

# Italy uses tough decree to expel Romanians

By Guy Dinmore in Rome

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Local authorities in Italy have started expelling Romanian immigrants under a tough decree that the government hurriedly issued in order to calm the public uproar concerning the brutal murder of a woman outside a Rome railway station.

The centre-left government is accusing an illprepared [European Union](#) of failing to anticipate a "mass exodus" of Romanians since the country's entry into the EU in January.

EU directive 38, which governed the free movement of citizens with criteria for residency and limited provisions for expulsions, was completely insufficient, said Giuliano Amato, the interior minister. Various statistics have been issued but Mr. Amato spoke of a "historic phenomenon" of 500,000 poor Romanians flooding into Italy within a year.

He warned that the majority out of 1m or so of the "poorly treated" Roma community would try to leave Romania within months. Vulnerable to a right-wing fuelled public backlash over the immigration issue and aware that other EU governments are grappling with the same problem, Romano Prodi's government is calling on the EU to work together to track and tackle mass migrations.

The decree passed last week allows local authorities to expel from Italy EU citizens who are deemed by the courts to be a threat to public safety. The expulsion order is valid for three years.

Traian Basescu, Romania president, appealed on Sunday to Romanian and Italian politicians to "refrain from making statements that could make the situation more tense. We support any criminal being punished but we can't agree with the humiliation of Romanians [to suit Italian political purposes]," Mr Basescu said.

Romano Prodi on Sunday spoke to Calin Popescu Tariceanu, the Romanian prime minister, who will travel to Rome this week.

Strongly backed by public opinion, Milan expelled four Romanians at the weekend. Others are expected to follow. The expulsion authorisation had been part of an immigration bill that was stalled in parliament. But the government acted quickly to give it the force of a decree after Giovanna Reggiani was beaten to death outside Rome's Tor di Quinto commuter station. A young Romanian man has been charged with sexual assault, robbery and murder.

Her death, after two days in a coma, gripped Italy where the issues of crime and immigration have combined to dominate the national debate. National leaders attended her funeral.

Isolated attacks on Romanians by gangs have been reported. Football fans chanted racist slogans against a Romanian player in Serie A. "If xenophobic hate starts setting the metropolitan jungle on fire and triggers do-it-yourself justice, it is the end," Mr Amato warned in La Repubblica newspaper.

Police have started clearing shanty-towns on the banks of the Tiber. Gianfranco Fini, leader of the right-wing National Alliance, said expelling 250,000 immigrants "would make a good clean-up".

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