



## Human rights are not for sale

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Comment

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WHILE trouble is brewing in the Middle East and the Arab world, Europe and the West in general, are also facing their own tensions.

In mid-February, for example, the Council of Europe openly backed its increasing number of members who denounced "multiculturalism" as a failure, and dubbed it a potential threat to the security of the region.

Thorbjørn Jagland, secretary-general of the council, in an interview with *Financial Times* (Feb 17) was quoted as saying: "As we understand it now, multiculturalism allows parallel societies to develop within states."

He then added: "This must be stopped. It is also clear that some parallel societies have developed radical ideas that are dangerous. Terrorism cannot be accepted."

The far-right groups reportedly rejoiced at this stance as they see this as an official endorsement of "their hard-line positions on immigration and race". Apparently, the issue is about "European identity" and the values that shaped it.

Jagland reiterated that there is a need to focus on what will hold society together. The recent unrest has been viewed as a threatening sign if Europe's stand on human rights is allowed to be diluted by a tolerance of cultural or ethnic differences. The Council has also reportedly set up a group of leading academics and former politicians to seek recommendations on how to deal with the issues posed by "greater cultural diversity".

Similar to the sentiments expressed by many European leaders to date, the "threshold" of acceptance is "to melt into a single community which is the national community, and if you do not want to accept that, you cannot be welcome" to cite French President Nicolas Sarkozy in the *Financial Times*.

In this instance, we are reminded of the one-off inducement of 300 Euros made to each adult Roma (also known as "gypsies") to board a so-called "voluntary" flight home to their countries of origin, some with police escorts.

Interestingly enough the controversial move has invited a number of criticisms, not least from human rights groups backed by a leaked document "showing that the Roma were the explicit target of the crackdown".

In 2009, some 10,000 Roma were said to have been sent back to neighbouring European countries of Romania and Bulgaria, according to official sources.

These incidents have evoked unpleasant memories of yesteryears when communities were specifically targeted leading to massacres and genocide largely in Europe.

An online BBC report (Jan 23, 2009) made mention of "the forgotten Holocaust" where up to 500,000 Roma were believed to have died in mass shooting and Nazi gas chambers.

Then, of course, the word "terrorism" was not as fashionably used as it is today to justify the profiling of communities which are deemed a threat because they have decided not to "melt" in.

Not surprisingly, France is alone in adopting the stance; other countries are contemplating it.

Roma -- purportedly European Union's largest ethnic minority of more than 10 million -- have become stigmatised as Europe's pariah.

Their ancestors were thought to have left north-west India and migrated to Europe at the beginning of the 11th century.

In the light of ongoing regional unrest, some have argued that the Roma are victims of the "democratic revolutions" that released them from oppressive regimes where they were hidden from international scrutiny.

Today, they are under inspection because of the democratic process that allows ethnic groups such as the Roma to be singled out, profiled and targeted under the banner of democracy, and the attending rights and freedom to all things, and in an attempt to "buy" votes and popularity.

The question is could the new waves of current democratic revolutions that the Western counterparts are eagerly supporting (at the slightest hint that their favourite despots are in trouble) trigger a greater mobility across the "friendly" West?

After all, the West has greatly benefited from the despots that they supported for decades at the expense of the citizens of each country -- think Hosni Mubarak -- and the Western leaders cannot turn the table against them now like they do to the Roma.

Given this possible scenario, the multicultural crisis that Europe has created for itself seems to be a well thought out ploy to quickly deal with yet another nomadic culture crossing into its borders as the waves of democracy released a population that has long been oppressed.

Only this time the 300 Euros offered may not be enough to lure the Roma home. They would have learned by now that human rights are not for sale.

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