

REPORT ON THE COVERAGE OF THE ROMA IN THE GREEK PRESS

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(Comments in italics are made by the GHM)

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1. UN Panel on Roma, references to Greece and the 2004 Olympics

20/8/00: *Le Monde*

<http://www.lemonde.fr/article/0,2320,87950,00.html>

“L’ONU se preoccupe enfin du racisme anti-tsiganes. Un document de travail a ete presente a Geneve”

Mis a jour le samedi 19 aout 2000

GENEVE de notre correspondant

Tout le monde en convient, les Roms ou Tsiganes figurent parmi les principales victimes des actes racistes en recrudescence dans toute l’Europe. Pourtant, il aura fallu attendre plus d’un demi-siecle apres la tentative de leur extermination par les nazis pour que l’ONU se decide enfin a se pencher sur leur sort. Un premier pas a ete fait avec la presentation d’un document de travail sur la precarite de la situation des Roms au cours de la session annuelle de la sous-commission des droits de l’homme, qui s’est achevee vendredi 18 aout a Geneve. A l’issue de deux jours de debats, les participants ont invite les Nations unies et les Etats a redoubler d’efforts pour proteger les droits fondamentaux des Roms et supprimer toute forme de discrimination a leur egard.

Selon l’expert francais Louis Joinet, la question des droits des Roms est «l’un des sujets les plus delicats que la sous-commission ait eu a aborder au cours de ces vingt dernieres annees». Comme l’a rappele l’auteur de ce premier document de travail, le juriste mauricien Yeung Sik Yuen, jamais auparavant l’ONU n’avait «cherche systematiquement a comprendre la situation

de la minorité ethnique rom en Europe et aucune étude approfondie n'avait été réalisée sur la discrimination qu'elle endurait ni sur les moyens d'améliorer son sort ». Tout en soulignant l'urgence de renforcer la protection des Roms, le document de travail discute devant la sous-commission aura permis de prendre la mesure de la gravité et de la complexité de leurs problèmes.

AGRESSIONS DE SKINHEADS

Doublement marginalisés en tant que minorité et en tant que groupe, les Roms sont victimes de tous les types d'abus, de discriminations et d'exclusion. Pour l'auteur du document, l'une des raisons du racisme et de la violence qui les frappent réside dans la réduction des débouchés professionnels dans les pays d'Europe centrale et orientale depuis la chute du communisme. « Les rares emplois disponibles ont été ardemment disputés, notamment ceux qui ne demandent aucune compétence et que la majorité des Roms recherche. Il est donc facile pour la population en concurrence directe avec les Roms de faire d'eux des boucs émissaires », explique-t-il. Les autorités ont elles aussi une part de responsabilité dans ce phénomène, la police et la justice se montrant souvent partiales et ne prenant pas les plaintes des Roms au sérieux.

Parmi d'autres discriminations, l'expert relève que souvent les Roms n'ont pas accès aux restaurants, aux piscines et aux discothèques. Phénomène nouveau venu de l'Ouest en Europe de l'Est, ils sont également victimes d'agressions racistes perpétrées par des skinheads. Abordant la situation spécifique des Roms dans certains pays, l'expert constate qu'ils sont en butte à l'hostilité des albanophones au Kosovo, après avoir été persécutés par les Serbes lors des hostilités en Bosnie. En Grèce, à en croire une organisation humanitaire, leurs campements font l'objet d'opérations punitives afin de nettoyer Athènes à l'approche des Jeux olympiques. Des cas de pratiques discriminatoires ont également été dénoncés dans des pays comme la Roumanie, la Bulgarie, la Croatie ou la Hongrie, tandis que les candidats à l'asile sont généralement traités comme des réfugiés de seconde classe.

« ECOLES SPECIALES »

Évaluée à une population de 8 à 10 millions de personnes réparties dans une quarantaine de pays européens, la communauté rom souffre aussi de ségrégation économique et sociale. Réduits à une « ghettoïsation de fait, note l'expert, la plupart des Roms vivent encore dans des ensembles d'immeubles sordides et en ruine. »

Dans certains pays, les enfants seraient systématiquement dirigés vers des écoles « spéciales » pour handicapés mentaux, ce qui les prive d'une scolarité régulière et expliquerait un taux d'analphabétisme élevé. Une autre forme flagrante de discrimination se traduit par un chômage nettement supérieur à la moyenne - de 70 % en République tchèque et de 60 % en Hongrie. Pour briser ce cercle vicieux, l'expert invite les États à mieux respecter leurs engagements en matière de droits de l'homme et à favoriser l'éducation et l'emploi.

Jean-Claude Buhner

17/8/00: Athens News [Kathy Tzilivakis], p: A02
Article code: C12727A021

“Rights groups accuse Greece of discriminating against Gypsies. Roma ‘thrown out of areas slated for 2004 Olympic sports facilities’”

http://athensnews.dolnet.gr/athweb/nathens.print_unique?e=C&f=12727&m=A02&aa=1&ei_dos=S

GYPSIES in Greece live on the margins of society and are being thrown out of settlements by bulldozers clearing the land for the construction of sports facilities ahead of the 2004 Athens Olympics, Greek-based human rights groups told a two-day United Nations conference earlier this week. Human rights groups from across Europe unanimously called for the elimination of discriminatory and racist policies and practices against Gypsies (also known as *Roma*, *Tsiganes*, *Yeniches*, *Chicanes*).

The forum, which ended yesterday in Geneva, was part of the ongoing 57th Session of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). A UN report of the solutions and recommendations that were discussed during the debate are expected to be released today. The representatives of numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participating in the conference condemned the poor living conditions and limited opportunities offered to Gypsies. Representatives of the Greek Helsinki Monitor and the Minority Rights Group Greece explained that Gypsies in Greece are subject to ill-treatment, exclusion and discrimination of various forms.

A spokesperson for the Greek Helsinki Monitor, Panayote Dimitras, told the Geneva meeting on Tuesday that a large number of Gypsies, including families, is being illegally evicted from settlements and is subject to police brutality. Dimitras stressed that the government has not done enough to improve the conditions of the Gypsies who live in shabby tents, often near rubbish dumps and are faced with segregation in housing, employment and education. Dimitras presented numerous cases where hundreds of tent-dwelling Gypsies were evicted from their settlements, as well as reported instances of arbitrary police raids and brutality.

“The most recent case of eviction is going on this summer,” Dimitras said at the conference. “All efforts to stop these evictions, as well as ones in the greater Athens area, or to find alternative sites to house these Roma, have failed, as local authorities claim they want the land to build sports facilities for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.”

“Will the international community, including the International Olympic Committee, tolerate a cleansed, Roma-free greater Athens area as the host of the Olympic Games?” Dimitras wonders.

Dimitras told the Athens News yesterday that Greece will be one of several countries to be reviewed at the next CERD session scheduled to take place in New York in January 2001. “Everything that was mentioned about Greece at the debate,” he said, “will have to be taken under consideration by the government because the situation of the Gypsies in Greece will be put under a magnifying glass in January.”

Representatives of Doctors of the World said that Gypsies’ health situation was “very alarming”. With no effective access to health care in most European countries, many of the Gypsy children are not immunized and their life expectancy is under the average rate. Ninety-nine percent of the Gypsies living in settlements in the northwestern Athens suburbs of Nea

Liosia and Aspropyrgos have been exposed to hepatitis.

In June, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued its second report on Greece, noting that Gypsies are “frequently the victims of misbehavior on the part of the police in Greece”, and that “they are often reported to be the victims of excessive use of force - in some cases resulting in death - ill-treatment and verbal abuse on the part of the police”. Furthermore, the vast majority of Gypsy children do not attend school.

There are an estimated 8-10 million Gypsies living in Europe. According to CERD chairman Michael E. Sherifis, Gypsies “have for centuries been subjected to ill-treatment, rejection, exclusion and discrimination of various forms. But it is distressing to know that at the beginning of the third millennium, the problem is still there”.

15/8/00: ABC News 12:27:00 ET

http://abcnews.go.com/wire/US/reuters20000815_1657.html

“U.N. Report: Gypsies Repressed, Attacked in Europe”

GENEVA (Reuters) - Gypsies living in squalid conditions remain victims of racism and violence across Europe, a United Nations report said Tuesday. Rights groups, including Medecins du Monde (Doctors of the World), endorsed the report’s call for European governments to boost protection of the minority, known by various names including Roma, numbering eight to 10 million. Persecution in Central and Eastern Europe is rife, including reprisal attacks on gypsies in Kosovo and raids on their slum settlements near Athens to clear space for facilities for the 2004 Olympic Games, the groups said. They took the floor in Geneva at the start of a two-day debate on gypsy rights, the first of its kind, at the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. “Scarcely anything has been achieved and today Roma across the whole of Europe are still generally poor, uneducated, discriminated against in practically every sphere of activity,” the report by South Korean jurist Yeung Sik Yuen said. “They’re frequently subjected to persecution and are victims of open acts of racism. Many...live in constant fear of violence being perpetrated against them because they are Roma,” it said. “The Roma are often barred from restaurants, swimming pools and discos and are often the victims of violent racist acts by skinheads...,” the report said. In Kosovo, gypsies were accused of collaborating with Serb forces and suffer attacks by ethnic Albanians. They need “around the clock” protection from KFOR international peacekeeping troops, the Society for Threatened Peoples, based in Goettingen, Germany, said.

EVICCTIONS FOR ATHENS OLYMPICS

Gypsies are also being evicted from their dwindling settlements near Athens to clear the way for sports facilities for the 2004 Olympic Games, according to two rights groups, the Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece. They accused Prime Minister Costas Simitis’s government of failing to live up to pledges on minority rights and reported five raids on Roma settlements in the Aspropyrgos and Ano Liosia settlements near Athens since 1996. “Will the international community, including the International Olympic Committee, tolerate a cleansed, Roma-free Greater Athens as the host of these Games?,” they asked. The Roma people, subjected to ill-treatment and discrimination for centuries, originated in northwest India. Many still lack access to health care and education, although only 20 percent are

regularly on the move, according to Yeung. Yeung submitted his report to the U.N. Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights at its annual meeting in Geneva this month, and is one of its 26 independent experts. "The health indicators are particularly alarming: maternal and infant mortality rates are very high, respectively eight and five times as high as those observed in the main populations; life expectancy is considerably shorter," said Paris-based Medecins du Monde, aiding Roma in France, Greece and Spain. Of the minority's original 150,000 members in Kosovo, only 10,000 to 20,000 still remain there, the Society for Threatened Peoples said.

18/08/2000: Athens News [Kathy Tzilivakis], page: A30
Article code: C12728A303

"Panel on Gypsies"

http://athensnews.dolnet.gr/athweb/nathens.print_unique?e=C&f=12728&m=A30&aa=3&eidos=S

A UNITED Nations panel yesterday urged the leadership of European countries, including Greece, to adopt measures to protect Gypsies against racial violence and to improve their squalid living conditions. A list of recommendations was drafted following a two-day discussion in Geneva about the problems of Gypsies, also known as Roma, which was held during the ongoing 57th Session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Members of numerous rights groups, including the Greek branch of Helsinki Monitor and the Minority Rights Group Greece, participated in the two-day meeting, which ended on Wednesday. A spokesman for the Greek Helsinki Monitor, Panayote Dimitras, told the Geneva discussion on Tuesday that not only are Gypsies in Greece confronted with discrimination and are too often the victims of arbitrary police raids and brutality, but the state is systematically trying to remove them from areas where sports facilities for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games are to be built.

Included on a list of recommendations issued yesterday, the committee urged governments that have signed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Greece signed the Convention on March 7, 1966) to take action to prevent discrimination against Gypsies.

17/8/2000: BBC World Service, 12:30 GMT 13:30 UK

<http://news6.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/americas/newsid%5F833000/833088.stm>

"UN denounces persecution of Roma"

The United Nations has called for compensation for Roma people victimized by the Nazis during the Second World War.

The Geneva-based Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination also called for an end to what it says is the continuing failure of European governments to protect gypsies from persecution and violent attack.

The Committee urged governments to consider a financial package for victims of Nazi deportation and extermination programs.

It said there was still widespread racial discrimination against the Roma, particularly in central and eastern Europe. In Kosovo, they need round-the-clock police protection from ethnic-Albanians bent on taking revenge for gypsies' alleged collaboration with Serb forces.

In Greece, Roma are being evicted from squalid campsites to clear the way for sport facilities for the 2004 Olympics. Correspondents say the Roma are a prime target in the recent upsurge of racist violence in many former communist countries, where they are seen as an economic threat.

From the newsroom of the BBC World Service

15/7/00: BBC World Service, 19:42 GMT 20:42 UK

<http://news6.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/americas/newsid%5F882000/882074.stm>

“UN reports on Roma troubles”

A new United Nations report says Europe's Roma people are victims of racism, violence and human rights abuses of all kinds.

The report, prepared for the UN's Geneva-based Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, partly blames the difficult economic conditions following the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe.

It says those few Roma people in employment are picked on by other workers in competition for their jobs.

But the report also says that the media plays a harmful role by stereotyping the Roma as gypsies, and suggesting that they have a predisposition for committing crime.

It says the police often shy away from their responsibility to protect the Roma because they're also prejudiced.

From the newsroom of the BBC World Service

All reports are positive.

2. Commemorating the Roma Holocaust

3/08/2000: Athens News [Kathy Tzilivakis], p: A04

Article code: C12716A044

http://athensnews.dolnet.gr/athweb/nathens.lst_by_topic?e=C&t=01

“Greece urged to protect its Gypsies”

GREECE should do more to address human rights violations against its Gypsy minority, said Helsinki Commission Chairman Representative Christopher H Smith in the US Senate yesterday. The Greek Helsinki Monitor also stressed the need for the Greek government to publicly condemn intolerance and discrimination against this group.

Marking the 56th anniversary yesterday of the death of thousands of Gypsies in the Nazi camp at Auschwitz, the plight of thousands of Gypsies in Greece and across Europe - most of them living on the margins of society, was addressed by human rights advocates around the world. The Greek Helsinki Monitor raised awareness about yesterday's international Remembrance Day of Gypsy victims of the Holocaust.

Thousands of Gypsy men, women and children were killed in gas chambers at Auschwitz. More than one million Jews met a similar fate at the camp during World War II. Gypsies were among those targeted by the Nazis. More than 20,000 Gypsies were taken to Auschwitz between 1941-1944.

On August 2, 1944, Nazi troops stormed the camp, killing the last remaining 2,897 Gypsies in the gas chamber.

“The countries where the greatest number of Gypsies live have allowed this situation to get progressively worse,” said Smith. “From Nea Kios in Greece to Csor in Hungary, local authorities have sent the message that their Gypsy minorities are not welcome and national officials have stood by in shameful silence.”

Smith referred to the Peloponnesian town of Nea Kios where the local municipal council took a decision on May 20 to literally chase out all Gypsies from the town. Residents set up regular roadblocks to prohibit some 500 Gypsies who live in the area from entering the town. They claim the Gypsies are responsible for a reported rise in local crime. Human rights groups and several local left-wing political parties condemned these measures as “racist” and as a “violation of human rights”.

Greece's Gypsy minority numbers more than 350,000. At least half of them live on the margins of society. They live in makeshift settlements, often in deplorable conditions. Few Gypsy children attend school.

Positive report.

3. Municipality of Dymi (Achaia, Peloponese) pleads for measures to combat Romanies' noisy festivities.

4/8/00: Peloponnisos

“They can't sleep because of the Roma”

Since May 2000, the mayor of Dymi --the municipality where Kato Ahaia administratively belongs to-- has addressed himself twice to the competent police authorities asking for their contribution to combat local Romanies' unlawful behavior, in particular their noisy festivities. According to the mayor's memo, Roma weddings and other massive celebrations are

excessively noisy --lasting till the early hours-- disrupting the peace and harmony of the local society. Moreover, Roma illegally close the streets by blocking the entrance to certain neighborhoods thus, seriously impeding the local citizens' free circulation.

Neutral report, simply referring to the municipality's action.

4a. Romani lobbying in Europe for recognition as a nation without a state

1/8/2000: *Eleftherotypia*

"Gypsies to Europe: Recognize us as a nation without a state"

Roma leaders from 40 countries in Europe asked for their recognition as a nation without a state. Discrimination against Roma is rather difficult and the only way to secure their true and equal participation in Europe --along with the rest of the its peoples—would be their recognition as a nation without a state.

Rather positive report, without further comments.

4b. The Greek Roma reaction

Greek Roma Leaders Lash Out at International Romani Union

No to the Demand for Recognition as Nation Without a State

Panayote Dimitras
Greek Helsinki Monitor
(AIM Athens, 6/8/2000)

"I'd rather stop calling myself a Gypsy than belong to a separate nationality," said Yannis Chalilopoulos, representative of the Union of Greek Gypsies. He was commenting in the daily newspaper *Eleftherotypia* on the call by the International Romani Union World Congress held in late July 2000, in Prague, for the recognition of the Roma as a "nation without a state." "I think that the Americans are behind this," added Christos Lambrou, president of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations. "Since they want to maintain their hegemony over an afflicted European region, they are now trying to create an issue from nowhere that makes use of the Gypsies of Europe, whose political judgment and awareness is still embryonic because of the poor living conditions."

Lambrou made arguments similar to those found in the notoriously nationalist daily newspaper *Eleftheros Typos* two days later (4/8/00), in an article titled "The [Athens 2004] Olympic Games, an obstacle to the US plans on the Balkans." The newspaper's Washington correspondent, while describing the alleged U.S. destabilization plans for the region, wrote: "The Gypsies of Eastern and Central Europe, with full American support, have risen in an obvious effort to create a state entity."

<p>5. Agrinio (Continental Greece): The Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life comments positively on the progress in the works in Romani settlements</p>

9/8/00: Peloponnisos

“Agrinio: The advisor to the Prime Minister on Roma”

Mr. Stamos, from the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life, and Mr. Papaspyropoulos, special advisor to the Minister of Interior, together with municipal cadres of Agrinio –including the mayor- visited Roma settlements in the region and inspected the infrastructure works that are already underway. Both advisors were satisfied with the outcome of their visit and the progress that has been made so far. The mayor of Agrinio expressed the wish that in the coming years, local Roma will have escaped their misery and marginalization.

Neutral to positive report.