

**NOVEMBER 1999 ACTIVITY REPORT
OF THE GHM ROMA OFFICE**

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1.) Roma in Rio. Possible eviction

A report in the local paper *Week of Rio* stated that the local residents and the municipal council would not tolerate the presence of Roma in the area any longer. The GHM contacted the newspaper immediately in order to get more information. Rio, near Patras and right at the border between continental Greece and the Peloponesus, is a town with a substantial number of Roma residents. Following reactions from the local residents and rumors regarding Roma involvement in criminal acts, the municipal council voted in favor of the eviction of the Roma. Criminality and hygiene were the two issues brought forward by the Rio residents in their complaints to the authorities. Their main arguments are that Roma resort to crime and live below any hygienic standards, putting in danger both public safety and health (see also October 1999 GHM report to the ERRC on the coverage of Roma in the Greek press).

On November 3, 1999, the GHM contacted Ms. Raptis, a journalist with the local newspaper, which brought the issue to the limelight. According to information she received from local sources, the residents and the municipal council of Rio do not want the Roma. Therefore, the municipal council decided to initiate the eviction procedure on the basis of the aforementioned arguments, as well as on the basis of trespassing public property. About five years ago, Roma settled in an area, which belongs to the University

of Patras. They live without any suitable infrastructure. This explains the lack of hygiene in the camp. Some of the residents live in shanties, others - in tents. According to Ms. Raptis, the University has not shown any interest in finding a viable solution to the housing problems of the local Roma. One is then left with the impression that, in addition to the residents and the municipal council, the University also wants the Roma out of the area. In reality, though, only the municipal council in its last resolution has clearly expressed the view that the Roma should be evicted from Rio. The local residents have not expressed such a position openly. The non-Roma residents have argued that the Roma should leave their present settlement. However, the argument does not go so far as to argue that the Roma should leave the town of Rio. As far as Ms. Raptis knows, the University has not taken any side officially. The Prefect of the region, Mr. Seretis, has stated that local municipal authorities should provide the Roma with an alternative viable solution within Rio. According to Ms. Raptis, so far the Prefect's comment has been the only pragmatic and human reaction on behalf of the authorities. Ms. Raptis also mentioned that in the last municipal council, despite some «nice words,» many racist comments were expressed about the Roma (e.g. «the presence of Roma in Rio does not honor the city...»). She also made clear that allegations of criminal activity do not involve drug trafficking. Finally, for an in depth inquiry on the issue, Ms. Raptis recommended contacts with the municipality of Rio, representatives of the local residents, the dean of the University and the Prefect's Office. The newspaper and Ms. Raptis in particular will closely follow the events. She promised to keep the GHM informed on the new developments and, in its turn, the GHM promised to let the reporter know about its actions.

The following day, the GHM made contacts with the President of the Rio Municipal Council, Mr. Angelopoulos, with the Prefect Mr. Seretis and with Mr. F. Stamos from the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life. The first one, Mr. Angelopoulos, stated that there are at least three groups of Roma scattered around Rio, all within a small area:

- a) in the area of Platani (district),
- b) around the regional hospital of Rio and
- c) at a site which belongs to the University of Patras.

In all three cases, there is trespassing of public land. Mr. Angelopoulos claimed that the Roma settled down in the wider area of Rio in summer 1999 that is, some two to three months ago. He also argued that they are not residents of Rio, nor are they registered with the municipality. Apparently, the Roma reached Rio following the evictions, which took place on the other side of Patras, namely in the areas of Makriyani and Lefka. (In Makriyani, only those Roma who were registered with the municipality of Patras were allowed to stay. Half of the original population was forced to leave the area for the place to be reconstructed and to constitute a model settlement. Shanties were rebuilt, water supply and public toilets were also provided. However, only half of the original site was given to the Roma. The rest is planned to be turned into a park. When the GHM visited the camp in May 1998, it found dead rats around the settlement, 'squeezed' families living one on top of the other due to lack of land. The Roma were completely marginalized within local society).

Asked about the main professional occupation of the Roma in Rio, Mr. Angelopoulos stated that their main occupations are in trade and beggary. The Roma do not work as farm workers, because the locals prefer to hire Albanians for this job. According to him, some of the Roma have property and houses in other parts of the Peloponesus, for example in Kato Ahaya or Egio. He also made reference to the complaints of the local residents who have reacted negatively to the presence of the Roma, asking the municipality to initiate an eviction procedure. He argued that there have been many complaints about robberies attributed to the Roma. However, when asked by the GHM to provide concrete facts on arrests of suspects, Mr. Angelopoulos said that there were no proofs, only denunciations and allegations.

The Prefect's statement was quite different in many ways. In the first place, he mentioned that the Roma in Rio live in five areas, the aforementioned ones included. He opposed Mr. Angelopoulos' statement regarding the presence of Roma in the area. «I myself have known the problem for two years now...» He also opposed the view that the Roma had reached Rio after their expulsion from Makriyani and Lefka. He mentioned that in Makriyani the authorities were trying to have the Roma settled in houses with their consent, though it is very difficult for such a plan to be implemented in practice. He informed the GHM that he had a meeting on the very same day with the mayor of Rio and with the dean of the University explaining to both of them that the issue of Roma should be addressed in a humane way. The statement «as long as Roma leave Rio, we have nothing to do with them» is neither realistic nor human. He claimed that he made a very concrete proposal to the dean in search of a viable and acceptable solution for all parts. He asked from the university to grant 50 acres, out of its 500 acres, for a settlement to be established. From the overall discussion, Mr. Seretis gave the impression that he is willing to further proceed with the issue and that he is alone in this effort: namely that neither the Municipal Council nor the University have expressed any wish to keep the Roma in Rio.

The GHM made it clear to Mr. Seretis that the organization is willing to initiate a dialogue with him, the local authorities and the Prime Minister's Office in search of a real solution to the problem. The fact that there is some land that could be granted to the Roma is already a satisfactory starting point and a basis for further negotiation. The GHM also explained to Mr. Angelopoulos that the Roma should be given a viable alternative. Even if allegations of criminality are true, given the circumstances, this should not look strange. A population already expelled, moving from place to place, living without any infrastructure, in the social margin and, under the fear of uncertainty, might resort to unlawful acts. The GHM informed both Mr. Angelopoulos and Mr. Seretis that it would contact Mr. Stamos about the situation and ask for his assistance. The case of the Evosmos Roma was mentioned as a concrete successful example of cooperation.

Indeed, Mr. Stamos -who was unaware of the latest developments- stated that he wishes to establish contacts with the local authorities and the Prefect and to pay them a visit in the near future. The visit will also comprise meetings with the Roma themselves. There seems to be a chance for such a visit to take place at the end of next week. He also mentioned that financial support might also be available through the Prime Minister's

Office and the government. The GHM promised to make the necessary arrangements with Mr. Seretis, with the mayor and with the dean and then inform Mr. Stamos about that. The organization also plans to ask the University of Patras about their official position and to bring the issue to the limelight, using the national press. All information gathered by the GHM would be sent to the Prime Minister's Office in order for the latter to get the full picture of the situation.

On November 9, 1999, the GHM contacted the dean of the University of Patras, Mr. Alahiotis. The latter, when asked about the University's position regarding the Prefect's suggestion for the university to grant 50 acres of land to the Roma, replied that he was not aware that such a proposal had been made either officially, or unofficially. In any case, such a proposal would have been and would be rejected by the university. «How is it possible to have Roma living around the University, bringing in their animals and creating trouble and damages?» The GHM asked «Shouldn't an institution such as the University show more flexibility and sensitivity on the matter?» The dean simply replied that the University is not and cannot become a center for taking care of the Roma. He went on that this job is within the authority of the Prefect, who should find an immediate solution to the problem. The whole university community is indignant he finished.

2.) 16 Roma children in Larisa Infected with Hepatitis A; *contacts with the medical authorities*

On November 4, 1999, the private radio station Flash reported on the fact that only in a month (September-October, 1999) there had been 16 cases of Roma children carriers of Hepatitis A in Larisa, mostly in the district of Nea Smyrni which has a large settlement of the Rudari Roma. That settlement was one of the numerous settlements visited by the GHM and the ERRC during their joint fact-finding mission around Greece (May 1998, for further details see GHM May 1998 report to the ERRC). Roma families live in their own two-story houses with full infrastructure and, in no way, encounter the same difficulties and degree of exclusion faced by the tent-dwellers. Keeping this in mind, one wonders how it is possible for such an well-integrated population to show Hepatitis A rates of this kind and how much worse the situation can be when it comes to tent-dwellers.

The GHM contacted Mr. Zilides, the doctor in charge in the Prefecture of Larisa. He confirmed that preventive vaccination had already started, with the first phase already completed. He explained that this is one of the first, if not the very first, times that Greek citizens receive preventive vaccination for Hepatitis A. The latter, unlike Hepatitis B, belongs to the category of diseases for which mandatory vaccination is not provided. In addition, vaccination against Hepatitis A does not seem to be always effective. Mr. Zilides also argued that no matter how paradoxical it might sound, the 16 cases indicate a certain degree of improvement in the hygienic standards of the Roma population and in general of the whole population in Greece. Some 50 years ago, almost every Roma child between one and two years of age had symptoms of the disease. Once hit by Hepatitis A, children would start building their defensive mechanisms against the disease for the rest

of their lives. That was the case for the majority of the Greek population as in general the standard of living was much lower than today's. Sewage systems were non-existent and medicine had not progressed that much. Today people live in much better conditions and Roma in Nea Smyrni are not an exception. In this sense, it is 'normal' to see some Roma children, already past the dangerous age threshold of two years of age, to show symptoms of the disease at the age of seven. As the standards of living improved, in this particular case of Roma, present generations became more vulnerable to the disease. As the instances of the diseases become rarer, the defensive mechanisms of the human bodies get less effective too. Nevertheless it is still questionable why 99% of the non-Roma population show no symptoms of this disease while some Roma do. Mr. Zilides explained this difference on the basis of different personal and family hygienic practices and the easiness with which the disease can contaminate people in their everyday interaction. Large groups of Roma still live together in one place. People of all ages share the same house - infants live with grandparents. Moreover, Roma know little or nothing about preventive medicine and hygienic standards. They are relatively poor and illiterate. Even today, Roma children attend only one or two grades of primary school.

The first reaction of the authorities was to have the water tested. As there seemed to be no problem with it, they proceeded with preventive vaccination. In the meantime, with the help of doctors from Thessaloniki, almost 250 blood samples of Roma (age group 1-30) were taken for examination. Based on the results, the competent authorities will take further action. Mr. Zilides said that he lives in the wider district and has many Roma acquaintances. He also mentioned that after the story reached the press, the Directorate of Education in Larisa expressed fears regarding further spreading of the disease within the community of non-Roma children in the schools. On this occasion, Mr. Zilides referred to the virtues of publicity, demonstrating how the interest of the media contributed to the finalizing of the first phase of vaccination against Hepatitis A without any delay, something, which is not very common. Mr. Zilides also referred to the bad aspects of publicity and the panic it may cause in the public: who can exclude the possibility of non-Roma parents asking for separate schools on the basis that Roma threaten public health?

Roma in Tyrnavos

Finally, Mr. Zilides made reference to the Roma in Tyrnavos «where human rights are clearly violated.» Roma live without any infrastructure and face the absolute negation from the authorities. They live in their own land in shanties because the municipality refuses to include the area in the town plan. They survive without water, electricity, and toilets. Local residents want them out from the area and pressure the authorities in this direction because the presence of Roma devalues their property (For more information also see May 1998 GHM report to the ERRC). Mr. Zilides referred to the situation in Tyrnavos in the local media, which went to Nea Smyrni to inquire about the Hepatitis cases. To indicate the tragic and racist aspect of the situation, he compared the present situation with the situation of an army during a state of war. If the army's general does not provide his soldiers with the basics for survival -water and minimal infrastructure- his soldiers can accuse him of war crimes. What is happening for years in Tyrnavos is unacceptable.

3.) Roma in Evosmos: *delay in the works in the Gonou barracks. The case in the hands of the Ombudsman*

Talking with the GHM about the Rio case, Mr. Stamos also commented on the delay in the works at the former military barracks of Gonou. The Roma were supposed to move in at the end of October 1999; the initial deadline was March 1999. Due to funding problems the works have not been completed yet. Mr. Stamos said that the Prime Minister's Office had contacted the deputy Minister of Health, Mr. Kotsonis, who agreed to give a supplementary grant (GDR 250-260 million) for the electricity and water supply works to be finished by mid-November and for the Roma to settle in Gonou by the end of the month. Regardless of all that, the end of November found the Roma of Evosmos in the drained bed of the Galikos River. By the end of November 1999, Mr. Kotsonis had not signed the decision yet. The Roma of Evosmos, on November 24, submitted a report to the Ombudsman's Office, asking for an investigation on the reasons behind this new delay. The Roma argued that they would not be able to survive another cold winter in the drained bed of the river with the threat of floods looming large. In the dossier, there was also a report by the Prefect of Thessaloniki, signed by A. Kaltaverides (vice-prefect), to the deputy Minister of Health to start the procedure.

4.) Stateless Roma

The recent GHM and MRG-G report to the OSCE and the Greek Ombudsman on the stateless people in Thrace -including some Roma identifying themselves as Turks and who are refused identity papers- was followed by a request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thrace to the Ombudsman's Office. The Ministry wanted to get the Ombudsman's Office dossier on the issue, as well as any relevant data, in order for it to be able to follow the case closely. The Ombudsman's Office asked the GHM for approval before it transferred the file, since the GHM was the applicant on behalf of Durgut Sezgin. Approval was naturally granted.

Moreover, answering to the parliamentary question of Progressive Left Coalition deputy Maria Damanakis, (15/7/1999) the Minister of Public Order replied the following:

«In general all cases regarding aliens are being examined thoroughly by the competent authorities. When it comes to the case of Durgut Sezgin, in particular, to his request to be provided with an identity card for stateless people, it should be stated clearly that issuing such a certificate presupposes giving him the status of a stateless person. Mr. Sezgin has no such status based on the documents that the competent authorities possess. He is a Bulgarian citizen, therefore an alien. It should also be stated that, indeed, the latter has received permission to stay in Greece as a person with undefined

nationality. In order to be able to seek treatment as a stateless person, Mr. Sezgin was advised to provide the Greek authorities with a valid certificate stating that he is not a Bulgarian citizen. In case he was unable to do so, he was asked to submit a valid travel document from the Bulgarian authorities for his application, regarding permission to stay in Greece, to be considered under law 1975/1999.»

The Minister of Public Order, Mr. Chrisohoides, signed the answer.

5.) Getting a passport: *the case of Nikos Katsaris*

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 the 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.

6.) Roma in Katerini (Continental Greece): *a hundred waterlogged Roma*

10/11/1999: *Flash* (Private) Radio Station, morning news.

Reportedly there were approximately a hundred waterlogged and waterbound Roma in the wider area of Katerini, which was flooded overnight.

A brief and neutral report.

Following the news, the GHM staff contacted Flash Radio with a request for more information. A hundred Roma, who live in houses in a settlement in the Pelekas area, were facing difficulties due to the latest floods in the wider region. Waterlogged and waterbound Roma counted on the authorities' efforts to help them evacuate from their homes. An operation of the Prefecture and the Fire department was already in place. Nobody from the hundred Roma was hurt.

7.) Self-managed camps: *Nea Alikarnassos and Rhodes*

a) Crete/ Nea Alikarnassos

Thanasis Triarides from the Drom Network for Roma Social Rights informed the GHM about the latest developments in Crete and in particular in Nea Alikarnassos. Around 500 meters away from the location of the present Roma camp in Nea Alikarnassos, midway from the former military barracks of Karteros -initially proposed as an alternative site for establishing a self-managed camp- is the new site for the future Roma settlement. The Regional Governor of Crete, Mr. Valasopoulos, is responsible for the project. The Mechanic, Mr. Karathanasis, is in charge of the architectural planning and the construction works.

b) Rhodes

Similar plans on the establishment of a self-managed camp, accommodating 40 Roma families, were discussed in Rhodos. Initial contacts were made with Ms. Efthymiatis from Doctors of the World. The organization is going to establish a second regional office on the island, and thus will be able to follow the case from a close distance. According to information received by the GHM from Elpida Efthymiatis, the municipality of Rhodos has started moving towards the direction of finding plots of land and providing Roma with loans for the building of their own houses. The Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life has already allocated GDR 30 million. The registration of all residents has already taken place. There are 36 families -197 people-scattered all over three different areas. Out of the 197 people, the children (8-18 years old) are 108.

8.) Roma in Kalamata: *slow but steady progress*

On November 12, 1999, the GHM contacted Mr. Spiliotes, from the Committee of Human Rights of Kalamata, to find out about the latest developments in the case of Roma in Kalamata and Mesini (for more information see the GHM August 1999 report to the ERRC). The Committee, which will grant the project to the best bidder, has already been formed. The houses will be built by the state-run Organization of Workers' Housing. The overall picture is that things are moving slowly but steadily.

9.) Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece commemorating «Kristallnacht»

In order to commemorate Kristallnacht and the International Day Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism on 9 November 1999, GHM and MRG-G published an article in the *Avgi* daily. In it they draw parallels between the Jews some 60 years ago and the Roma nowadays. Roma are today's victims, targets of racism and xenophobia all around the European continent. The letter «G» (for Gypsy) in their passports reveals their identity, and makes it easier for the authorities to prohibit their entrance with no chance to apply for asylum. The usual result is that the authorities simply send the Roma back to where they came from. In the Czech Republic, the Roma in a town near the Czech-German border are segregated from the rest of the residents. A wall was built overnight dividing the city into first and second class Czech citizens. Roma children are automatically sent to schools for children with special needs and their parents are almost as a rule unemployed (80% of them). Things are not better in the rest of Europe. Roma live in remote camps without infrastructure, always under the fear of eviction. They suffer from high unemployment, illiteracy and, diseases due to the living conditions under which they are forced to live.

In Greece, it took only two days for the earthquake victims to get new land. Years have passed, but the similar needs of the Roma have not been met yet. They are faced with eviction orders and procedures without being offered any alternative solutions by the authorities. Frequently, they see their children rejected at schools. The Ministry of the Interior claims that the 1996 governmental program for the Roma is being implemented successfully and without problems. During the latest OSCE meeting, however, the Minister of Foreign Affairs admitted that reality is not even close to that, allocating responsibility to the local authorities, the police and, to a certain extent, to the Roma themselves for not standing up for their rights in a joint action.

10.) Roma in Mytilini

(Excerpt from the GHM November 1999 report to the ERRC on the coverage of Roma in the Greek press)

15/11/1999: *Eleftherotypia*, [S. Balaskas], p. 54

«Two Million Drachmas for Creating Roma Settlement»

The Directorate of the Town Planning Service of the Prefect of Lesbos (an Aegean island, close to Turkey) fined the municipality of Mytilini for illegally constructing a Roma settlement two kilometers outside the main town of the island. Indeed, two years ago the municipality took the initiative to resolve the housing problem of the Roma and to provide them with decent living conditions. The Association of Merchants in Mytilini, however, filed a complaint with the Directorate of the Town Planning Service accusing the municipality of Mytilini of illegal construction. The reason behind this complaint was the fear of the non-Roma merchants of their Roma business competitors. Mr. Ioanides, who is in charge of the project at the Town Planning Service, said that his office did not take any action against that, because of the great social implications of the matter. However, when the complaint was forwarded to the District Attorney, the Service was left without any other alternative. The buildings were pronounced illegal and the municipality got a GDR 2 million fine. The deputy mayor, Mr. Paterelis Pantelis, stated, «the settlement was built on the initiative of the municipal authority and the subsequent municipal council's approval. Unfortunately, the Town Planning Service gave us a huge fine. Is this truly the only instance of illegal construction in our town, I wonder? And why the Service showed austerity only in this particular case?» The illegal Roma settlement is a drop in the sea. In the last few years, old buildings in Mytilini proclaimed as «national treasures» have been reconstructed without the necessary permits and without any intervention on behalf of the Mytilini Association of Merchants or the Town Planning Service.

A very positive report, strongly criticizing the hypocrisy and double standards of the institutions involved.

Following this report, the GHM contacted Mr. Balaskas, the reporter who gathered the information to find out more about the case. From this additional information, it became clear that the illegality lies in the conducting of construction works on a site without a permit. Roma live in shanties in a place with some basic infrastructure: water, electricity, toilets and a school (in prefabricated houses). The municipality picked up the cost of the works. The GHM contacted also Mr. Paterelis, deputy mayor of Mytilini. (The current municipal authority is not the one, which established the camp). Mr. Paterelis reaffirmed Mr. Balaskas' statement. The GHM wrote an open letter to the Greek Prime Minister, Mr. Simitis, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Papandreou and to the Minister of the Interior, Ms. Papandreou, denouncing what seems to be common practice in Greece. In cases where Roma, or any organization trying to secure their rights do something illegal, the law is immediately enforced against them, while, in cases where the authorities themselves violate the rights of Roma, the law is never enforced. The DROM Network for Roma Social Rights cosigned the letter.

11.) Roma in Chalandri and Agia Paraskevi (Athens)

Following the GHM contacts with Mr. Fredy Stamos from the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life and Elpida Efthymiatos from Doctors of the World, a solution to the housing problems of the Roma in Chalandri and Agia Paraskevi seems to be on the way. The mayors of the two municipalities have given their consent and agreed to provide GDR 2 million per family for the purchase of plots of land in the wider district of Geraka and Agia Paraskevi. The Ministry of the Interior also agreed to allocate money for this purpose. Based on the outcome of the initial search for plots of land the price is about GDR 10 million for an acre of land, which is not yet included in the town-planning scheme. The idea is to buy plots of land (around 250 square meters per family) and provide the Roma with loans for purchasing prefabricated houses, so as to avoid further bureaucratic troubles and delays from the Town Planning Service. This solution seems to be acceptable by the Roma. The mayors, on their turn, have given the impression that they want to finish with the matter once and for all. In Chalandri there are approximately 40 families and in Agia Paraskevi - another 10. Nikos Katsaris will be in charge of providing the authorities, the Prime Minister's Office and the involved NGOs with a full and complete report on the exact number of Roma families in each municipality (i.e. number of residents and their age groups). On the basis of the registration, Nikos Katsaris will be also looking for plots of land and submit a full list with locations and prices.

12.) Court decision on Roma in Nea Alikarnasos: the eviction decision was abusive

The Heraklion (Crete) County Court, with the 975/1999 decision of 12/11/1999, cancelled the 17/12/1999 eviction protocol issued by the Mayor of Nea Alikarnassos against Roma.

The Court acknowledged that in principle the municipality had the right to issue a protocol of eviction as the proprietor of the land in question. Roma settled in this land, following the decision of the prefecture authorities and with the consent of the municipality. Previously, the Roma tent-dwellers had been scattered around in the wider district. This fact provoked intense reactions on behalf of the local residents and a solution was imminent at the time. The Roma built shacks and lived without any infrastructure hoping, as promised by the authorities, that their living conditions would improve soon. The increase in the population of the camp made things worse and provoked a new series of reactions but no serious effort was ever made towards the improvement of the situation. The lack of any effort of this kind can in no way be blamed on the evicted. Under the aforementioned circumstances and, following the failure of the committee set up by the Heraklion Prefect to find a suitable place for the transfer of the Roma, a protocol of eviction was issued by the municipal authorities. The evicted, in their majority people with large families and low income, claimed that they would not be able to face the consequences of this decision. Taking into account all this, one can conclude that even though the eviction decision was within the rights of the municipality, it was evidently abusive. Therefore, the grounds for the Roma's appeal should be accepted and the protocol of eviction, which was initially issued, be canceled.

13.) On Racism and Xenophobia in Greece

a) Meeting in Thessaloniki

On November 19 and 20, 1999, the Greek Delegation to the **European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)** of the Council of Europe, the Greek Delegation to EU's Vienna-based **Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia**, and the University of Thessaloniki's Center for Public International Law, with the support of the Secretary General for European Affairs of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized a two days' meeting on racism in Greece. GHM was one of the participants in this event. Receiving the provisional program and the list of participants, GHM realized that there were no minority and migrant representatives included and requested from the organizers to provide space for as many minorities as possible. The list of minority and migrant representatives who had met previously with OSCE's High Commissioner for National Minorities, as well as his special envoy on Roma issues and the ECRI Contact Visit team in Athens, was provided, but the organizers refused to invite national and religious minorities. MRG-G then asked Nikos Katsaris (the 23-year-old tent-dwelling Roma man from Chalandri, see above) to participate, in his quality as advisor to its Roma Office, in the meeting. It is noteworthy that the Federation of Roma Associations was invited but did not attend, just as they did not attend a previous briefing of Greek MEP Anna Karamanou on human rights. Thanasis Triarides represented the DROM Network for Roma Social Rights and Panayote Dimitras represented the GHM. Mr. Dimitras, together with Nikos Katsaris, and GHM Board member Gregory Vallianatos, took the opportunity to also visit the Roma in the Gallikos River and the works in the former military barracks of Gonou.

During the meeting, Thanasis Triarides made brief presentations on the draft law on the self-managed camp, submitted by Doctors of the World, the DROM Network for Roma Social Rights, the Greek Helsinki Monitor and the Progressive Left Coalition Party. Other suggestions were related to the inclusion of the history of the Roma and their cultural contribution to Greece and Europe in the school textbooks and, last but not least, proposals on the education of Roma on the basis of their bilingualism and their marginal position in the society. Specifically, Thanasis Triarides announced that DROM, in cooperation with Doctors of the World and the Patakis publishing house, is soon going to release a book entitled «The Great Shadow and the Roma - History of the Roma for Children in 12 Tales.» The book is to be distributed for free in all schools where Roma children study as well as in camps where there is some educational activity. The book will also be available in bookstores for the wider public. There are ideas about translating it into other languages. Moreover, a book will be compiled with studies on the Roma during the Holocaust, covering the period 1939-1945. Finally, a proposal has already been made to the Ministry of Education to include at least one chapter, in the existing history textbook for students in the first class of high school, on the history of the Roma and their cultural contribution. A book on European Civilization, as a combination of various cultural influences, is already being used at Greek schools. Neither Roma, nor Jews, however, are included in this book.

Regarding concrete proposals on Roma education, Thanasis Triarides announced that, according to data from the Ministry of Education, only 5,000 Roma children, out of a total of more than 50,000 children, attend school. Compared to the percentage of literacy present in the overall population (97%), the percentage of literacy in the Roma communities is not exceeding 10%. Even those Roma children, who are the exception, rather than the rule, attend school with many problems. In most cases, they miss classes, quit in the middle of the school year or in the middle of their primary education (third grade). These problems become much more evident in the case of tent-dwellers. Girls, due to their parents' fear of premarital sexual activity, stay at home, while sons, even if attending school for some time, soon give up to join their parents at work. Moreover, besides the economic, social and cultural obstacles, there is also the issue of bilingualism, which the Greek educational system does not take into account. What is of primary and vital importance is for the Greek state to improve the overall living conditions of the tent-dwellers. Visiting professors should become an institutionalized reality and state financial aid for large families should be somehow connected to the children's school attendance. Preparatory classes and the introduction of a bilingual primer should also be institutionalized. DROM Network has already prepared such a primer, after working for years and having taken into account the experience of other countries. The primer covers the three Roma dialects mostly spoken in Greece and is soon to be included in the pilot educational programs that will take place in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki.

b) The extreme right on Roma

(Excerpt from the GHM November 1999 report to the ERRC on the coverage of Roma in the Greek press)

26/11/1999: *Chrysi Avgi*

«Let's talk about... Gypsies»

The «white nations» are dying; the population explosion in Africa and Asia and the subsequent migration movements towards Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia leave no room for hope. The White Man will disappear soon from the earth and its history. Moreover, there is an ethnic bomb in the heart of most European countries – a bomb put by a minority whose members have been given the privilege to be citizens of those countries. These are the Gypsies. They are abnormal hybrids of the three races: the yellow, the black and the white. They originate from India and Pakistan, countries, which have always been meeting places for all races. Gypsies have combinations of the Negro, the Mongolian and the White characteristics. In any case, they are all tasteless, unable to organize themselves and produce spiritual work; they are liars and dishonest people. They are parasites, living at the expense of the others, which is visible in their «artistic» contributions. They have polluted the European culture and tradition, similarly to the Jews. They have never cultivated the land, they never had animals and they always dealt with parasitic trade just like the Jews still do, even though the Gypsies are less professional and more dangerous. In Greece, they were the main polluters of our traditional folk music, because they were frequently playing in musical groups, taking up a job, which was considered to be deprecatory at the time. Similar and even more catastrophic have been their services to other European countries. It was a real fortune that for years they were living in the margin of the society. For some of them, this is still the case. The word Gypsy in Greek has a derogatory meaning. Everyone who dealt with Gypsies knows that they are thieves, drug traffickers, and smugglers. The latest events in the Czech Republic show that Gypsies are hated by all White Men.

The report speaks for itself; the most negative ever.

Following this report, the GHM considered the possibility of Roma individuals or associations to file a complaint against the reporter and the newspaper; it was advised to avoid such action that may play up into the hands of this neo-nazi group.