

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

**Contents**

- 1. Institutionalized Police Racism Towards Roma in Greece**
- 2. Statements on Roma Rights at the OSCE Implementation Review Meeting**

**1. Institutionalized Police Racism Towards Roma in Greece**

*“It is well known that [Roma] are a traditionally nomadic people (...). This fact, combined with their illiteracy, moral standards, customs and occupations, creates an obstacle both to adapting to the native population and to be accepted by it. A consequence of all that is an unlawful behavior that is usually the expression of everyday life. This behavior usually takes the form of illegal driving and other violations of the motor vehicle code, violations of the Codes of Sanitation, Building and Commerce, illicit trade, unlawful weapons’ possession and, often, unlawful weapons’ use, theft, possession and trafficking of narcotic substances, etc.”*

Such were the introductory arguments, in a letter sent by the Greek Police General Staff (Archigio) to the Human Rights Directorate of the Greek Foreign Ministry. In it, the Greek Police tried (how unsuccessfully...) to refute charges of racism and police apathy made in repeated reports and releases of GHM and MRG-G related to anti-Roma racist incidents that had occurred in May and June 2000, in Nea Kios (Argolida). The letter was never sent to GHM and MRG-G but was published in a local newspaper (*Argoliki Enimerosi*, 31 August 2000; the full text translated by GHM follows).

Indeed, many policemen are very eager to claim that Roma are involved in possession if not trafficking of drugs, even when they have no evidence or, worse, there exists evidence refuting such claims. In the same letter, Greek Police claimed that, on 15 June, they had confiscated “80 grams of unprocessed Indian cannabis” near the hut of a Rom, who was subsequently indicted for possession. However, on the very next day, a lab report had shown that the related evidence was mere grass. But two months later, the Greek Police General Staff letter insisted on the possession.

In the meantime, on July 6, 2000, around 6 a.m., police raided the settlement by the river Gallikos in search of stolen goods, drugs, weapons and suspects. 92 people were brought to the police station. Against some of them, police found pending warrants for unpaid fines for trading or driving without license. Neither weapons nor drugs were found during the investigation. Nevertheless, the state Macedonian Press Agency (MPA) covered the incident (6 July) in a way that stigmatized the Roma: it reported falsely that among those taken into custody there were

fugitives and suspects of robberies, frauds and other unlawful acts, as well as illegal immigrants. When GHM asked the authorities to investigate and punish both the irregular police raid and the slandering state agency coverage, MPA attributed the initial “exaggerated” information to the police, but did not apologize (10 July).

The local association of Roma tent-dwellers, with the help of GHM, filed a report to the Ombudsman (11868/31-7-2000) denouncing their racist and improper treatment. In a letter to the Salonica Police (11868/11-8-2000), the Ombudsman urged them to “*avoid the creation of the stereotype of ‘usual suspects’ at the expense of racial minorities like the Roma*” and called a blanket police raid of the Gallikos Romani community, on 6 July 2000, a possible “*indication of the stereotypical view that links Roma with serious criminal offenses.*” In its reply to the Ombudsman (13656/15-9-2000), the Salonica Police confirmed that “*the police operation aimed at finding stolen goods, weapons, and drugs, as well as the arrest of suspects*” and also that “*the home search had a negative result.*” No apologies for having falsely stated to the media that many Roma were involved in serious crimes was offered.

Moreover, many cases of abuse of violence and racist remarks by the police at the expense of Roma were registered by GHM in 2000. When reported to the OSCE Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, on 24 October, the Greek delegation called these incidents minor and trivial:

*“What is more significant though is that in those 18 pages more serious concerns and situations are mentioned along with detailed accounts of relatively minor incidents. The result is the trivialization of an issue to which the Greek Government for one attaches great importance. Of course you can fill 18 pages if you report incidents like the one we see in page 42, about a couple of Roma Greeks being stopped for police inspection during which they were called “dirty Gypsies” and “bloody Gypsies” – nothing else happened to them.”*

GHM’s rebuttal underlined that the Greek state answer highlighted indeed the “mainstreaming of racism” in Greece:

*“The Greek delegation called “trivial” the incident –one of so many occurring every year-where, during a police inspection, two Roma were called “dirty Gypsies” and “bloody Gypsies,” adding that nothing else had happened, but NGOs did report it. First, they refrained from mentioning that, as mentioned in that report, this supposed police control was carried out at gunpoint, probably because Greece considers that even more trivial. However, the most important point in Greece’s answer was that racist police behavior is considered “trivial.” Does anyone need further evidence confirming NGO arguments of “mainstreaming racism” in Greece?”*

The Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), in its *Second Report on Greece* (released on 27 June 2000) comes to similar conclusions:

*“There have been consistent reports that Roma/Gypsies, Albanians and other immigrants are frequently victims of misbehaviour on the part of the police in Greece. In particular, Roma/Gypsies are often reported to be victims of excessive use of force -in some cases resulting in death- ill treatment and verbal abuse on the part of the police. Discriminatory checks involving members of these groups are widespread. In most cases there is reported*

*to be little investigation of these cases, and little transparency on the results of these investigations. Although most of these incidents do not generally result in a complaint being filed by the victim, when charges have been pressed the victims have reportedly in some cases been subjected to pressure to drop such charges. ECRI stresses the urgent need for the improvement of the response of the internal and external control mechanisms to the complaints of misbehaviour vis-à-vis members of minority groups on the part of the police.” (p. 13).*

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

15/9/00

### **SUBJECT: GREEK POLICE FORMALLY CONFIRMS THE PRESENCE OF INSTITUTIONALISED RACISM AGAINST ROMA**

The cooperating organizations **Greek Helsinki Monitor** (GHM) and **Minority Rights Group-Greece** (MRG-G) make public today the letter sent by the Greek Police General Staff to the Greek Foreign Ministry, in which the Greek Police tries to deny all charges of racism and police apathy made in consecutive reports and releases of our NGOs. The letter was never sent to GHM and MRG-G but was published in a local newspaper. The beginning of the letter is a “textbook case” of racist stereotypes against Roma. Written by the Police General Staff, it is the most resounding confirmation that Greek police is racist towards the Roma.

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#### **Letter of the Ministry of Public Order (Police General Staff) to the Human Rights Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in response to Greek Helsinki Monitor releases and reports on anti-Roma racist incidents in Nea Kios** (as published in “Argoliki Enimerosi,” 31/8/2000)

1. In response to the above (a) and (b) concerning the attached documents regarding this issue, we wish to inform you of the following from the aspect of police responsibility:

a. It is well known that Athiganoi are a traditionally nomadic people who in recent years have shown a tendency to permanently settle, without, however, overcoming their former living habits. This fact, combined with their illiteracy, moral standards, customs and occupations, creates an obstacle both to their adaptation to the native population and their acceptance by this native population.

A consequence of what has been briefly mentioned above is the manifestation of their unlawful behavior in such a way that is usually the expression of daily life. This behavior usually takes the form of illegal driving and other violations of the motor vehicle code, violations of the Codes of Sanitation, Building and Commerce, illicit trade, unlawful weapons possession and, often, unlawful weapons use, theft, possession and trafficking of narcotic substances, etc.

b. The Police Authorities, as obliged to impose and maintain the law, are often summoned to handle such situations and to restore legality.

c. Therefore, in order to cope with transgressions of the Athiganoi in the specific region of Nea Kios, Argolida and to anticipate any further incidents with the residents, also reported by the General Police Directorate of the Peloponnisos Region, the latter proposed on 31/5/2000 the taking of specific police measures. The Police General Staff (“Archigio”) issued in accordance an order, where it was mentioned that the matter of confronting transgressions of Athiganoi is both a sensitive, delicate issue as well as a serious one, requiring the observation of the implementation and effectiveness of the measures taken by the police authority. Moreover, particular emphasis was given, in the framework of the action plans and the information of all participating Police officers, that their actions must be within the framework decreed by the Constitution and the Laws.

d. According to the report of the same Police Directorate (of Argolida), the everyday problems of police concern that are created by Athiganoi in their area of jurisdiction are dealt with within the framework of the increased police patrols in collaboration where required with other related Services.

e. In all incidents involving the assembly, protest, etc., of citizens (whether Athiganoi or not), the police took measures that were successful in avoiding any misdoing.

f. Concerning the harassment and insults suffered by the Journalist **Mr. P. Lambrou**, and mentioned therein, and according to the aforementioned [police] report, thanks to the prompt intervention on the part of the police present at the scene, no incident -beyond the noisy catcalling by the assembled residents of Nea Kios at all the members of the Committee- took place against him or any other Committee member visiting the Nea Kios City Hall at 19.30 on 8-6-2000.

g. During the recent period, the Police have discovered and verified the following violations by Athiganoi in the region in question:

(1) On 25-5-2000 in a police operation on Orders of the Prosecutor and in the presence of three Judicial Officials, 16 Athiganoi were arrested for theft of electric power. Additional cases have been made against 12 others, who were absent at that time, for the same offense, and 3 against those who had 14 outstanding Judicial Decisions. During the same operation, illegal electrical installations were dismantled by Power Company (DEI) crews and a total of 1,500 meters of electric cable were confiscated.

(2) On 8-6-2000 a case was drafted by the Police Security Department for wanton gunshots inside the settlement of Athiganoi of Nea Kios.

(3) On 15-6-2000 a case was drafted by the aforementioned Service against an Athiganos resident of Nea Kios for violation of the “weapons” Law. This was due to the fact that a legal premise search, in the presence of a Judicial Official, of the shanty inhabited by said individual, resulted in the finding and seizure of a hunting rifle that had been stolen from the area of Crete on 15-12-1996.

(4) On 9-6-2000 an Athiganos charged that, in the “KARAKAXA” area of Nea Kios, two residents of Nea Kios riding on a motorcycle shot him with a pistol outside the settlement, wounding him in his left arm. This allegation was not verified, since the preliminary inquiry disclosed that the injured party had been wounded inside the settlement and outside the tent in which he resided, by an unknown member of his own race. Furthermore, the legal search that took place in the presence of a Judicial Official of the interior and surroundings of his father’s tent resulted in the finding and seizure of a 9 mm spent cartridge, a 9 mm Star pistol, 132 rounds of the same diameter, and 80 grams of unprocessed Indian cannabis.

(5) On 27-6-2000 at 09.30, in the “KARAKAXA” area of Nea Kios, the Police in the company of Power Company employees cut off the illegal supply of electric power to the shanty of an Athiganos, who was arrested caught in the act of this violation.

h. The incident cited in the letter of 5-6-2000 from the Greek Helsinki Monitor concerning the Athiganos woman, Mrs. **Maria KALAMIOTI**, has not been reported to any Police Service and cannot be verified as a fact.

2. From the above reports it is clear that the Police have been involved only in matters of a purely Police nature and in no instance has there been an issue of racial discrimination. Rather, they have acted in their authority to confront the characteristic problems of a society, problems similar to those that could occur in any region of our Country, and beyond. The activities of the Police were within the framework of legal and constitutional orders, as necessary.

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<b>2. Statements on Roma Rights by GHM and/or MRG-G at the OSCE Implementation Review Meeting</b>
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**STATEMENT ON GREECE  
AT THE 2000 OSCE IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**

17 October 2000

## Citizenship and Statelessness

### Overview

Greece applies abusively the internationally accepted discretion of states on citizenship matters. It may allow applications for naturalization to remain unanswered for many years, even more than ten. While its repeated commitment to reduce statelessness is questioned by slow administrative procedures that seem encouraged by the absence of political will.

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### Greece's Born Stateless Persons

Another category of Muslims was born stateless. Their ancestors moved from Bulgaria and subsequently lost their citizenship. These individuals (considered as Roma but self-identified as Turks) were forced by police to acquire expensive alien's residence permits valid only for one year: on them police authorities mentioned they were of "undefined" citizenship. The police department of Komotini refused in 1999 and again in 2000 to give a stateless identity document (an obligation under the relevant UN Convention) to one of them, Mr. Sezgin Durgut. Eight months after his application and only after the Ombudsman stepped in, police alleged that the reference to an undefined citizenship was a mistake that had supposedly been repeated for years. They claimed that Mr. Sezgin had Bulgarian citizenship, and asked him to prove that he is not Bulgarian in order to consider him a stateless person. They made the same argument in answering a parliamentary question tabled by the Progressive Left Coalition MP, Maria Damanaki.

But as far back as in 1997, Sezgin Durgut had provided the Greek authorities with a Bulgarian Consulate certificate saying that he was not a Bulgarian citizen. The Greek state was aware of that but was regrettably deceptively pretending it was not. A year ago, in this OSCE forum, the Greek delegation, probably misled by local authorities, also provided inaccurate information. They said:

*"I wonder, however, whether [such cases are] really worthy of being discussed in a forum like this, considering in particular that the persons involved cannot be said to be suffering let alone being endangered in any way. Those are cases of people going through a routine administrative process and encountering difficulties in it."*<sup>1</sup>

However, Mr. Durgut is suffering, as he has no identity papers at all. One consequence is that he cannot receive benefits for his children. Moreover, his petition to receive Greek citizenship dates from 1990; even though he should have been granted citizenship immediately, as the son of a stateless father and a Greek mother, on the basis of the relevant U.N. Convention. After all, his sister was granted citizenship on that ground in 1993. Mr. Durgut resubmitted the same document of the Bulgarian authorities, in February 2000, applying for a second time to obtain a stateless identity card, but has not received any answer. The Greek Foreign Ministry, under pressure from the Ombudsman, has asked the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry to confirm the information in the

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<sup>1</sup> Statement Made by the Greek Delegation in Exercise of its Right of Reply, Vienna, 21 September 1999

1997 document issued by the Bulgarian Consulate in Salonica. Months have gone by and no progress is made. Is all that “routine administrative process,” as Greece claimed in this forum last year?

We appeal at this OSCE meeting to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry to speed up whatever answer they have to give to the Greek authorities so as to help expose the latter’s real intentions: they do not want to admit that they had for years been harassing Mr. Durgut against all Greek and international laws and have even provided related misleading information to the Greek Parliament and the OSCE. In the meantime, for having dared challenge the Greek administration, for it Sezgin Durgut does not exist; he cannot travel abroad, have his driving license extended for his work or get a family allowance. Occasionally, policemen have even verbally abused him.

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**STATEMENT ON GREECE  
AT THE 2000 OSCE IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**

18 October 2000

**Right to a Fair Trial**

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Finally cases of police torture or killing of Roma in 1996 and 1998 never led to court hearings despite the existence of incriminating evidence, including forensic report, and severe indictments by prosecutors for torture and murder.

Since multiple related appeals to the authorities made in Greece by NGOs or by ECRI have been completely ignored we make an appeal here to the OSCE and participating states to put pressure on Greece to respect migrants’ and minorities’ right to a fair trial and to equal treatment with ethnic Greeks.

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**STATEMENT ON GREECE  
AT THE 2000 OSCE IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**

23 October 2000

**Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in Greece:  
Tolerance of Intolerance and Growing Mainstream Extremism**

Like in all OSCE countries, there are many phenomena of racism in Greece, at the administrative, the intellectual and media, as well as the public opinion level. What, though, differentiates Greece from most traditional democracies is the lack of reaction to racism, to the extent that one has the impression that racist actions, opinions and ideas are acceptable variants in society. There is no reaction not only to obviously extremist racist actions, but also to “mainstream extremist”

statements – made by persons not considered to be extremists - that would lead anywhere else at least to strong criticism if not outright condemnation.

Greece strongly rejected the carefully worded criticism of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) report. As current Minister of Justice Mihalis Stathopoulos, a non-politician with a NGO background, said, commenting on these reactions to the ECRI report, “*all those who boast for the absence of racism in Greece are people who are not used to criticism and self-criticism.*” This is the Minister who helped suppress the reference to religion on identity cards. Significantly, the move triggered reactions by the Orthodox Church and many sectors of the Greek public that were not only verbally violent but often outright racist and especially anti-Semitic. Many condemned the verbal violence, but hardly any did likewise for the racist overtones. Just as few if any condemned most of the cases of racism reported in our detailed report submitted to this meeting,<sup>2</sup> not to mention that some of them went almost unreported in Greece.

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- In May 2000, three municipal council of Argolida (Southern Greece) unanimously decided to evict all Roma living in their municipality, holding them collectively responsible for alleged (but not verified by any police data) rising criminality. The government called the incident a case of “personal vendetta.”

In many cases monitored by NGOs, it has become evident that in the Greek police force there is deeply rooted institutionalized racism towards the Roma. In answering NGO charges on one of these cases, in Nea Kios, the Greek Police General Staff confirmed its racism, by writing the following to the Human Rights Directorate of the Greek Foreign Ministry.<sup>3</sup>

*“It is well known that [Roma] are a traditionally nomadic people. This fact, combined with their illiteracy, moral standards, customs and occupations, creates an obstacle both to adapting to the native population and to be accepted by it. A consequence of all that is an unlawful behavior that is usually the expression of everyday life. This behavior usually takes the form of illegal driving and other violations of the motor vehicle code, violations of the Codes of Sanitation, Building and Commerce, illicit trade, unlawful weapons’ possession and, often, unlawful weapons’ use, theft, possession and trafficking of narcotic substances, etc.”*

With this eloquent text, we rest our case.

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**STATEMENT ON GREECE  
AT THE 2000 OSCE IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**

24 October 2000

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<sup>2</sup> See note 1

<sup>3</sup> As published in *Argoliki Enimerosi*, 31 August 2000.

## **Roma Rights**

It is a rare and welcome opportunity for a NGO to be able to report on a positive development that has occurred after it had prepared the report for this meeting.

Two weeks ago, indeed, the first successful resettlement of Greece's largest destitute Roma community from Gallikos River to Gonou, near Salonica, took place. Four NGOs (Doctors of the World - Greece, DROM Network for Gypsy Social Rights, Greek Helsinki Monitor, and Minority Rights Group – Greece) backed by a small parliamentary party (Progressive Left Coalition), had for four years pressed authorities -through statements, lobbying, even bringing charges in court- to implement the plan for the creation of the first self-managed Roma dwelling unit in Greece. A plan fully backed by the Roma concerned –and regrettably opposed by the state-launched Panhellenic Federation of Roma Associations.

It is even more gratifying that we owe the completion of this project to the Prefecture of Salonica, and in particular the Deputy Prefect Abraham Kaltaveridis. He recently ended up fighting alongside the Roma and the NGOs against central authorities that were dragging their feet; and against local police that have engaged in collectively stigmatizing these Roma as criminals, despite the lack of any evidence. We want to commend him because, four years ago, he was the object of the charges brought by NGOs and the Coalition Party, as central authorities tended then to put the blame on the Prefecture.

This positive development is unfortunately one of the rare exceptions to the rule of widespread discrimination and racism against Roma in Greece. There is a related detailed section in the report submitted to this meeting. It covers in particular the horrible living conditions in score of destitute settlements around the country. The OSCE HCNM "Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area" (April 2000) and the ECRI "Second Report on Greece" (June 2000) come to similar conclusions. In their report, NGOs note that the Greek government tabled in Parliament –answering a deputy's question in early 2000- its own "Implementation Review for 1996-2000" of its ambitious 1996 plan. After three years, such review still included plans of - rather than accomplished- resettlements, in a country that showed last year, after the devastating earthquake in Greater Athens, that it needs only a few months to successfully resettle an equally large population, but of gadje.

Here, we like to stress once again that the government's review had no provision for the Roma of Greater Athens. This, even though, since last year, NGOs have reported in this forum and elsewhere that municipalities around the capital have been expelling the Roma and/or refusing all relocation solutions NGOs and sometimes the Prime Minister's Quality of Life Office had suggested. They have been claiming that they needed the land for works related to the 2004 Athens Olympics. We are grateful to the International Olympic Committee, which, when recently alerted to the case, has intervened to the Greek authorities, as we believe no one should tolerate the emergence of a Roma-free Athens for the Olympics.

In conclusion, we recommend that the OSCE Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues "conducts an on-sight inquiry" as called for by the related Recommendation 5 in the OSCE HCNM "Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area" (April 2000). Building on the positive

development in Gonou, we believe that such a visit can help accelerate the implementation of the government plan throughout the country and can also contribute to the necessary empowerment of the destitute Roma communities.

### **Comments on the Greek Delegation's Statement in Reply to this Statement**

*We would like to comment on three points of the Greek delegation's reply to the above statement made this morning:*

1. The Greek delegation called "trivial" the incident –one of so many occurring every year- where, during a police inspection, two Roma were called "dirty Gypsies" and "bloody Gypsies," adding that nothing else had happened, but NGOs did report it. First, they refrained from mentioning that, as mentioned in that report, this supposed police control was carried out at gunpoint, probably because Greece considers that even more trivial. However, the most important point in Greece's answer was that racist police behavior is considered "trivial." Does anyone need further evidence confirming NGO arguments of "mainstreaming racism" in Greece?
2. The Greek delegation presented as an evidence of its interest for Roma the creation of a related "Inter-Ministerial Committee" in January 2000. What it did not say is that, in that Committee, there is no representative of the Roma tent-dwellers' associations, nor of the NGOs advocating their rights. The presence of a representative of the state-launched "Panhellenic Federation of Roma Associations" that has no members among these Roma contributes only to window-dressing.
3. The Greek delegation mentioned that "relocation programs" for Roma in Greater Athens are in progress. They gave the concrete example of Spata, which however does not belong to the cases NGOs reported as related to the Roma-cleansing for the Olympics. We assure this forum that, at this writing, there is no concrete plan for the communities concerned of Aspropyrgos, Ano Liosia, Halandri, Aghia Paraskevi and Nea Ionia.
4. Finally, it is regrettable that Greek authorities decided this year -unlike in previous years' statements- to put the blame for the delays on the Roma who are allegedly divided and are therefore obstructing the implementation of the government's plan. We challenge the Greek delegation to provide just one example where the tent-dwelling Roma are responsible for the delay of any project.