

Civil Rights and Identity: The Persecution of the Rom

By [J. B. Gerald](#)

Global Research, October 15, 2012

Region: [Canada](#), [Europe](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

In Paris October 7th, several hundred gathered in the place du Pantheon for a Roma Pride rally, an affirmation of Roma identity at a time when the Roma face ongoing and unacceptable persecution in France and throughout the European Union. Small gatherings for Roma Pride in fourteen EU countries were reported. While the European Union backs policies of integrating the Roma into society, in fact criminal acts and agendas of violence particularly in Hungary and the Czech Republic are mirrored by programs of “camp clearing” and expulsions in nations with more advanced bureaucracies.

Media coverage of the persecution in France is sporadic; *cafebabel.com* reports that 400 Roma were expelled in the last two months. In Marseilles on Sept. 27th, vigilantes burned a Roma camp of 35. With nowhere to go the homeless victims remained in the area and the Town Hall is currently (as of Oct. 11) demanding their departure. Press reports lack any assurance that the Roma adults and children have minimal recourse to food, shelter, and government protection. Near the border with Belgium a bulletin in *La Voix du Nord*, announces the Rom encampment at Faubourg-de-Bethun (Lille) will be closed toward the end of October, but with some thought for accommodation of the displaced.

Roms as a vulnerable group historically (ie. at least half a million died in Nazi concentration camps), appear frequently in notations of early genocide warnings for Europe since 2006 (“Genocide warnings,” *nightslantern.ca*). Under President Sarkozy France’s banning of the Islamic full face veil in [July 2010](#), was followed by his campaign to clear France of Roma. ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#)). So the small Roma Pride rallies of October 7, 2012, occur within a context of a rightist extremism threatening all vulnerable minorities. Parallels to early Nazi campaigns of the 1930’s remain, gloved in policies that kill slowly. Forms of racism against Arabs, Jews, Roms and Black Africans knit a “white” majority’s vote as far right French politicians protest “anti-white racism” and epithets like “chalk face” (*rff*).

Benjamin Abtan of EGAM (*Le Mouvement Antiraciste Europeen*), an organizer of the October 7th rally laid out its tenets in newspaper articles calling for the an end to the racist acts, an end to expulsions without alternative lodgings, an end to the law of January 3, 1969 which remains partially in effect requiring travel papers for Travelers, an end to the 3% only quota for a Roma community in towns, among other points all within a context of anti-racism. He describes “Roma Pride” as “a mobilization of and a support system for self-emancipation, carried out regardless of the origins of individuals and organizations involved, since Universalism is our inspiration, and the full integration our shared demand.”

From outside of France, *The New Statesman* quotes Marian Mandache of *Romani Crisis* in

Roumania: "We believe that the French government, be it right-wing or left-wing, UMP or PS, is mainly looking at ways to reduce numbers, following the idea that Roma people should leave France..." It remains difficult to find in European and U.S. media, evidence (names, dates, witnesses, exact location) of acts against Roms which may be crimes under international law though permitted or unprosecuted domestically. In this way the media colludes with the persecution.

Current Canadian immigration policy *re.* Roma immigration provides an insight into how vulnerable minorities are to be dealt with by the NATO alliance. From [Hungary](#) where reports suggest that violence against Roms is police protected, Roma rights activist Guyula Kanto and his family escaped to Canada. Rejection of their appeal for asylum was assured by decision of Federal Court, Sept. 5th.

And on Sept. 5th in his show, "The Source" / "The Jew vs. the Gypsies", *Sun Media News*, Ezra Levant, presented a diatribe against "Gypsies" enforcing stereotypes to portray the entire people as criminals.

France offers no broad political alliance of the victim groups, each challenged by the rise of European fascism and accommodation by the left. Organizations of Rom, Muslims, Jews, the elderly, student organizations, former colonial peoples, the LGT community, Unions, Communists, as well as Gaullist groups, Greens, military and veterans organizations, might differ strongly but unite in their refusal to persecute.

Partial sources online:

"La 'Roma Pride': une marche pour dire non aux persecutions," Benjamin Abtan, Oct. 5, 2012, *Le nouvel observateur*; "Roma Pride : de la dignite et de l'egalite en Europe," Benjamin Abtan, Oct. 7, 2012, *La Regle du Jeu*; "March for the Dignity of Roma People in Europe," Benjamin Abtan, Oct. 6, 2012, *Hurriyet Daily News*; "The Roma in France Is Hollande going to expel us all," Valeria Costa-Kostritsky, Oct. 1, 2012, *NewStatesman*; "Angry locals set fire to Rom camp in Marseille," Angela Diffley, Sept. 28, 2012, *rfi*; : "Residents of Creneaux insist Romani people must leave town," *Romea.cz*, Oct. 11, 2012, *Roma Solidarity News*; "Expulsions : la France reprend du Rom," Oct. 11, 2012, *cafebabel.com*; Les Roms de l'eglise des Victoires vont etre (en partie) installes Hellemmes," *La Voix du Nord*, Oct. 13, 2012, *La Voix du Nord*; "Roma in Hungary feel persecuted but they have nowhere to turn," Rick Westhead, Oct. 13, 2012, *thestar.com*; "Canada rejects Roma activist despite claims of neo-Nazi attacks in Hungary," Gary Dimmock, Oct. 9, 2012, *The Ottawa Citizen*; "Right-wing leader claims 'anti-white racism' growing in France," Tony Cross, Sept. 27, 2012, *rfi*; "Coordinated protests against racism held in 14 European countries," G. Dunkel, Oct. 12, 2012, *Workers World*; "Statement Concerning Hate Speech in Canadian Media," Roma Community Centre, Sept. 10, 2012, *Roma Solidarity News*.

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