

**JANUARY 2000 ACTIVITY REPORT  
OF THE GHM ROMA OFFICE**

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**1.) GHM fact-finding mission to Thessaloniki, Xanthi and Komotini**

*a) Minimal progress in the infrastructure works in the former military barracks of Gonou*

In January 2000, GHM representatives Panayote Elias Dimitras and Christina Rougheri and MRG-G representative Nafsika Papanikolatos visited the city of Thessaloniki and the former military barracks of Gonou, in order to inspect the progress of the infrastructure works in the first self-managed camp in Greece. Minimal progress had been made since November 1999, only the surrounding wall and the foundation of the multipurpose center were almost finished. According to Thanasis Triarides (DROM Network for Roma Social Rights), the competent authorities had given all guarantees to the building contractor that the work was going to be finished. The last deal, made in November 1999, was that the building contractor would receive 100 million drachmas every month. At the time, the contractor had already been given 250 million drachmas. The overall cost was estimated at around 610 million drachmas, plus another 100 million. The additional 100 million would be allocated for changing the electricity power from the initially planned 2 W to 10 W. By November 6, 1999, the government (the Ministry of Health) had given the building contractor 350 million drachmas. The unforeseen problem that exasperated the situation for a while was that the works came up to more than the amount stipulated in the initial budget. In such cases, the building contractor is allowed to proceed with the works only if the extra amount is not more than 50% of the initial budget. Otherwise, the law provides for another auction for the undertaking of the construction to take place. In the case of Gonou, the initial budget was for 350 million drachmas. In reality this meant that the building contractor should not undertake works that would cost more than 475 million drachmas. Yet, the latest budget was for 710 million drachmas. This problem should have been solved through a new auction. In order to overcome another delay in the construction work, the prefecture authorities, and the non-governmental organizations involved in the inspection of the works, used a clause providing for the assignment of

the whole construction to the same building contractor in emergency cases. The argument used by the prefecture authorities and the NGOs was that, under the existing circumstances, the prolonged stay of Roma in the drained bed of the river Gallikos was a threat to their health and life, especially in winter where the fear of floods was always present.

According to Mr. Triarides, the self-managed camp is not expected to be ready before March 2000. The lottery for the distribution of the plots of land has not yet taken place. The association of Roma from Evosmos is expected to acquire legal status within the next two months. This association will be in charge of the management of the camp. The association's duties will include the provision of a clean environment in the camp, since the municipal authorities are not obliged by law to collect the garbage from places, like Gonou, which are not included in the urban plan.

Mr. Triarides also said that 101 Roma children regularly attend school classes. Compared to the past, when only 16 children attended school, this is seen as a real progress. Members of the DROM Network for Roma Social Rights provide transportation to the children on a bus, given by the prefecture authorities specifically for this purpose. In the near future, after the transferring to the former barracks of Gonou, there will be various education and employment programs for the residents of the camp (e.g. adult classes, classes for women, especially for those above the age of 12, bilingual classes).

#### ***b) GHM and MRG-G visit to Evlalo (Xanthi)***

On January 10, 2000, the GHM and MRG-G visited Evlalo, a village near Xanthi with a mixed population - Christians and Muslims. Among the Christian families, there is a substantial number of Roma. The NGO representatives went to the (Christian) primary public school of Evlalo, attended solely by Roma pupils, and met with the two teachers there - Mr. Papamihail and Ms. Papandreou. The teachers said that the school has 25 children. Out of them, 21 come regularly to school. The rest have immigrated with their parents to Germany but are still listed in the school records.

On Ms. Papandreou's initiative, the first graders -nine pupils- use a brand new textbook for the instruction of the Greek language, different from the textbook provided for in the official curriculum. The scientific team of the University of Ioanina, which runs a Roma education program, produced the book. The team has already produced 16 books - eight for the pupils and another eight for the professors. They deal with a series of topics -language, geography, hygiene- and, unlike the books in the official curriculum, are not aimed at specific age groups, but rather at children with different levels of basic school knowledge. So far the Evlalo School is the only one that uses one of the books of the university team. The idea is for this pilot project to be expanded to other Greek schools with Roma children. The results are encouraging. The book is based on the progressive learning of the construction of syllables, then of words and finally of phrases. The book in the official curriculum is based on a different philosophy -the automatic instruction of words- that seems to be far more difficult for Roma children to whom, in most cases, Greek is their second or even third language.

Despite their success, the organizations still face numerous problems in the implementation of the project. The children do not use the original book but a photocopied version. From an aesthetic and psychological point of view, this creates problems to the children. To overcome this, their teacher, Ms. Papandreou, asks them to color the pictures on their own. Photocopies are used, because the few original copies were distributed to various schools in the region of Xanthi (in Dekarho, Kimeria, Drosero) with the idea of multiplying them through photocopies. The money for colored photocopies or original textbooks is insufficient, since this is a pilot project and the books have not yet been officially approved by the Organization of Textbooks. This means that, for the moment, the money for the mass reproduction of the approximately 100-page book cannot be granted by the aforementioned organization, which is the one in charge of such technical issues. In any case, it seems that the overall budget of the University of Ioanina Roma education program is not as high as the budget for a respective program for the minority in Thrace.

Apart from this, the school is in serious need of technical support and infrastructure. There is no central heating, so the children have to be in class wearing their overcoats. The school has two classrooms - one relatively big and another one relatively small. The teachers have repeatedly asked the authorities to divide the space into two equal portions, so that the lack of heating is not so severe. The school does not own a single computer; the desks are few and very old. Initially the professors themselves furnished the school with spare furniture from their own houses. Last fall the school was given one cupboard, two blackboards and a used photocopy machine. The GHM and MRG-G representatives promised to bring all this to the knowledge of the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life and to contribute to the securing of alternative grants for the mass reproduction of the original copies of the book.

A very positive development was that since the beginning of the school year, two school traffic policemen have assumed the duty of helping the children cross the main street and of also accompanying them to and from their homes. The measure was provoked by the complaints and excuses of the parents, who claimed that this was the reason for not sending their children to school. The parents had a point in arguing that the street was not safe. The distance between the school and the Roma neighborhood is approximately 700 meters and the law does not provide for a school bus for less than 1200 meters.

### ***c) GHM and MRG-G visit to Drosero (Xanthi)***

On January 11, 2000, GHM and MRG-G visited the center for social care in Drosero. The latter is situated near the district center of Xanthi and is populated by Muslim Roma. The NGO representatives met with Ms. Athanasiadou, director of the center. The center was the first public institution to get in close contact with this population. The needs are still immense. There is no telephone and no table games for the children. The NGO activists referred to their close contact and cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life and promised to bring these needs to the attention of the competent authorities. Actually, according to Ms. Athanasiadou, there are approximately 380 Roma children in Drosero. With some exceptions they all go to school. Yet, for lack of financial means, they attend the Greek program. They participate in the morning prayers and have no classes on the Koran. Class dropout

usually starts after April. Courses for adults are also offered in a building close to the center for social care.

***d) Follow up in the case of Durgut Sezgin.***

The GHM and MRG-G produced a joint report to the OSCE, referring to the case of the stateless Roma, Durgut Sezgin. According to the Greek government, Mr. Sezgin was not entitled to a stateless person's identity card, since his status was not that of a stateless person. According to the Greek government, Durgut Sezgin is Bulgarian. Moreover, if he wanted to be considered as stateless, he had to provide the competent authorities with a legal document proving his non-Bulgarian citizenship. On January 11, 2000, the GHM and MRG-G group met with Durgut Sezgin in Komotini and informed him of the latest developments in his case. He was asked to go to the Bulgarian Consulate in Thessaloniki and ask for a certificate proving that he was not a Bulgarian citizen. Then, he said that already in 1997 he had provided the authorities with such a certificate. In the course of the discussion, it turned out that Mr. Sezgin's sister is a Greek citizen. The family had realized this when Durgut Sezgin went to the community authorities of Vena (a Muslim village in Komotini) where his mother -who is a Greek citizen- was registered. It was after this discovery that he was advised by the secretary of the community to look deeply into his case and ask the Bulgarian Consulate for the appropriate documentation. In addition to that, the authorities had not renewed his father's residence permit. Similar to his son and his brother, Emin Durgut is also stateless.

The GHM contacted the chief officer of the Police Directorate of Komotini, Mr. Kokinis. After getting information about the case, Mr. Kokinis promised to look into the matter. In the next few days, Mr. Durgut was asked by police officer Mr. Havieras to find the document, which he had submitted once to the local authorities of Vena or, otherwise, to get a new one from the Bulgarian Consulate in Thessaloniki. Mr. Havieras explained to Mr. Durgut that this was a necessary step for him and his father to acquire a 5-year-long residence permit. However, by proving his non-Bulgarian citizenship, Mr. Durgut should automatically fall into the category of 'stateless' and claim a stateless person's identity card. The GHM, with the consent of Mr. Durgut, submitted a report to the Ombudsman's Office asking for a proper investigation of the matter.

***e. The case of Durgut Songiul***

Durgut Songiul is 22 years old and married to Durgut Sezgin. On March 11, 1999 she miscarried twins. She went to the public hospital of Komotini where she had to stay for at least one day, so that the necessary medical tests are done. Afraid that the doctors in the public hospital would not take care of her, Durgut Songiul went to her private gynecologist. The latter told her that the embryos were dead, adding that she needed to undergo an operation, which required anesthesia. To her great surprise, Durgut Songiul woke up in the public hospital of Komotini. During the surgical intervention of the private doctor, some complications had occurred, so the doctor himself took his patient to the hospital in a state of shock. The doctors in the hospital explained to her that, since she had a perforated womb, they had to take out the vital organ. It took her

a few seconds to realize the implications of this operation: she would never be able to give birth.

Songiul Durgut decided to investigate the matter and find out what the gynecologist's share of responsibility was. Once again, she went to the hospital of Komotini asking for a certificate stating the reasons why her womb had been taken out. At first, she was told that for such a certificate to be issued, she would have to wait for at least one month, while the organ is being examined in the hospital's laboratory. The second time she was told to wait even longer. Yet, she discerned an effort made by the personnel to discourage her from pursuing the case. After consulting with the GHM, Durgut Songiul addressed the hospital for the third time. She was told that the organ was never examined, nor was there any possibility for that to be done in the hospital. Angry, she stated that it was her indisputable right to know what had really happened and that it was the hospital's responsibility to provide her with an explanation. The Ombudsman's Office has encouraged the GHM, with the consent of Durgut Songiul, to forward the case to the Ombudsman.

## **2.) Doctors of the World Hold Press Conference on the Roma**

On January 13, 2000, Doctors of the World gave a press conference at which they presented the scientific results from their research in four camps in Athens: Agia Paraskevi, Chalandri and Aspropyrgos (Nea Zoe and the camp in the garbage dump). The overall population in the aforementioned camps is estimated to be around 1,800 people. At the time when the main research took place, there were 1,034 people; the rest were traveling around Greece in search of seasonal occupation. According to data collected and presented by the Doctors of the World, 52% of the population are women and 48% men. 50% of the total population are children and minors. The average age of the Roma woman who gives birth for the first time is 16 years. One out of ten families sends their children to school. One out of five children begs in the streets. The average monthly income of a Roma family in these camps is estimated to be around 76,000 drachmas, approximately half of the minimum salary on the labor market. Only 14% of the Roma have some sort of education. 91% of them have a primary school degree, 7% were registered at the high school level and only 2% at the college level. Literacy is higher whenever there is a school near the camp. The Doctors of the World visit the aforementioned camps twice a week and provide the Roma with emergency aid, hygiene instructions and vaccinations.

The GHM participated in the press conference and gave its input in the discussion with the journalists. Stelios Kalamiotis, from the camp in Chalandri, shared with the public his experience as a Roma tent-dweller. Doctors of the World's European partners and members of the Romeurope Network also attended the conference.

### **As a follow-up to the press conference:**

(Excerpts from the January 2000 GHM report to the ERRC on the Coverage of the Roma in the Greek Media)

**26/1/2000: Planet Radio Station 104.5** [M. Economeas]

Starting from the findings of the Doctors of the World, M. Economeas, journalist with the private radio station Planet, made reference to the destitute living conditions of Roma tent-dwellers in Athens, Thessaloniki and in other parts of Greece. References were also made to their social and economical marginalization, their exclusion from the school system and violations of their fundamental rights. Ms. Elpida Efthimiatos spoke mainly about the existing housing prospects for the Roma of Chalandri and Agia Paraskevi as well as of the Roma in Western Athens (Ano Liosia and Aspropyrgos, Nea Zoe and rubbish dump). She referred to the obstacles set up by the mayor of Ano Liosia and the Prefect of West Attica in relation to the plans for the creation of a local self-managed camp. She also tried to shatter the well-known myth about the nomad nature of Roma. The tendency at least during the last few decades is that Roma wish to have a permanent base, a home in which to settle down.

Mr. Triarides, from the DROM Network for Roma Social Rights, spoke on the social exclusion of Roma and the problems set by the local authorities and residents, despite the stated wish of the government to work towards the smooth integration of the Roma into Greek society. Mr. Triarides explained that it is not difficult for a population, which constantly lives in the margin to resort to unlawful acts.

Christina Rougneri from GHM referred to the Roma's late acquisition of Greek citizenship and the consequences that this delay had on their marginalization. Despite the myths and stereotypes about the free 'non-conformist' spirit of the Roma, the latter wish not only to settle, but also to acquire their own property. Yet, even when Roma have the financial means to get a plot of land and a house, obstacles are set by the local authorities who refuse to give them building permits like in Ano Liosia and Tyrnavos (near Larisa, in Continental Greece). Roma are maybe the only category of the Greek population to have a point in complaining of the enormous competition on the labor market, coming from the Pontics (ethnic Greeks from the former Soviet Union) and immigrants. The Greek state has taken no measures of 'positive discrimination' or 'economic nationalism' to help them adjust in the new market reality. Are there any violations of their fundamental rights? Besides the refusal of the local authorities to register them as citizens and municipal residents and the refusal of school directors to accept Roma children in the classrooms, there is also the issue of police brutality. There is no way one can compare the way a Roma driver is treated by the police with the way car inspections are done on any other Greek citizen. In any case, police officers have neither training, nor education to understand and approach the Roma. The GHM complements the decision of the Minister of Public Order to provide police officers serving in Zefyri, Ano Liosia and Zefyri with F. Mandilaras' book «The Great Shadow and the Roma.» Stelios Kalamiotis, from the Chalandri Association Elpida, presented the position of the tent-dwellers. He spoke about the efforts made to find plots of land to be subsidized by the municipalities of Chalandri and Agia Paraskevi as well as by the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life.

### **3.) Doctors of the World's Scientific Symposium on the Roma**

A summary of the debate during this symposium, along with related background, can be found in the AIM article appended below.

(Excerpts from the January 2000 GHM report to the ERRC on the Coverage of the Roma in the Greek Media)

**29/1/2000: *Avgi***, p. 12 and 21

### Roma Streets

A comparative two-page report on the situation of the Roma in Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece, based on a presentation made by Christina Rougheri (Greek Helsinki Monitor) at a seminar organized by the Doctors of the World on January 15, 2000. The presentation dealt with the legal status of the Roma in the four countries (implicit recognition in Greece and Albania, explicit recognition in Bulgaria and Macedonia) and its reflection in four sensitive areas: literacy, employment, media and political representation.

(The text on which the presentation and the subsequent report were based is to be found in the following title: <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/pdf/roma-southeast-europe.PDF>. Rougheri Christina (1999) «Theory and Practice. Roma in the Southern Balkans»)

#### **4.) Third Annual Meeting of the University of Ioanina Associates with Discussions on the Roma Education Project**

On January 28 and 29, 2000, the third annual meeting of the associates of the local university working on the Roma Education Project took place in the town of Ioanina (Hepirus). The Project has been underway for three years now, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and the University of Ioanina, in particular the Department of Philosophy, Pedagogic and Psychology. The theme of the meeting was «Education Integration of Gypsy Children. Steps Forward, Steps Backward». The aim was to discuss the progress made, as well as the existing problems. Apart from the university professors and the local associates involved in the project, which so far covers 26, out of the 52, counties in Greece, there were other guests at the meeting. There were representatives of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations (President Mr. Lambrou and Ms. Halilopoulos), representatives of three non-governmental organizations – Greek Helsinki Monitor (Christina Rougheri), DROM Network for Roma Social Rights (Io Aghouri) and Doctors of the World-Greece (Agis Terzides), as well as Ioana Sotirhu, a journalist with the *Eleftherotypia* newspaper.

The meeting was structured in 30-minute-long presentations per county. The local associates dealt with a number of issues, such as the integration of the children into the school system. This is based on the desire to get the six-year-olds enrolled in the first grade of the primary school; to organize preparatory classes for the older children, so that they later integrate into the school system; to encourage the four and five-year-olds to attend the kindergarten preparatory program. Another important issue discussed was the children's acquaintance with the school environment as well as the sustainability of their interest in and enthusiasm about school. In many cases, the resistance of school directors, teachers, parents and local authorities seemed to be too much of an obstacle and prevented the Roma children's smooth integration into the school system. The university associates reported that they had had to do the

impossible and undertake duties outside the project's scope. Many of them provided school directors with the birth or permanent residents' certificates of the prospective pupils, so that the latter could be enrolled without facing the authorities' pseudo-excuses for not accepting them as students.

Unlike other education projects for the Roma carried out throughout Europe, this one is based more on the undermining of the differences, rather than on the empowerment of the children's Roma identity. Preparatory classes are solely in Greek. Romanes is completely left out of the pilot project, as well as of the recommendations on an education strategy in the near future. On various occasions, Mr. A. Gotovos, the professor in charge of the project, has made references to «the plague of ethnicism/culturalism» which, in the name of the respect for diversity, legitimizes «ghetto» policies in education: separate books, separate classes, separate schools. According to Mr. Gotovos, the fans of ethnicism, by making use of words such as «minority» and «race», portray the Roma as a group of people absolutely different from the rest of society, in this way legitimizing double standards. The aim of the project is to «minimize the importance of cultural background as a contributing element to the organization of a class». In this light, Mr. Gotovos misrepresented the theory and normative practice of self-managed camps, speaking about «peculiar ghettos». In addition, he called the supporters of these ideas -in their essence inspired by the Nazis- «stupid and dangerous». Similar ideas were also expressed by other professors and associates of the university, as well as by the president of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations.

The Greek Helsinki Monitor criticized the project's assimilationist approach. The organization questioned the scientific credentials of the university's associates on the basis of two concrete examples. While presenting the progress of the project in the county of Larissa, the local associate failed to mention that the residents in the settlement of Nea Smyrni identify themselves as Rudari and not as Roma. The GHM argued that this is a very significant detail, which should not be overlooked by an associate in an education project. In this way he discredits the project's overall leveling approach towards sensitive issues like identity and self-identification.

The second example is related to a comment made by another associate, working in a different county. While giving a detailed account of her efforts to make the project known to Roma parents, the associate in question mentioned the case of a certain Roma settlement where residents, on hearing the word Roma, almost lynched her, disclaiming their Roma origin. After realizing that Roma were rather well «integrated» into society, with their children facing no serious problems at school, she left the settlement in question out of the project's scope. The GHM again questioned the scientific credentials of the university's associates who prefer to use the term «integration», instead of «assimilation».

In the course of the meeting a valuable piece of information was made known to the public by the president of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations, Mr. Lambru. The latter, after reciting the statements of the Deputy Minister of the Interior, Mr. Florides, on the allocation of 800 million drachmas to municipalities with Roma camps and settlements for infrastructure works, announced the setting up of a committee on the funding of housing schemes and proposals for the Roma. As

president of the Federation, Mr. Lambrou was invited to participate in this committee, as well as in the inter-ministerial organ -set up by Prime Minister C. Simitis- which is staffed with competent deputy ministers, ministerial secretaries and participants in the inter-municipal Network «ROM». The Minister of the Interior, Ms. V. Papandreou, is the Chair of this inter-ministerial organ.

## **5.) Educating the police**

Doctors of the World's G. Boukovinas informed the GHM on the initiative of the Minister of Public Order, Mr. Chrysohoides, to buy 200 copies of the book of F. Mandilaras «The Great Shadow and the Gypsies» to be distributed to police officers serving in Zefyri, Ano Liosia and Menidi, areas highly populated by Roma. Reportedly, the General Secretary of the Ministry of Public Order, Mr. Efstathiades, asked Mr. Mandilaras to organize seminars and use the book for teaching at the police academy. The book is a contribution to the self-knowledge of the Roma by the Doctors of the World, DROM Network for Roma Social Rights and the Patakis Publications. It is meant also to make the general public aware of the problems of the Roma. The GHM supports the initiative.

## **6.) How to Prove Permanent Residence? The Ombudsman on Nikos Katsaris' Report on the Difficulties in Getting a Passport.**

(Excerpts from GHM Report to ERRC no. 72: 25/12/1999, November 1999 Activity Report of the GHM Roma Office)

On November 9, 1999, Nikos Katsaris, the 23-year-old Roma man from Chalandri who recently pressed charges for verbal and physical abuse against police officers in Nafplio, went to the passport issuing department of the prefecture of Athens. He was accompanied by a member of the GHM and had all the necessary documents (an identity card, a photocopy of the identity card, two photos, a GDR 9,000 fee and the application form). There was just one thing missing: he did not have two receipts from water, electricity or telephone bills. Instead, he had filled out a notary-certified statement that he is a Roma tent-dweller who lives in the camp of Chalandri without infrastructure, which makes it impossible for him to submit the aforementioned receipts. Nevertheless, the address written in both his identity card and application form is valid and is his permanent address. His closing statement was that he is fully aware of the legal repercussions in case this were proven untrue. This was done on the advice of the GHM, which had had prior consultation with the Ombudsman's Office. The new law on the relations between the citizens and the state suggested that a mere statement by Mr. Katsaris should be enough. Confused, an employee led Nikos Katsaris and the GHM representative to Mr. Geros, the person in charge. The latter listened to the story and then asked for a document from the municipality of Chalandri certifying, in the first place, that such a camp exists at the address stated by Nikos Katsaris in his application form and, then, that Mr. Katsaris resides there.

The GHM representative tried to explain that Nikos Katsaris' statement should be enough without the need for provision of other documents. Since Mr. Katsaris has no police record, nor is he a fugitive, the service should accept the credibility of his

statement. The GHM also referred to the communication and prior consultation with the Ombudsman and the new law. The person in charge reacted by saying, «the Ombudsman is not issuing any passports and has no responsibilities related to that, while I do.» He also threatened that «if you refer once more to that Ombudsman I will not help you in this!» With this last phrase it became clear that he was ignorant of the role and the existence of the Ombudsman. The GHM representative gave Mr. Geros a photocopy of the law establishing the Ombudsman and defining his duties, encouraging Mr. Geros to make a photocopy of it, even though it is not within the citizens' responsibilities to inform the Public Administration on issues of its concern. Later on, the GHM called the Ombudsman and asked Ms. Lykovardis -the person who had initially been consulted on the case- to call Mr. Geros and inform about the law and the service.

After some time, Nikos Katsaris and the GHM representative were called back at Mr. Geros' office. Following contacts with the municipality of Chalandri, Mr. Geros stated that he was going to accept the application. Instead of the missing receipts, a document from the municipality of Chalandri, certifying his permanent residence in the camp and its address, would be put in Nikos Katsaris' application file.

Following this event, the GHM wrote a complaint to be signed by Nikos Katsaris and be sent to the Ombudsman for further investigation, in order to inform the Public Administration on issues of this kind.

To the Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization  
Directorate of Urban and Municipal State

According to Article 3, Paragraph 1, clause 20 and 4 and Paragraph 5 of Law 2647/1998, the issuing of certificates of permanent residence is within the competence of the local authorities, in particular the communities and municipalities. Regarding the process itself, the same law stipulates that certificates are issued if the applicant can prove residence in the community or municipality using all possible means for that. Circular No. F. 68200/1766/1.2.99 -issued by the Ministry of the Interior in order to set standards for the uniform enforcement of the aforementioned law- has a list of indicative means for proving permanent residence besides a notary-certified statement and a photo. These include: receipts from electricity, water and telephone bills, photocopy of tax returns or any other document local authorities would find suitable for that purpose. Though the aforementioned list is *indicative*, certain authorities that provide services on the grounds of permanent residency (for example the passport issuing departments of the prefectures), tend to overlook this fact, going by the circular's unswerving application and requiring from the applicants receipts from telephone, water and electricity bills.

This attitude has already created problems to a certain number of citizens who do not wish to or are unable to make use of the services of the telephone, electricity and water-supply companies. Disregarding the indicative character of the circular's list and relying only on some of the possible means of proving permanent residence threatens the fundamental freedom of personal self-determination as stipulated in the Greek Constitution (in the clause regarding the free development of personality). More

specifically, certain groups of people with linguistic, ethnic or other features, like the Roma, have come to develop ways of living and an attitude to life, which the majority might see as deviating from the prevailing social norm. However, the Roma cherish these as valuable elements of their group identity. In this light, the living of a more or less nomad life in makeshift lodgings in the countryside is entitled to protection under Article 5, Paragraph 1 of the Greek Constitution.

Having a known permanent residence implies a series of rights as well as duties in the name of the public welfare. Nevertheless, the latter does not in its turn imply the abolition of nomad life. On the contrary, the public welfare should be satisfied in a way, which takes into consideration cultural and social particularities in accordance with the constitutional right to freely develop one's personality. Even though they lead nomad and semi-nomad life, the Roma do have some residential documents, usually related to the vital professional and family activities they are involved in (e.g. municipal rolls, children's registration in schools, professional status as stated in the tax returns). In any case, the proof of permanent residence -when it comes to Roma nomads- should not be left exclusively to the applicants. On-the-spot municipal inspections are a way for the local authorities to help overcome the applicants' impossibility to produce proof of their permanent residence. These inspections may include the acquisition of certificates from other authorities like school and police directors and of notary-certified statements made by people with known addresses

Keeping in mind the criticism by international human rights organizations of the way the Greek authorities treat the Roma, the Ombudsman's Office would recommend to the government to revise the existing circulars. This revision should include the appending of guidelines that would analyze the problem and suggest alternative ways for the Roma to prove their permanent residence. We strongly urge the authorities to follow the provisions of the Greek Constitution and show true respect for the cultural specificity of their citizens.

Sincerely yours,  
G. Kaminis  
Assistant to the Ombudsman

## **APPENDIX**

### **Assimilationist vs. Multiculturalist Approaches to Greece's Roma**

Christina Rougheri  
Greek Helsinki Monitor  
(AIM Athens, 29/2/2000)

To be --a minority-- or not to be? This paraphrase of Shakespeare's well-known words seems to encapsulate half of Greece's "Doctors' of the World"'s scientific symposium on Roma last January. Most probably, another Shakespearean paraphrase encapsulates the other half: there seems to be "something rotten" in the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations...

On January 15, 2000, Doctors of the World-Greece organized a rather eventful scientific symposium entitled ***“Gypsy Populations in Europe: From Social Exclusion to Violation of Human Rights.”*** In many ways the meeting was a success. It established itself as a forum where normative approaches to difference are discussed and suppressed rivalries are expressed openly. A University of Ioanina team is in charge of the education program on Roma, which has been underway under the auspices of the Ministry of Education for three years now. The team talked about what can be considered as the prevailing “assimilationist trend” in Greece, a blend of liberal nationalism and ethnocentrism that undermines the importance of diversity in ethnicity, language, religion and culture, so as to “integrate not yet assimilated social groups.” Years ago, the prevailing trend was to keep such groups marginal.

In essence, both approaches are contrary to multiculturalism as they regard diversity as a potential threat, a problem, rather than a sign of wealth. At the symposium, as well as later, during their third annual meeting in Ioanina (January 28 and 29, 2000), the university’s program associates made references to “the plague of ethnicism/culturalism.” Professor Athanasios Gotovos, who is in charge of the program, claimed that supporters of “ethnicism,” i.e. the multiculturalists, falsely portray Roma as a group of people different from the rest of society. According to him, this is done through the use of words like ‘minority’ and ‘race.’ In general, their “discourse on minorities is obstetrical, leading to the construction of minorities rather than the mere observation of them” argued Mr. Gotovos, using as an example theorists like Anderson, Gellner and Danforth. He paid particular attention to Danforth’s thesis on “the allegedly existing Macedonian minority.” “The term minority implies a certain homogeneity which does not exist in reality... In the name of the respect for diversity, the supporters of ethnicism legitimize ghetto policies” stated Mr. Gotovos. According to him, cultural pluralism demands ghetto policies in education with separate books, classes and schools; similar policies in housing imply construction models like the self-managed camps for Roma, which are “strange sophisticated ghettos.” Mr. Gotovos finished his speech by calling the supporters of these ideas “stupid and dangerous,” and advocating solutions “originally inspired by the Nazis.” An associate of Mr. Gotovos, Mr. Dafermakis, moved even further saying that all those involved in the advocacy of Roma’ rights are “pimps.” On the same bandwidth was the position of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Theodoros Pangalos. He stated that Roma are one of the “unassimilated groups” in contemporary Greece (*Ta Nea*, February 14, 2000).

Not surprisingly, unlike other Roma education programs throughout Europe, the program of the University of Ioanina is based more on the undermining of the differences, rather than on the empowerment of Roma identity. Preparatory classes are solely in Greek. Romanes is completely left out of the pilot project, as well as out of the recommendations on an education strategy for the near future. As clearly stated by Mr. Gotovos and his associates, the aim of the existing program is to “minimize the importance of people’s cultural background as a contributing element to the organization of the class.” In other words, the aim is to make Greek Roma less Roma and more Greek.

Traditionally, Roma in Greece have tried to claim for their rights through “fragmentary” leadership and clientelistic relations with the governors. Theodoros

Pangalos reaffirmed that point by saying, “Gypsies deal with politics only to trade their votes in an anachronistic and fruitless way” (*Ta Nea*, February 14, 2000). Keeping this in mind, the attitude of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations is hardly surprising. “We are not interested whether Prime Minister Costas Simitis, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Papandreou and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople call us ‘minority.’ We are Greek Gypsies,” stated the President of the Roma Federation, Christos Lambrou, stressing the adjectival use of the term “Roma/Gypsy.” “I do not think that Gypsies constitute a minority” stated Herakles Kalamiotes in a protest letter, indirectly opposing the organizers’ position expressed in the symposium’s agenda: “Gypsies: Second Class Citizens or Cultural Minority?” On the very last day before the symposium, Herakles Kalamiotes, the only tent-dweller board member of the Roma Federation, who was invited to be among the panelists, chose not to participate in the symposium. Instead, he sent a letter with the request that it be publicly read by Freddy Stamos from the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life. Besides the paradox that a Roma tent-dweller and NGO leader asked to be ‘represented’ by a government adviser, Herakles Kalamiotes’ letter conveyed his reservations about participating in a symposium which would make him look “folkloric.” He also complained that the Federation was not given the recognition of a full participant.

The organizers’ gave a straightforward response to the critical remarks on the Federation’s exclusion from the panels. The selection of the speakers was not dictated by any public relations protocol. Doctors of the World did not feel obliged to invite the Federation and pay tribute to a body that they think is bogus. “Why should we invite the Federation to talk about Roma tent-dwellers when it has never set foot in a Roma camp? We have not seen the Federation there when the authorities were burning shanties in Aspropyrgos, when Roma children were about to get drowned in the flooded bed of the Galikos River, when evictions were taking place all over Greece, in the camps of Evosmos, Ioanina and Nea Alikarnasos? Where was the Federation when tent-dwellers were suing the local and prefecture authorities in Thessaloniki and Crete?”

Doctors of the World were right in their criticism. The Federation was never around when needed to voice problems and suggest solutions. On October 1, 1999, at a conference entitled “Asoun Man: Promoting the Social Integration of Roma” organized by “Save the Children-Greece,” Christos Lambrou had insolently stated that embarrassing the Greek government and denouncing problems -especially in international fora and organizations- was not among the Federation’s aims. At this very same meeting, Christos Lambrou had verbally attacked Greek Helsinki Monitor for presenting reports with references to Roma rights violations.

A month later, the President’s (in)action spoke louder than his words: although invited, the Federation was not represented at the briefing on human rights of the Greek Member of European Parliament and member of the EU Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties and Human Rights Anna Karamanou. Further on, the Federation - although invited- did not attend the Round Table on Racism and Xenophobia organized jointly by the Greek delegations to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and to the European Union’s Monitoring Center of Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). They also failed to attend the meetings of the

Monitoring Center's NGO European Network Against Racism (ENAR).

Instead, Mr. Lambrou accepted to participate in the informal advisory committee dealing with the funding of housing schemes on Roma and staffed by cadres of the Interior Ministry, other competent ministries, the Inter-municipal Network 'ROM' and the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life. With the exception the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life, all other members of the committee, including the Federation itself, were directly or indirectly implicated by the Greek delegation to the OSCE last September as bearing the responsibility for the grave situation of Roma rights in Greece. "...The rate of change is frustratingly slow... reaching consent is extremely difficult when one has to deal with a social group, which does not easily speak with one voice... another serious obstacle is the prejudice towards Gypsies... which acquires even more frightening and dangerous dimensions when expressed by police officers or elected officials." With its participation in the committee, the Federation legitimized a policy, which admittedly had no real results. A few months ago, in his answer to the Progressive Left Coalition MP Maria Damanakis, the Deputy Minister of the Interior Mr. Florides, defended the ministry's policy by invoking the Federation's tacit blessing. "In cooperation with ROM Network, the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations and others, the Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization is carrying out a program to deal effectively with the problem." Regrettably, the Federation's leadership is reminiscent of previous attempts at Roma leadership, for which Theodore Pangalos wrote, "the trade of arbitrary representation has flourished: Presidents, 'chiefs' and 'kings' succeeded one another to satisfy the need of the 'balamo' [as Greeks are called in Romanes] for exoticism." (*op.cit.*).

Without even knowing what had been debated in the symposium, the President of the "Progressive Left Coalition," Mr. Konstantopoulos, in his closing speech entitled "Gypsies: a European Minority" countered the assimilationists by addressing the Roma: "The expression 'you are not a minority, you are like us' is an excuse for multiple discrimination at your expense ... the recognition of Roma as a cultural minority is an act of civility; Roma are a minority in the cultural and sociological sense of the term."