

REPORT ON THE COVERAGE OF THE ROMA IN THE GREEK PRESS

APRIL 1999

(Comments in italics are made by the GHM)

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* page numbers of the articles in the *Avgi* newspaper are not provided, since there is no such reference in the web edition of the paper

1. Roma and education

- **3/4/1999: Eleftherotypia**, pages 60-61

'Romanology' without Roma

Roma children education was the subject of two conferences held in March. The conferences presented two different approaches to the subject. While the first one was based on the principles of intercultural education, the second one, at which the State was present, cunningly questioned these principles. The first one was organized by the Group of Primary Education Teachers 'D. Glinos'. During the conference on the Ruling Cultural Models and Minorities in Education: Alternative Educational Perspectives, people with immediate experience in Roma education tried to locate problems and provide solutions. The background of the second conference, with the pompous title 'First Panhellenic Conference: Roma Facing the Year 2000', is well-known to our readers. It was co-organized by the 'Romanologist' Mr. Matoulas, School Counselor and President of the recently created Institute for Roma Studies in Greece (IRSG). Mr. Matoulas has repeatedly expressed discriminatory and racist points against Roma and has supported the necessity of an educational Roma ghetto. As a consequence, the Ministry of Education has withdrawn its permission allowing the School Counselor to carry out a research paper on the subject and declared that it would not participate in the organization of the conference. According to sociologist Mr. Georgiou, social care monitor Ms. Dimitriou -both of them participated in the D. Glinos' Group conference- and philologist, Ms. Politou, the conference, organized by Mr. Matoulas, was a parody, which humiliated and discredited Roma identity. «Only two Roma were invited to participate, and one of them just read his poems», says Mr. Georgiou. The magazine published by the IRSG is called *Roma Talking*. However, it is not about the talking *of* Roma but about the talking *about* Roma. The conference tried to construct a negative image of Roma as a marginal, poor and problematic group. On the pretext that they are illiterate, Roma are excluded from the discussion about their own problems. Most of the projects on Roma never reach them. Roma are merely used to justify the existence of specific projects, while the creators of these projects abuse of their contribution. A recently published Dictionary of the Romani Language, compiled by a person who does not speak the Romani language, vaguely thanks the Roma that participated in its creation. The warm message of the Special Secretary of Intercultural Education, Mr. Halkiotis, at the conference proves the hypocrisy of the authorities. How can the person responsible for the public Intercultural Education Program, based on the principles of co-education, be so warm at a conference promoting separate education for Roma?

- **13/4/1999: Eleftherotypia**, page 10

Roma and Education

In a letter to the newspaper, the Special Secretary for Intercultural Education, Mr. Halkiotis, argues that his presence at the conference Roma Facing the Year 2000 was meant to clarify the policy of the Ministry of Education to all the participants. He

explains that this policy fully shares the principles of intercultural education and wonders why he was not invited to participate in the conference held by the Group of Teachers in Primary Education 'D. Glinos'. In their reply, the writers of the article (Ios tis Kyriakis) said that just a proclamation of the principles of intercultural education is not enough, if it is not accompanied by keeping distance from those who subvert it.

A good report on intercultural education following the generally accepted approach to Roma education from a human rights perspective. The writers firmly stand for the co-education of Roma and non-Roma children and reveal the racist attitudes of the supporters of separate education. It is the third time in six months that the writers deal with the same subject (see October 1998 and November 1998 Press Reports of the GHM Roma Office). It was after these articles last November that the GHM warned the Ministry of Education to refrain from co-organizing the conference Roma Facing the Year 2000. Even though the Ministry withdrew its participation, it now seems unwilling to clearly differentiate itself from the attitudes that are harmful to the Roma community, lest it dissatisfies those who share them.

2. Roma in bad health condition

- **4/4/1999: Eleftherotypia**, page 99

Examination - Shock

The living conditions at the Roma settlements of Aspropyrgos, Nea Zoi, and Aghia Paraskevi are miserable. Roma live near garbage rumps, they carry the water they drink and wash with in jerry cans. The Doctors of the World organization has been visiting Roma settlements since the summer of 1997 providing them with medical care. In the beginning, the Roma were suspicious but the organization soon inspired confidence in them. Five months ago the Doctors of the World carried out blood tests for Hepatitis on some 270 Roma. According to the results, 90% of them are carriers of Hepatitis A, one out of five are carriers of Hepatitis B and some of them - of Hepatitis C. Doctors of the World informed the municipalities concerned at once. As a consequence, the Ministry of Health will provide 700 vaccines against Hepatitis to vaccinate Roma children up to the age of 12. However, the Roma will continue to face health problems of this kind if they go on living in places like these. Doctors of the World seek for a suitable place where Roma would be able to build a 'civilized' settlement.

- **9/4/1999: Nea**, page 79

Widespread Rubella Cases

The article refers to the recent widespread appearance of rubella cases in Greece and to the possibility of seeing the same development with cases of measles next year. The article is based on data provided by the Ministry of Health. One of the reasons behind this phenomenon is the fact that specific groups of the population, such as Roma and immigrants, have not been vaccinated against the diseases.

The reports reveal the very bad health condition of nomad Roma in Greece, due to the indifference of the State to ameliorate their unacceptable living conditions and to provide Roma with the necessary medical care.

3. The integration of Roma: a folklore study

- **5/4/1999: Nea**, page 26

Roma Wear Jeans Now

In Aghia Varvara the looks of Roma have changed and their former nomad life has been restructured. Social Folklore Professor Anna Lydaki spent four years with the Roma of Aghia Varvara. She wrote about her experience in the book 'Roma in the City - Growing Up in Aghia Varvara'. The Roma who had to avoid their nomad life and their traditional professions are in a transitional stage. This is obvious in their houses. They adopt a modern way of life which they do not fully accept. Their houses have furniture but they still sit and sleep on the floor. They dress in traditional Roma style at home but try to hide their identity at work. In front of non-Roma people, they disagree with the term 'Gypsy', because of its negative connotations. However, when they are among members of the Roma community, they tend to laugh at the stereotypes the non-Roma have for them. Up to now, Roma used to care only for the acceptance of the other Roma; now they seem to care about how the non-Roma see them. Some Roma women tell their children to avoid the company of other Roma so as to keep away from trouble. It is very difficult, however, for a young Rom to leave his/her friends and family and enter unknown surroundings in which s/he feels insecure. Even though at first glance one has the impression that Roma and non-Roma live on good terms, it is evident that great differences still survive.

A presentation of an interesting folklore study of those Roma who have overcome the nomad way of living and have been integrated into the middle class society of Aghia Varvara.

5/4/1999: Nea, page 20

30 questions to Anna Maria Papaharalambous

We got to know Ms. Papaharalambous from last year's TV hit, 'Whispers of the Heart', where she starred as the young Roma woman Erato. The actress admits that the role of Erato helped a lot in her career and that many people associate her with the persona of the Roma woman. The moral lesson of the serial, according to her, was that people still have their ability to dream.

Whenever actress A. M. Papaharalambous appears in the press, her name is accompanied by the adjective 'Roma'. However frivolous and superficial last year's TV hit Whispers of the Heart may be, it made the word 'Roma' appear more often in everyday language (see also 'The Apotheosis of Roma in a Record-Breaking Greek TV Series', Christina Rougheri, AIM, April 1998).

4. Roma in the Kosovo conflict

- **16/4/1999: Eleftherotypia**, page 14

Roma Don't Sing Anymore

The Roma of Kosovo followed the destiny of the refugees. Most of them moved to the hinterland of Serbia. Cut away from their country in refugee camps, they are waiting for the day when they will go back to Kosovo even if the latter is totally destroyed. They left Kosovo because of the bombings. They yearn for the days when all national groups lived together in peace and blame the USA for the division between Serbs and Albanians.

- **27/4/1999: Avgi**

Discrimination Over Discrimination

Even in the horror of the war in Yugoslavia discrimination against Roma continues to be common practice, according to a statement issued by the European Roma Rights Center. The organization denounces cases in which Roma were not allowed to enter shelters; were threatened in order to declare that they have an Albanian national identity; were deprived of humanitarian aid and food provisions. Another serious accusation is that in Kosovo, Serbian authorities treat Muslim Roma as Albanians and throw them out of their homes, while Albanian nationalists treat them as Serbs and abuse them.

Two completely different approaches to the same subject: how the war in Yugoslavia influences the Roma community in Kosovo. While the second one is based on information that proves the existence of discrimination against Roma by both sides to the war, the first one is based on interviews taken in Roma camps to strengthen the anti-NATO and pro-Serbian attitude of the newspaper.

5. Eviction of the Halandri settlement Roma

- **24/4/1999: Avgi**

30 Roma Families are Threatened by Persecution

Progressive Left Coalition MP, Ms. Stella Alfieri, Doctors of the World, Drom Network for Roma Social Rights, Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group - Greece called on the legal and public authorities to refrain from evicting some 220 Roma who have been living in Halandri for more than 20 years. Although the Roma have never faced any problems of this kind in the past, they were recently warned to leave their settlement. They have also been found guilty of trespass and the Court decided on their immediate eviction. The MP and the NGOs called on the authorities not to implement the decision, which is against the social and human rights of the Roma. They also called on the Municipality of Halandri, the Prefecture of Attica and the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for Issues concerning the Quality of Life to draft a project on the resettlement of the Roma to a self-managed camp which satisfies the 13 basic preconditions contained in a relevant draft proposal reached by NGOs and

social groups. The case of the self-managed camp for the Roma of the Gallikos River which is under construction near Thessaloniki can serve as an example.

The report adopts the points of the NGOs and sympathizes with the Roma.

6. Negative images of the Roma

- **28/4/1999: Avgi**

The six 'enemies' of the children

According to a survey published in the *Educational Community* magazine questioning children from Great Britain and Greece on their perception of 'the Enemy' and 'the Other', children are victims of stereotypes and negative images against certain foreign countries and certain social groups within their own countries. Greek children described immigrants as a fundamentally criminal group. When asked about Roma and Albanians, they characterized them as 'dirty', 'combative' and 'lazy'. These images are due to a great extent to the ethnocentric character of the educational system. Children's perceptions are related to activities at school, such as the way national holidays are celebrated.

A very interesting and positive analysis on the role of education in the creation of stereotypes and negative images towards foreigners and social groups. The report adopts a comparative approach and stands for an education free from the ethnocentric limitations which distort the perception of 'the Other'.

7. General

- **17/4/1999: Nea, page 30**

From the Old-fashioned Kidnappers to the Huge Ransom Hunters

The case of the young Roma boy Marselino is one of the stories used to illustrate the report on children who become victims of kidnappers. Marselino was kidnapped and killed by his kidnappers when he recognized them - one of them was his cousin. In the numerous court hearings, Marselino's family was reported to have burst into tears, while cursing the murderers.

- **17/4/1999: Avgi**

The Lawyer of the Poor

More than 450 members of the Athens Lawyers Group provide their services for free to the destitute members of our society, regardless of their nationality, religion and the nature of their crime. Since its start in 1997 the Legal Help Project of the Athens Lawyers' Group has accepted more than 300 cases related to drugs, illegal immigration, burglaries and others. The cases are transferred to the ALG through the various social and public institutions which cooperate in the Project. Among them is the Center for Roma Information and Support.

- Several articles mentioned the Roma community as being part of the population of Kosovo, as well as being among the groups that mostly suffered from the Nazi cleansing.