should only be punished for things you did. It is a basic principle of human decency, and also human rights. We are individuals; I should not be punished because someone I know, or someone you associate me with, did something you think was wrong. Sounds fair, right?

When it comes to Roma, a lot of powerful people in Europe seem to disagree. We are individuals with individual human rights. But antigypsyism makes us look to them like a collective. And they punish us collectively for things they think we've done wrong. Sometimes it is totally made up. A crime has been committed and, like in the Middle Ages, they just assume some of us did it; and even though it is only supposedly just a few of us, they burn all of our homes, threaten to (or, recently in Ukraine, actually) kill us. Sometimes maybe someone has done something wrong. Like when a single Romani person who is due to report to prison doesn't show up. It happens; just like non-Roma, Roma sometimes break the rules. But that doesn't justify 80 armed officers terrorising an entire Romani neighbourhood celebrating a festival, beating people in their homes and in shops, like the cops did in Skopje (Macedonia) in 2013. Sometimes the whole situation is contrived, so the authorities can punish us whenever they like. So in Niš (Serbia), there is a Romani community where hundreds of people share a "collective" electricity meter. That's illegal in Serbia: every household should have its own. It also makes it easy to punish hundreds of people - including sick people who need to refrigerate medicine, and children who need to do homework - by cutting off the power whenever. We are often relegated to the edges of cities and informal housing, because centuries of antigypsyism have left us poor. And our poor, segregated, informal housing leaves us vulnerable to collective evictions, punishing us collectively for being poor.

It doesn't take a lawyer to know that this isn't right. Any society that allows public authorities to punish an ethnic group collectively, because a few people are suspected of something, or because the community is poor, is a breach of the basic principles of any country governed by the rule of law. You treat people as individuals, not as a group.

This would be unacceptable for anyone else. But antigypsyism makes people feel it is acceptable for us.

To hell with that. We're fighting back. These powerful people have agreed to be bound by rules - human rights, anti-discrimination laws - that they seem to think don't apply to the way they treat us. We are using their rules, taking cases to court. And it's working. In 2016, a Romanian court ordered the authorities to rehouse one of our communities after an effective eviction. At Christmas last year, a Serbian court ordered the authorities to turn the power back on in Niš. Does Macedonia really think the European Court of Human Rights is going to let them get away with failing to investigate that brutal raid? Judgment is expected sometime in the next year. Does Ukraine think its own courts will ignore their tolerance (or is it encouragement) of far-right groups that torch our homes in the middle of the night? Well, maybe the Ukrainian courts will let them get away with it. But then we'll take them to the European Court and to the UN, getting binding judgments the whole world can read.

These cases will cost them, in time, money, and reputation. We are individuals with individual rights. See you in court.

The following ten case-studies are taken from ten European countries from over the last ten years. They were chosen because they are examples which best illustrate the issue of collective punishment against Roma; both by state authorities, and by the public.



# BULGARIA

## PUNITIVE FORCED EVICTIONS OF ROMA IN VOJVODINOVO

On 6th January 2019, under disputed circumstances, a fight broke out between three men in the village of Vojvodinovo, just outside of the city of Plovdiv in Bulgaria. As a result of the melee, one of the men—a non-Roma man who was also a member of the Bulgaria special forces—was hospitalized.

Two days after the incident, the Minister of Defence and Deputy Prime Minister for Public Order and Security, Krasimir Karakachanov—leader of the xenophobic and far-right Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization party (IMRO)—spoke to reporters:

*“Gypsies in Bulgaria have become exceptionally insolent. ... This cannot continue. The tolerance of Bulgarian society has run out. [...] The truth is that we need to undertake a complete program for a solution to the Gypsy problem.”*

In an overt call for collective punishment of an entire Romani community for the actions of two individuals, he called on local authorities to deal with the matter, demanding the removal of so-called “illegal homes” in the Romani neighbourhood in the village. Five homes were demolished almost immediately, just three days after the incident, on the purported basis that they were found unsuitable for habitation. The following day, ten more homes were destroyed. It is almost certain these demolitions ran afoul of both Bulgarian law and European human rights law.

One of the mothers of an evicted family wept before the cameras, she said:

*“We have nowhere to go. My children study. I don’t want to be removed from our home... For many years we have lived here, many, many, many... What can I say? There is nothing to be said.”*

“Protests”, including one led by a former general of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, Dimitar Shivikov, were held in

the village almost daily. Such “protests” could only be viewed as an attempt to intimidate and implicitly threaten Romani people in Vojvodinovo and elsewhere, and included vicious and venomous calls from the crowds openly advocating for violent action against Roma.

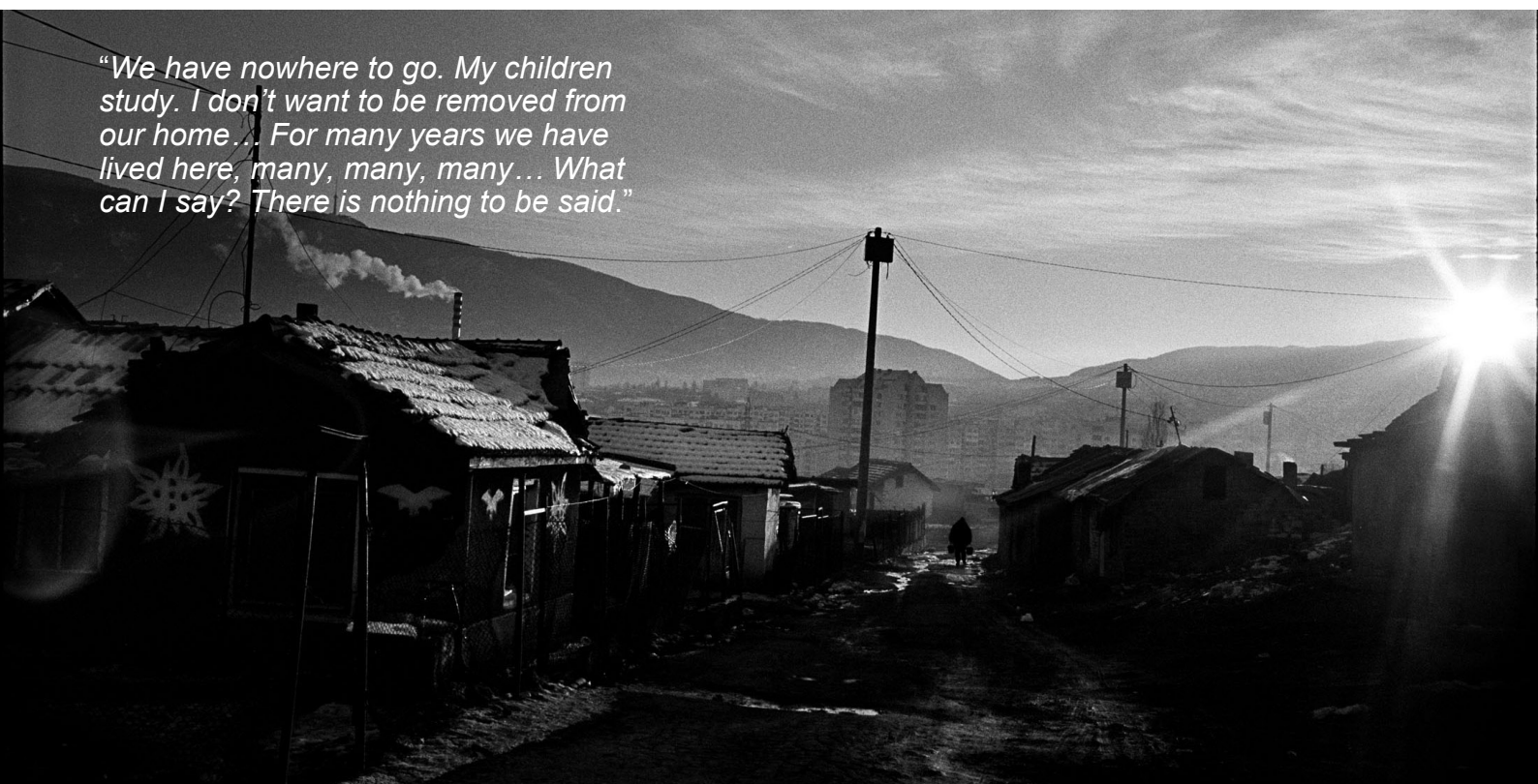
Fearing the very real possibility of political violence and pogroms, nearly all of the Romani families had already fled the village to nearby Plovdiv by time the mob arrived, leaving behind their belongings, valuables, everything. This ethnic cleansing, ensuring their removal and barring their return, is all-too-familiar a tactic in the Balkan Peninsula.

On Monday 14 January 2019, hundreds of people, Roma and non-Roma alike, protested in Sofia, demanding that Karakachanov apologize for his racist and fascist remarks and immediately resign. Multiple similar protests have been held throughout Europe in the two months since the event.

On 6 February 2019, the IMRO released what they have repeatedly referred to as policies “to resolve the Gypsy problem”, knowing full well the dark connotation of the phrase. Among the proposals were demolitions of all homes without proper documentation and genocide-adjacent measures such as “limiting births” of Romani mothers, including by “providing free abortions to Roma mothers with more than three children”.

Local human rights activists have been working with the families from the affected neighbourhood to prevent any further illegal housing demolitions. The ERRC’s local partners have 17 cases currently pending before the regional administrative court in Plovdiv. However, according to once local news source, regardless of the outcome of the court cases, “the people from Voivodinovo are categorical in their stance to not allow the Roma to return to the neighborhood. If this occurs, the discontent will continue. They warned that they will react exceptionally sharply.”

*“We have nowhere to go. My children study. I don’t want to be removed from our home... For many years we have lived here, many, many, many... What can I say? There is nothing to be said.”*





# FRANCE

## LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, EXPULSIONS FORCÉES.

On 16th July 2010 riots broke out in the village of Saint-Aignan involving French Travellers after a 22-year-old French Romani man was shot and killed by police during a car chase. The unrest provided French President Nicolas Sarkozy with a pretext to launch a series of measures directly targeting Bulgarian and Romanian Roma, which evolved into the pattern of repeat eviction that continues to this day.

Sarkozy made a speech in Grenoble on 30th July 2010 condemning anti-police demonstrations and vowed to “put an end to the wild squatting and camping of the Roma”. As president, he could not accept the fact that there were 539 Romani camps in his country, and he promised that half of them would be gone within three months.

**7 August 2010:** The first camp clearance took place in Saint-Etienne, when French police sealed off the area and prevented journalists and rights groups from witnessing the evictions, which began before dawn and continued for several hours. Afterwards, police said 44 of the camp’s residents were ordered to leave France. The Loire

regional prefect told journalists: “It is clear what I did this morning was in line with presidential instructions. There have been recent instructions to ask Roma to return home. There is no future here for Roma whose papers are not in order.”

**19 August 2010:** Der Spiegel reported that a charter flight carrying 93 recently evicted Roma took off for Bucharest. Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux, trumpeted: “We have closed down 40 illegal camps in the last two weeks.” He said that 700 evictees would be sent back to their “countries of origin” within weeks.

Critics from within Sarkozy’s own party described the policy as ‘shocking’. Jean-Pierre Grand even said the arrests recall the mass incarcerations of French Roma during the Nazi occupation, who were kept in internment camps for two years after the liberation, and was upset “that families have been split up by security personnel -- on one side the men, on the other the women, and they are threatened with being split up from their children.”





**9 September 2010:** The European Parliament passed a resolution calling for an immediate suspension of all expulsions of Roma, and “rejected any statements which link minorities and immigration with criminality and create discriminatory stereotypes as well as the inflammatory and openly discriminatory rhetoric lending credibility to racist statements and the actions of extreme right-wing groups”.

**14 September 2010:** EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding provoked outrage from the French government when she accused French ministers of duplicity, and said she thought the situation was one that “Europe would not have to witness again after the Second World War”.

Reding’s suggestion that the Commission might take legal action was prompted a leaked memo from the interior ministry, which showed that the French authorities had been instructed to specifically target 300 Roma camps within three months, contrary to assurances given by French ministers to the European Commission that there was no racial targeting. Reding, furious at have been lied to, stated: “This is not a minor offence in a situation of this importance. After 11 years of experience in the Commission, I even go further: this is a disgrace.”

**19 October 2010:** The Commission expressed its satisfaction that France had responded “positively” to the Commission’s official request, and had decided not to pursue an infringement procedure against France for alleged discrimination, instead demanding more proof to support France’s claim that it was not deliberately targeting Roma.

After Sarkozy: plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose

Any grounds for optimism in 2012 that a Socialist government might herald a more humane approach were soon

dashed. Françoise Hollande’s denunciation of Sarkozy’s policy as creating a situation of “intolerable” precariousness for Roma communities came with a pre-election call to abolish “discriminatory measures against Roma populations.” But his minister Manuel Valls proved even more enthusiastic about mass evictions than Sarkozy, acting “not just as interior minister, but as a citizen, as a militant member of the left.”

In 2013 Valls declared that Roma lifestyles were “clearly in confrontation with French ways of life – they could never be integrated; and the majority should be delivered back to the borders. We are not here to welcome these people.” Approximately 11,000 Roma were sent back to ‘countries of origin’ in 2013.

The inflammatory rhetoric, punitive policy measures, and the deliberate infliction of hardship upon Roma through forced evictions and deportations, was by any standards extraordinary when one considers that in a country of 66.3 million inhabitants, the migrant Roma amount to no more than 20,000. Rather than invest in strategic Roma inclusion policies, France chose the repressive option.

The desire for a short-term populist fix blinded both left and right to the obvious fact that short-term coercive responses are costly and counter-productive. Worse still, this approach became the ‘new normal’, and racist prejudice and collective punishment became the new mainstream. This bi-partisan political embrace of coercive antigypsyism has left a legacy where today, mass evictions and removals of Roma has become routinized (19,300 Romani people were evicted in 2013); and the far-right feel more emboldened to scapegoat, to use hate speech and commit hate crimes against Roma.





## GREECE

### AN ATTEMPTED POGROM IN SUBURBAN ATHENS.



On Thursday 8th June 2017, an 11-year-old boy was killed in the Athenian suburb of Menidi, Greece when a stray bullet fired into the air came down and struck him in the head during an end of school celebration. Without a suspect to accuse, the local population and media turned on the Roma living nearby on the other side of the railway tracks. Almost immediately the entire Romani community was collectively blamed, and the next day hooligans associated with far-right groups *Golden Dawn*, *Combat 18* and *Independent Meander Nationalists* firebombed two Romani houses near to the school where the boy was killed.

A racist anti-Roma rally was held, led by far-right organisations, in which rocks were thrown at houses belonging to Roma. On Saturday 10th June, the police announced they had arrested a 23-year-old Romani man who had admitted under questioning to shooting a shotgun on the evening when the boy was killed. In response, a mob of over 1,500 people took to the streets and marched towards the Roma neighbourhood. Riot police engaged the crowd at the train station near the edge of the Roma-occupied part of the district. Using riot shields and batons, they managed to prevent the racist mob from carrying out a full pogrom of the Roma living there. Even so, molotov cocktails and stones were thrown over the police lines at Romani homes on the other side of the tracks.

The violence continued into Sunday when the growing mob again tried to attack the Romani homes. A group

broke off from the main rally and launched more molotovs, damaging two Roma-owned homes, one of which was totally destroyed. Police responded with tear gas and clashed with the crowds attempting to reach the Roma neighbourhood. With the two Romani houses burning, racist hooligans continued to set fire to dumpsters and throw projectiles at passing trains on their way into Athens.

On Monday evening, a protest march once again turned violent at the train station near the Romani neighbourhood when the mob threw petrol bombs, firecrackers and stones at police officers protecting the Roma. The mob managed to cross the tracks into area where the Roma lived but police, using tear gas, riot shields, and stun grenades, prevented the crowds from further attacks on Romani homes.

The Romani suspect was eventually released after it emerged that the 9mm round which struck and killed the 11-year-old boy did not match his account of firing a shotgun on the same evening. He was given a suspended sentence of 40 months and released by police.

Media coverage of the attempted pogrom referred to the racist mob as a 'protest'. The rallies, marches and violence against Roma in Menidi, instigated and fuelled by far-right extremist groups in Greece, resulted in no arrests being made for the hate crimes which were carried out.



# HUNGARY

## THE WAVE OF TERROR AND THE MAINSTREAMING OF THE HUNGARIAN FAR-RIGHT.

In 2006, Hungary was beset by an economic and political crisis, which saw a sudden rise in the political fortunes of the far-right Jobbik party, pushing a vehemently anti-Roma agenda, promising to end ‘Gypsy crime’. In August 2007, Jobbik founded the Hungarian Guard, a uniformed paramilitary group committed to ‘national defense’ and staging mass rallies, marches and demonstrations designed to intimidate Roma across Hungary. A sequence of events occurred that provided added impetus to the far right’s crusade against ‘Gypsy crime’.

In October 2006, a local schoolteacher was beaten to death in front of his two daughters by a mob following a minor traffic incident in the Roma neighbourhood of village of Olaszliszka.

In November 2008, following the murder of a 14-year-old girl in Kiskunlacháza in central Hungary,



the local mayor organized a demonstration ‘for life against violence’ and made a speech implying that the kill-

ers were Roma. Seven months later, a non-Roma man admitted to have committed the murder.



**“I was holding Robi’s head in my lap, and he kept saying ‘le, le, le’ meaning he was shot but he couldn’t get the whole word out. My little grandson was gasping with his eyes closed. With tears rolling down his face. Putting so many shots into such a small child barely 11 kilos. May their lungs dry up.”**

In January 2009, Miskolc police chief was sacked, then immediately reinstated after he claimed that Roma had committed all the robberies in the preceding months.

In February 2009 Romanian handball player Marian Cozma in Veszprém was stabbed to death in a nightclub. At the memorial for Cozma there were cries of “death to Gypsies!” even before police announced that two of the suspects in the attack were Roma.

Founding member of Fidesz, Zsolt Bayer wrote in a daily newspaper that “a huge number of Gypsies have given up on coexistence and given up on their humanity.” He would later call for a final solution: “One must retaliate rather than tolerate. These animals shouldn’t be allowed to exist. In no way. That needs to be solved—immediately and regardless of the method.”

Against this backdrop of incitement, prejudiced press reporting and far-right mobilization, with calls for crusades and final solutions to the ‘Gypsy problem’, five Roma were murdered and over 50 wounded in a wave of gun and fire bomb attacks on Roma settlements between 2008 and 2009.

### Series of attacks

**July-September 2008:** Acts of anti-Roma violence included four attacks in small villages where Molotov cocktails were thrown and guns fired at family homes. There were no fatalities

**3 November 2008:** A Molotov cocktail was thrown into the home of Tibor Nagy in the village of Nagycséc. His wife Éva and brother Jozsef

were killed by gunfire as they fled the burning house.

**15 December 2008:** A Romani man and his partner were shot and wounded in Alsózsolca.

**23 February 2009:** Róbert Csorba and his four-year-old son Robika were shot dead in Tatárszentgyörgy as they fled their house which had been set ablaze by Molotov cocktails.

*Quote from his grandmother: “I was holding Robi’s head in my lap, and he kept saying ‘le, le, le’ meaning he was shot but he couldn’t get the whole word out. My little grandson was gasping with his eyes closed. With tears rolling down his face. Putting so many shots into such a small child barely 11 kilos. May their lungs dry up.”*

**22 April 2009:** Fifty-four year-old nightshift worker Jenő Kóka was shot dead with a single bullet to the heart by a sniper in Tiszalök as he set off for work from his house on Nefejejcs utca (Forget-me-not Street) at the very edge of the village.

**2 August 2009:** In the ninth attack in this deadly series, Mária Balog was shot dead and her 13-year-old daughter Ketrin seriously wounded as they slept in their beds by gunmen who smashed their way into the house of Bocskai Street is the last street on the edge of the village of Kisléta.

### After the killings, more racist intimidation and scapegoating

Soon after the Kisléta assault, four of the killers were apprehended. The murders stopped, but the survivors, the bereaved and the wider Roma

community were left traumatized; and neither was there any let-up in hate speech, calls for collective punishment, and direct intimidation of Roma by the extreme right.

In March 2011, uniformed neo-fascist paramilitaries, backed up by skinhead auxiliaries with whips and fighting dogs, set up checkpoints in the village of Gyöngyöspata and patrolled the Roma settlement with seeming impunity, as policemen stood idly by, in a siege that lasted for two and a half weeks.

Following two violent displays of force and intimidation in August 2012 by neo-Nazi groups targeting Roma inhabitants in the Hungarian towns of Devecser and Cegléd, at a far-right rally in Budapest to celebrate the founding of the Hungarian Guard, Jobbik leader Gabor Vona declared: “We need to roll back these hundreds of thousands of Roma outlaws. We must show zero tolerance towards Roma crime and parasitism. Any Roma who did not conform should leave the country.”

In August 2013, three of the killers were given life sentences, and the fourth defendant got a 13-year prison sentence. Outside the courtroom, Tibor Nagy, who was wounded in the Nagycséc attack said, “My wish is that the perpetrators be imprisoned until the end of their days. The murderers killed my wife and brother and they destroyed my life. I won’t have much happiness in this life anymore.” This sentiment was echoed by Eva Koka, who lost her husband to a sniper’s bullet and travelled to Budapest to hear the verdict: “The murderers have not just killed my husband. They’ve also destroyed me.”





# ITALY

## THE 'NOMAD EMERGENCY' AND ITS LEGACY TODAY

The brutal murder of an Italian woman in November 2007 by a Romanian citizen of Romani origin proved to be the catalyst for a series of repressive measures that amounted to a vicious form of collective punishment: violent attacks on Roma camps, and a steep rise in antigypsyism fomented by sensationalist press reporting and incendiary hate speech by right wing politicians, followed by the declaration of a state of emergency, effectively defining the presence of Roma as one of "serious social alarm" endangering public order and security. The day after the murder, the Italian Council of Ministers adopted an emergency decree for the expulsion of citizens of other European Union countries "for imperative reasons of public safety" defined as "behaviour that compromises the protection of human dignity or fundamental human rights or of public safety."

**11 May 2008:** Minister of Interior Roberto Maroni stated publicly that "All Romani camps will have to be dismantled right away, and the inhabitants will be either expelled or incarcerated," according to the national Italian newspaper La Repubblica. That same day, the Via Navona camp in Milan was burned to the ground with Molotov cocktails by an unknown number of assailants forcing the Romani inhabitants to flee, their personal possessions destroyed.

**13 May 2008:** Following an accusation that a 16-year-old Romani girl had kidnapped a baby, a mob armed with bats and Molotov cocktails razed a Romani camp in Ponticelli, near Naples, forcing some 800 Roma to flee without their possessions through a gauntlet of violent locals. In the aftermath, Umberto Bossi stated that "People do what the state can't manage" and Minister of Interior Roberto Maroni stated, "that is what happens when gypsies steal babies, or when Romanians commit sexual violence." According to the results of a poll by the national Italian newspaper La Repubblica conducted in May 2008, 68% of Italians wanted to deal with the "Roma Gypsy problem" by expelling all of them.

**31 May 2008:** The Italian Government proclaimed a one-year state of emergency, allowing extraordinary powers to state and local officials, usually permissible only in times of severe natural calamities to deal with the 'nomadic communities'.

**6 June 2008:** Italian authorities stated 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." The fingerprinting of children in the absence of informed parental consent prompted widespread international condemnation. Recalling Italy's fascist past, and the 1938 legal census of all foreign-born Jews which prepared the ground for the racial laws, Amos Luzzato told La Repubblica: "I remember as a child being stamped and tagged as a Jew ... Italy is a country that has lost its memory." MEP Livia Jaroka however supported the clampdown and claimed that the decision to fingerprint Roma "was based on goodwill."

**1 July 2008:** Italy's court of cassation, reversed the conviction of six Northern League defendants for distributing racist propaganda calling for the expulsion of all Roma from Verona. One of the defendants, Flavio Tosi, who later became the mayor of Verona, was quoted as having said: "The Gypsies must be ordered out because, wherever they arrive, there are robberies." The court of cassation held that his 'deep aversion' to Roma was not due to racial hatred but "by the fact that all the Gypsies were thieves."

**4 August 2008:** The Italian government declared an emergency situation and intent to deploy 3000 soldiers on the streets of Rome, Milan, Naples, Bologna, Verona and Palermo, supposedly to combat crime. The so-called 'Nomad Emergency' with its demonization of Romani people heralded a prolonged period of harassment, expulsions, mob violence and pogroms against Roma communities.

One camp dweller told ERRC: "This law of Berlusconi – where will they send us to? We are living in fear. All

of Italy is against us. The media has declared war on us. The whole government is fascist."

**15 December 2011:** Following a false claim by a teenager that "two gypsies had stolen her virginity", a furious hundreds-strong mob set fire to the informal Roma camp at Via Continassa, near Turin. Eyewitnesses and local media reported that a flyer was posted before the attack, calling on residents to 'clean up' the area of Roma, and confirmed that a public official, the president of the fifth district, was present at a demonstration that preceded the violence.

End of the 'Nomad Emergency', but no end to scapegoating of Roma

The European Roma Rights Centre challenged the State of Emergency decree before the Italian courts, and on 4 November 2011, the Council of State ruled that the emergency decree was unfounded, unmotivated and unlawful. In May 2013, Italy's Cassation Court rejected the government's appeal and upheld this ruling. But the end of the emergency and the fall of Berlusconi brought little respite for Roma.

Scapegoating was stepped up again in 2018 when Italian foreign minister Matteo Salvini spoke about carrying out "a mass cleansing street by street, piazza by piazza, neighbourhood by neighbourhood", and conducting an ethnic Roma census. On television, Salvini declared "Irregular foreigners will be deported via agreements with other countries, but Italian Roma unfortunately, we have to keep them at home."

In his defense, European Parliament Vice-President Livia Jaroka said that Salvini's Roma census had its merits, "because it is necessary to ascertain whether EU funds are being used to improve the situation of Romani people or not." The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) was less complacent about collective punishment and in January 2019, repeated its concerns "particularly with regard to racist misleading propaganda against Roma and Sinti indirectly allowed or directly emanating from the authorities".



End of the  
'Nomad Emergency',  
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## MACEDONIA

### INDISCRIMINATE POLICE VIOLENCE AND RAIDS DURING EDERLÉZI

On 5 May 2013, Macedonian police officers entered the Topaani neighbourhood - a majority-Roma area in the capital city of Skopje - to arrest one Romani man who had failed to return to prison after leave. What unfolded was a wide-scale, violent police raid involving 80 law enforcement officers. The police violently entered people's homes and stores, brutalising local residents. A search for one man was in fact a violent raid terrorising an entire community who were celebrating Ederlézi, a Romani holiday. Amongst the police were so-called "alfa" units, urban street crime units who are known

for their indiscriminate violence and whose reckless endangerment of the people they target led the European Court of Human Rights to condemn Macedonia in one case for breaching the right to life.

Many people were left physically and psychologically traumatised by the events. They include one man who, with the ERRC's support, made a complaint to the public prosecutor's office, claiming he was a victim of racially motivated police brutality. To this day, almost six years later, the prosecutors are still investigating and have made no arrests. Indeed,

for several years they did nothing at all - interviewed no one, collected no evidence. It was already clear years ago that they were not doing enough. So the ERRC helped him bring a case which is currently pending before the European Court of Human Rights. The ERRC is also standing beside him as "co-litigant" in cases pending before the civil courts in Macedonia claiming institutional antigypsyism within the police force and the prosecutor's office. The European Court case, which concerns the failure to investigate the complaints, will lead to a judgment, expected in late 2019 or early 2020.





## ROMANIA

### DEATH-THREATS AND VIOLENT, REPEAT EVICTIONS LEAVE ROMA WITH NOWHERE TO GO

In October 2013 as winter began to draw in, the homes of Romani families in Eforie Sud (Romania) were demolished without consultation or provision for alternative housing. Some had been living in the area for 40 years. These families were left homeless and vulnerable, in stark contrast to the idyllic tourist beach resort of Eforie.

What happened was less an eviction and more a punitive police raid. Eighty law enforcement officers ensured the demolition of their homes went ahead unhindered and without incident as the Roma inhabitants looked on. Local media reported the deputy mayor's threats to resisting Roma at the site: "if you don't come out, we're going to kill you here".

The days that followed saw the victims living outdoors in temporary shelters until some could eventually take refuge in an abandoned school building without windows or electricity. Others were housed in an equally grim disused dormitory.

The lives of those torn from their homes in Eforie have since been marked by harassment and hardship in the years following the demolition. In July 2014, ten Romani families of around 50 people were once again evicted from the school under the direction of the deputy mayor of Eforie and relocated to containers too small to house all members of the families. These containers had inadequate provision for utilities and were located on

the edge of the municipality near an excavation site, posing further risk to children. Three families, including 14 children, were provided with no accommodation of any kind.

The community vindicated their rights in court, with the ERRC's support. On 1 June 2016 a Romanian court ordered the community members to be rehoused and to be paid damages. Those members evicted again in July 2014 still have a case about that pending before the European Court of Human Rights, where the ERRC is representing them.





## SERBIA

### ELECTRICITY SHUT-OFF IN ROMANI NEIGHBOURHOOD WITH A COLLECTIVE METER FOR BILLS.

Hundreds of Roma have been living in the Niš neighbourhood of Crvena Zvezda for decades. They were moved there in the 1960's by Yugoslav authorities after their former homes were destroyed by floods. However, in recent years the land value of the site has increased, resulting in mounting pressure on the Roma to be removed from this valuable real estate in the city. Alongside the pressure to evict Romani families comes regular power cuts, which have plagued this community since at least 2014.

On several occasions over the past few years, the power to the homes of Romani families has been cut, often for months on end, whilst in the non-Roma houses - the lights stay on. This is because almost the entire Romani community is served by two collective electricity meters located off-site. This is not legal in Serbia;

every household should have its own meter. But in this case, electricity consumption for about one hundred households is estimated and billed collectively. The community is in arrears and receives bills corresponding to the highest possible tariff which are based on calculations that, according to locals and their lawyers, make no sense at all.

Collective billing of Roma is, in reality, a form of collective punishment which can be used for leverage over the community when the electricity is disconnected. Romani residents must organise collection of cash between themselves and pay this to the public electricity company collectively. Such an arrangement is otherwise unheard of for non-Roma. Treating a hundred households as one entity for billing purposes is discriminatory, and reflects cultural stereotypes of Roma.

Disconnecting the electricity for long periods of time has also seriously worsened the already dilapidated conditions in the settlement. The decision to cut the electricity unnecessarily heightens the risk of illness, and puts the lives of children and the elderly at risk particularly.

The fact that the off-site meters cover the entire neighbourhood and the bills are addressed to the "Roma settlement" and not to any specific individual, convinced the ERRC and community members that this exceptional arrangement amounted to race discrimination. After all other attempts to get the power back on in the neighbourhood had failed, we opened a lawsuit in the Higher Court in Niš against the publicly owned electricity supply company. In January 2019, after a six-month power cut, the court ordered the power to be switched back on.



# SLOVAKIA

## POLICE RAIDS, BRUTALITY, AND IMPUNITY.

In the autumn of 2012, four Romani neighborhoods located in the Kežmarok District were raided by the police: Stráne pod Tatrami, Hunčovce, Podhorany, and Rakúsy. According to witnesses, no arrest warrants or search warrants were presented. Despite this, the police entered houses situated in Romani neighborhoods and began searching them, beating adults and children indiscriminately, and hurling verbal abuse as they went. The investigation into their misconduct was terminated in October 2015 as the Interior Ministry inspectorate stated that the actions of the police did not amount to a criminal offense. The subsequent constitutional complaint was dismissed in 2016.

The police raid was an example of a now favoured tactic amongst Slovak police forces: the use of a large scale, and often violent, blitzkrieg on poor Romani neighbourhoods in pursuit of one or two individuals suspected of criminality. These terror-inspiring raids can happen at any time to thousands of Roma who are collectively suspected and punished for the crimes, or suspected crimes of the few. On the afternoon of the 19th June 2013, more than 60 police officers entered a Romani neighborhood in Moldava nad Bodvou, without a

warrant, in search of two individuals. Without warning or explanation they began kicking down doors to Romani homes, breaking windows, and beating with truncheons anyone who came into their path. Aside from significant damage to property, more than 30 people sustained injuries (including children) who did not resist or obstruct the police.

Once again, the Interior Ministry inspectorate did not find the police action to be unlawful. Criminal proceedings were eventually filed against the officers on the insistence of the Public Prosecutor, but in November 2015 and March 2016 these proceedings were discontinued. An external expert to the proceedings gave his opinion on the effect of the “Roma mentality (mentalita romica)” in relation to the testimonies given by the Romani victims. This mentality, the expert argued, resulted in attributes such as lack of self-discipline, aggression, asociality and an inability to comply with social norms. Their testimony was finally ruled invalid. In August 2017, the Slovak Constitutional Court dismissed another constitutional complaint on the matter.

As a result of the findings of the inspectorate, and the inadmissibility of the

testimonies, a separate investigation was initiated in 2017 by the prosecutor against some of the victims. Here the investigation took a complete U-turn, and the police brought charges against six victims of the raid for making false accusations against the officers involved. One of the victims of the attack described the physiological effect of the experience in an interview for a national newspaper: “I’m afraid my life will go wrong even further.”

No justice has been delivered for the victims of these attacks despite mounting evidence provided by civil society organisations. The ERRC is pursuing this case before the European Court of Human Rights.

Meanwhile punitive raids on Romani neighbourhoods remain the intimidation tactic of choice for Slovak police who are searching for a specific individual, or merely cracking down on so-called “increased criminality” with no target or objective specified other than: the Roma settlement.

The just doesn’t happen in non-Roma areas. The use of police raids on an entire neighbourhood with only a vague objective, no warrant, and where police can act with complete impunity, is something reserved only for Roma in Slovakia.





## UKRAINE

### FROM LOCHYNIIVKA 2016 TO TERNOPIL 2018: THE SPARK WHICH SET THE TEMPLATE FOR FAR-RIGHT COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT OF ROMA COMMUNITIES.

On the morning of Saturday 27th August 2016, the body of a 9-year-old girl was found in the village of Loshchynivka in Odessa region, Ukraine. Police investigators indicated there were signs that she had been raped. The same day a 21-year-old Romani man was arrested on suspicion of murdering her.

In a matter of hours an angry mob of over 300 villagers had descended on the homes of Roma living in the village. The Romani residents had already gone, meaning there were no casualties of the mob violence, but their houses were completely destroyed by the angry mob who attacked with farm tools and pieces of wood while local police officers watched on in silence. In some cases, the lights inside were still on and the doors left open from when the Roma had fled for their lives.

The authorities' response to the violent ousting of Romani residents demonstrated a breakdown of the rule of law in Ukraine. The police officers' complicity in the pogrom sent a dangerous

message across the country: that justice lies in the hands of the mob.

In the years since the Loshchynivka Pogrom, law enforcement authorities have only grown more complicit in the attacks of vigilante mobs on Romani communities across the country. Last year there were at least 6 anti-Roma pogroms carried out by mobs of young men affiliated with far-right paramilitaries. In every single one of these cases the authorities were either negligent in their duties to properly protect and investigate the attacks, or they actively allowed the pogrom to happen. A far-right attack on Roma in Lysa Hora, Kyiv was even carried out in cooperation with the local district administration. The leader of one far-right paramilitary had signed a memorandum of cooperation to provide security services to the district administration and National Police in December 2017.

*"I don't trust the police"* said a Romani woman who part of a group of people attacked by masked men with bats in Ternopil region in May 2018.

*"The next day I saw the police officer drinking coffee with one of the guys who attacked our camp. One of the guys who attacked us threatened to find us even underground if we dare to complain to the police."*

The collectivised violence against Romani communities in Ukraine is, to a large degree, a result of hate speech propagated online and through far-right subcultures. The propaganda which is recycled in this environment (and in mainstream news) results in collective punishment being meted out indiscriminately against Roma as a whole, for the perceived crimes of a few Romani individuals. The pattern of revenge violence against Roma in Ukraine has led to the deaths of one 24-year-old Romani man in Lviv in June 2018, and one 30-year-old Romani woman in Beregovovo in July 2018.

The ERRC are engaged in litigation relating to several of these pogroms at a local level and are additionally supporting Roma to sue the Ukrainian National Police for failing to protect Roma from this wave of mob violence.







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