

REPORT ON THE COVERAGE OF THE ROMA IN THE GREEK PRESS

FEBRUARY 2000

(Comments in italics are made by the GHM)

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1. On the educational program of the University of Ioanina

1/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia* [Ioana Sotirhu], p. 48

“Roma’s Vietnam”

Vietnam is a very true aspect of the everyday shameful reality in Greece, at least for some of our compatriots. There are human dumps of our ‘social superiority.’ Vietnam is somewhere near the town of Ioanina, in an area called Paralimni, full of garbage, where Roma live in wooden shacks.

During their third annual meeting, the associates of the University of Ioanina exchanged valuable information. The objective was to discuss the progress of the Roma education program under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education, which had been underway for three years now. The program covers 27, out of the 52 counties. One of the most positive developments was the increase in the number of Roma children who attend school. Yet, the problems are numerous. How can anyone think of education when one is starving? How can anyone think of school as a priority, when one lives in destitute camps and is forced to move in search of seasonal occupation or, even worse, because of evictions? The right to education is subordinate to the right to life. This should not be overlooked when it comes to Roma.

The failure of the school system to involve Roma children is overwhelming. The examples of school directors and teachers who refuse to enroll Roma children in their classes are numerous and the experience of the university's associates in this respect seems to be rather painful. Prejudice prevails. The media take the lion's share in doing this. As Mr. Gotovos --the person in charge of the program-- stated in his closing remarks, "we are fighting against the three Ps - Poverty, Phantoms and a 'Promiscuous' state."

A positive report, highlighting the responsibility of the Greek state and society for today's chaotic situation of the Roma in Greece.

2. Roma criminality

3/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 50

Two Roma were caught with 105 kilos of cannabis destined for the drug market of Zefyri. The 27-year-old George Nikitas and the 36-year-old George Kamberis had the cannabis packed in sacks in their car. Police officers arrested also the 19-year-old Gerasimos Kamberis and the 35-year-old Panayote Nikitas, who were accompanying the car as guards.

A negative report, highlighting the Roma identity of the suspects.

3/2/2000: *Paratiritis*, p. 13

"Couple Arrested for Murder"

The police arrested and kept in custody a Roma couple in Serres. The couple is accused of murder. The suspects are accused of the murder of a Turkish citizen three years ago in Theva. Allegedly, the couple had certain unsettled disputes with the victim. In their car, the police found a knife and a shotgun. Based on information from the police, the couple confessed to the murder. The reason behind this act --as stated by the Roma woman-- was that the victim had tried to rape her.

A neutral to negative report - no additional comments, just a mere presentation of the story of the police and the suspects. At the same time, the fact that the story highlights the ethnicity of the suspects does not really enrich the report from an informational point of view. It only reinforces the existing stereotypes about the anti-social behavior of the Roma.

7/2/2000: *Ta Nea*

"Roma Arrested in Thessaloniki"

Thirteen kilos of hashish, guns and stolen cars were found in the Menemeni Roma camp around Thessaloniki (the area of Diavata). Police officers claim that Roma have become the main drug dealers in the region after gaining control over the other traffickers. The police raid in the camp took place on Sunday night and ended with 36 arrests. Among the arrested Roma, there was a 10-year-old girl who later was set free.

8/2/2000: *Kathimerini* [Th. Tsiganas, D. Antoniu], p. 6

‘Latest Police ‘Operations’’

Until very recently, Roma camps in Menidi, Ano Liosia, Aspropyrgos and other areas of Western Attica were considered to be inaccessible --even to the police-- drug dealing zones. Local authorities and residents were frustrated with the inertia of the police, which tolerated the existence of such ghettos where even a walk at night seemed to be an invitation for trouble. Following the protests of the people, the police devised a whole plan against criminality covering all the above-mentioned areas and even more. Constant police presence in the streets, road blockades and raids in the camps have already showed some results. Large quantities of drugs were confiscated and drug dealers went to prison. A similar strategy was followed in Thessaloniki - 35 people were arrested; 13 kilos of hashish, four guns and two stolen cars and 1,260,000 drachmas were confiscated as a result of the latest police raid in the Roma camp of Menemeni. As police director Mr. Dalamagides stated, many Roma had transformed their tents and shacks into drug warehouses. Some of them used even their own children to advertise or hide their drug business. A 10-year-old girl was caught with 358 grammars of hashish in her underwear. Her mother had hidden the merchandise out of fear that she would be caught. The most striking thing that this raid shows is that Roma have the lion's share of the drug market and thus prevail over Albanians.

8/2/2000: *Kathimerini* (English edition)

Police raid. A 10-year-old girl was among those arrested in a raid on a Gypsy camp near the Diavates prison, western Thessaloniki, on Sunday. The girl's mother allegedly tried to hide hashish in her daughter's dress during the raid, and both she and the child were taken into custody. The girl has been released but will receive a summons to give evidence. The police arrested 35 people and confiscated 13 kilos of hashish, four rifles, two stolen cars and 1,200,000 drachmas.

Also on the same subject:

8/2/2000: *Ta Nea* p. 18

Negative reports, concentrating exclusively on the criminal act, leaving aside all possible references to the extenuating circumstances (e.g. social, political and economical exclusion, illiteracy) related to this act.

15/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 59

‘One Gave Birth and another Claimed to Be the Mother’’

A 50-year-old Roma woman delivered her baby on January 29, 2000. Some days later, the doctors, who had helped in the birth, saw a different and much younger woman who claimed the baby. They got suspicious and called the police. The doctors were right about the fraud, but they were wrong about its nature. The baby was not meant to be sold. The mother, who lacked a certificate of penury, was asked to pay for the

expenses of childbirth. Not having the money, the mother made doctors believe that she had a certificate of penury at home and agreed to leave the baby at the clinic for a couple of days until she comes back with the papers. Indeed, some days later a woman identifying herself as Spyridoula Karagounis came to the hospital to claim the baby. Yet, she looked much younger than the mother everybody remembered. Police investigation showed that Spyridoula Karagounis -unlike the real mother- had a certification of penury, which enabled her to take the baby without paying the clinic for the childbirth.

A neutral report, written with a humorous touch.

13/2/2000: *To Vima*

‘‘Athens’ Ghetos’’

‘‘Zefyri: The... American South of Athens’’

Only those who go ‘drug shopping’ know well the way to Zefyri. There, like in the American South, one can distinguish between the ‘whites’ --the old residents of Zefyri- and the ‘blacks’ - the Roma. The latter live in shacks that are good enough to accommodate their difficult life. This is a real ghetto. Human beings and rats live together... without a ray of light. Some of them earn their living by selling plastic chairs. Others have opted for ‘easy money,’ after years of waiting for a bright future, which never came. Easy money from hashish became even easier with guns and hard drugs.

A neutral report, drawing parallels between Romas’ marginal position in society and criminality.

18/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 58

‘‘Examilia Became Texas’’

A clash between Roma and four police officers took place in Examilia (Corinthos). According to some information, the police officers asked a 24-year-old Roma criminal suspect Michalis Theodoropoulos and his 30-year-old brother, Yannis, to get out of their car for inspection. Yannis refused to obey and tried to run away. The police tried to stop them by shooting. One of the suspects, Yannis Theodoropoulos, was injured. Michalis Theodoropoulos managed to escape. The Roma residents of the Examilia settlement got furious and attacked one of the two police cars with pieces of wood and stones. The car was completely destroyed and the four police officers left the area in the second car.

A neutral to negative report. The journalist presents the whole story as a usual routine operation with well prescribed stages (order for inspection, refusal, shooting). The transition from stage two to stage three is presented as a logical development without further comments or questioning of the way the operation ended. The police officers were supposed to shoot at the tires of the car to prevent the suspects from escaping. They shouldn’t have shot at the suspects themselves. The fact that one of

them was injured is not commented on at all. As a result, the aggression expressed towards the police officers by the Roma community is portrayed more as an expression of solidarity towards the suspects --indirectly, this is seen as Roma tolerance for crime-- and less as a possible protest against the handling of the matter by the police.

26/2/2000: Kathimerini, p. 6

“Nine People Arrested in Evosmos for Drugs”

Two young Roma women and seven men were arrested by police officers in Evosmos. The officers, while looking for drugs in a Roma camp above the ring road, found and confiscated a kilo of hashish. The police arrested seven people - two Roma women (Anna Kyriazis, 26 years old and Irene Eleftheriados, 22 years old), Aggelos Kosmanides-Santikoglu, 21 years old, Athanasios Samaras, 49 years old, George Meidanis, 47 years old, Theoklitos Karayanis, 22 years old and Nicholas Harisopoulos, 23 years old. The arrest took place exactly at the time when the first three were handing hashish to the rest.

A neutral to negative report, highlighting the ethnicity of some of the suspects.

3. Photo exhibition on Roma

5/2/2000: Eleftherotypia, p. 31

“Roma Perspective”

‘Terne Roma ando sureti’ is the Romanes phrase for ‘Young Roma Photographers.’ Under this title, the Roma students, who had the chance to attend a photography workshop in Agia Varvara, exhibit their work in the Book Arcade. The exhibition is the end product of an interesting effort under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. For six months, young Roma had the chance to learn all about the use of cameras and the art of photography. Photographer Stelios Efstathopoulos was the person in charge.

A positive report, in favor of the initiative.

4. «Let’s talk about... Gypsies» - D. Gousetis (GHM) on racist comments against Roma in a provincial newspaper

5/2/2000 Avgi [D. Gousetis]

http://www.avgi.org/cgi-bin/hweb.exe?-A=137493&-w=20000205_&-V=AVGI&-P

“Let’s talk about Gypsies”

Roma, as most of them in Europe identify themselves --known also under the pejorative term Tsiganes and Gypsies-- are often seen as a nomad and marginalized population due to... habit or customary practice. Only few of us detect the states’ responsibility for this marginalization, which derives from Romas’ exclusion from all of the important fields of life (social, political, and economic). The fall of Communism

contributed even more to the overall deterioration of their status in Europe. In Greece, when it comes to Roma, one can discern two different approaches: the assimilationist and the multiculturalist one. While the first approach aims at the ‘annihilation’ of Roma’s language and customs, the second approach supports a model of coexistence, mutual acceptance and tolerance of the differences. In this field, Roma are supposed to have their own space.

There is also another approach - the racist one. That is the approach of Mr. Spyros Pantazis, columnist in the provincial newspaper *Proini* [‘Morning Paper’]. This newspaper claims to be a mainstream local paper published in Korinthos (Peloponese). The columnist in question dedicated two subsequent articles (15&16/12/1999) with expressions of his [racist] view on the Roma. Roma camps are drug-dealing centers; Roma are characterized as people leading parasitic lives... Both articles were exact copies of a November 1999 report in *Chrysi Avgi*, the paper of the extreme rightists in Greece. The *Chrysi Avgi* report was not signed. Whether Mr. Pantazis wrote the article, or just copied it, makes no real difference as he publicly endorsed such racist views. The real issue is the paper itself. The publisher Ms. Kasimatis did not bother replying to the [only!] letter of protest from the Prefecture of Korinthos Youth Council. If Ms. Kasimatis’ paper targets the same audience as that of *Chrysi Avgi*, that’s fine. If not, she should detach herself and her paper from Mr. Pantazis and his views as soon as possible.

A very positive report, bringing into the light two of the prevailing approaches on managing inter-ethnic relations in Greece: assimilationism and multiculturalism. In addition, the report highlights the lack of sensitivity in Greek society. Tolerance for racist views, expressed in a mainstream newspaper, seems to derive not from the ‘tolerance for intolerance’ principle, but from a culture of public indifference towards anything deviating from the majority’s sometimes authoritarian perception of the norm.

5. Roma misfortune

7/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 51

‘‘Baby Loses Baby’’

She got married when she was only 15 years old. So did her husband. A year later, she gave birth to a child. Motherhood brought hope and strength into her miserable life. She was living in a small prefabricated house, a life full of perplexing thoughts and problems suited for mature adults and not for children like herself. Yet, life became ever more bitter. She hardly managed to grasp the meaning of what happened. While she was feeding her baby, the baby stopped breathing. Hopeless as she was, she could not be of any help to herself, let alone to her baby. The young Roma woman could not stop crying, holding the baby’s blanket, unable to explain her misfortune. A true story from the Pyrgos (Peloponese) camp of the destitute earthquake victims, who live just a few meters away from the civilized world.

A rather sensitive report, giving the reader a hint about the differences in the lives of Roma and non-Roma teenagers.

22/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 18

‘Little Boy Falls in Irrigation Channel’

Town of Patra: A 3-year-old boy, Panayote Panayotopoulos, was accidentally killed when he fell into an irrigation channel. The boy lived in a Roma settlement near Patra (Peloponese). The irony of the situation was that the boy’s father had run into the fence with his car and dismantled the fence exactly where the accident took place.

A neutral report, referring to the incident without further comments.

6. Research on Xenophobia

13/2/2000: *Kathimerini* [A. Lakasas], p. 28

‘Xenophobia Begins at School’

The 1990s have seen the influx of immigrants and repatriated Greeks from the former Soviet Union. This phenomenon established a ‘new order of things’ in Greek education. Data of the ministerial agency called Special Secretariat of Intercultural Education show that the mother tongue of approximately 6% of the student population in Greece is other than Greek. The presence of immigrants’ children, with all of their language and adaptation problems in the Greek schools, has pushed the ‘traditional others’ of our educational system --the Roma-- even further to the margin. How could 16-year-old Georgy from Uzbekistan be convinced to give up his job at a gas station and go to school, which he has abandoned because of his language problems and the negative attitude of his schoolmates? What could possibly be the response to the following disarming questions of a 14-year-old Roma girl? “Why should I go to school? We have no money for books and we will never be employed in offices. Do people hire Gypsies in offices?”

The inflow of children with learning difficulties --mainly attributed to their language deficiency-- in many cases leads to an overall downgrading of the educational process in class. As soon as Greek parents realize this, they rush to send their children in other, ‘better’ schools. This act makes the alien element even more conspicuous and almost synonymous to downgrading. Moreover, in this way the students who are left behind are pushed to the educational margin. This is not some parents’ fault. This is the state’s fault, because the state has failed to form its educational policy, which would deal with problems in the so-called mixed classes. Dropout rates in some cases reach 35%.

In their book entitled ‘The Different out of Class?’ two researchers, Christos Katsikas and Eva Politu, attempted to draw a picture of the situation by closely examining the trends of exclusion, marginalization and rejection present in the Greek schools. Students were asked to evaluate positively and negatively their schoolmates on the basis of their origin. The largest percentage of rejection was expressed towards Roma children (65%) and Albanian children (56%). Greek children seem to accept more Arabs, Asians and Africans (78%) and schoolmates from East and West European countries (84% and 93%, respectively). To a great extent, these ideas of the children

mirror the ideas of their parents. “The common form of educational racism is the official exclusion of certain groups of people from school” mentioned Mr. Katsikas.

A positive report, emphasizing the need for an “inclusive” philosophy and practice of education.

7. Interesting court decision

13/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia* [Vana Fotopoulos], p. 93

“Lost Case for Lost Honor”

They lived together for two years. Then, her fiancée abandoned her and she went to court demanding compensation for her ‘lost honor.’ Her case was based on Romas’ customary law, which obliges fiancées with premarital sexual relations to get married for the honor of the Roma woman to be redeemed. Otherwise, the community perceives the woman as dishonored.

The question the judges were called to answer was whether the unwritten rules of a specific social group can be invoked in court. The response was negative. Customs have no power when they are in discord with the Greek Constitution and international law in general. In view of the equality between men and women, the court ruled that the demand for compensation on the grounds presented above runs counter to the contemporary ideas on the equal position of women in society. The decision states that Romas’ customary law, which makes the redemption of a woman’s honor dependent on her marriage to the man with whom she has had sexual relations, ‘is out of our legal culture.’ ‘It automatically puts the woman into a situation of social inferiority and clashes with the constitutional provisions on equality.’ Customary practices of a closed social group, which impede the free development of one’s personality --e.g. lack of freedom to decide on marriage and partners-- cannot be taken into account by the court. ‘Had the Court reached the opposite decision, this would have resulted in the indirect establishment of an anti-constitutional rule of law. Therefore, the prevailing view in the Roma community cannot lead to the creation of a particular custom, nor can it lead to the creation of ethical standards of a certain group.’ The legislature’s goal is to establish equality of the sexes in law. This would be done both through the recognition and consolidation of the position of women and through promoting the evolution of people’s understanding of the issues.

A neutral report, without further comments.

8. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Theodoros Pangalos on Roma

14/2/2000: *Ta Nea* [Theodoros Pangalos, former Minister of Foreign Affairs], p. 14

Also available at:

http://ta-nea.dolnet.gr/neaweb/nta_nea.print_unique?e=A&f=16667&m=N14&aa=1

“Three Key Elements to Gypsies’ Integration --Compulsory Education, Housing Programs and Cracking down on Criminality-- Can Help Their Integration into Society”

From time to time, police raids in Gypsy camps remind the public of the existence of this particular group of Greek citizens. There are no reliable data on the number of Gypsies in Greece. Estimates vary from 60,000 to 250,000 people. On the one hand, this is due to the 'hidden identity phenomenon' present in some categories of settled and assimilated Gypsies. On the other hand, the reason for the unreliable estimates is in the fact that group leaders tend to blow the numbers up, in order to 'give some cloud' mainly to themselves and then to their people. In addition, some elderly Gypsies have no identity documents.

When did Gypsies become a problem?

Modernization and rapid industrialization gradually put Gypsies in the margin of economy. Their professions became old-fashioned and obsolete. Yet, an even greater blow was the influx of (Albanian) immigrants into Greece. These immigrants became the new cheap labor-force. The opportunities for seasonal occupation started dwindling, pushing the Gypsies even more to the margin. Lacking trade-union experience and action, with minimal participation in local administration, the Gypsies of the 1980s became an easy target to self-appointed 'Messiahs,' in reality crooks, who talked publicly in their name.

Immigration and modernization forced Gypsies to change their lifestyles. Thus they started moving to the urban centers. A number of them settled down in downgraded suburbs of Athens already populated with internal immigrants, suffering from high unemployment and housing problems. The established local population found it difficult to accept the newcomers, but easy to start looking down upon them. Racism and rejection were soon to come at least in the triangle of Ano Liosia, Menidi and Zefiri. Gypsy camps with various threats to public health (e.g. rats and mosquitoes) gradually turned into ghettos. Local residents saw their property --plots of land and houses-- decline in value. The value system of the Gypsies as regards issues of lawfulness changed as well, mainly due to their intermingling with other Gypsies from Albania and Romania. Gypsies turned from petty offenders to dangerous criminals, who dealt mainly in drug trafficking.

Education seems to provide the key answer to all these problems. Its importance suggests that it should no more be left in the hands of picturesque volunteers. In the last few years, the government took some action in the right direction. But that was not enough. Gypsies' high birthrate has increased the number of people born *de facto* in the margin of society. The only remedies are education, housing and cracking down on criminality. The problem of unassimilated groups of people is crucial. Our society has the necessary means and knowledge to solve this problem.

One of the highlights of the assimilationist perspective, which sees difference as a potential threat to society.

9. Roma in Kosovo

16/2/2000: Avgi [Sonja Biserco]

“Kosovo: From Nightmare to Hope...”

http://www.avgi.org/cgi-bin/hweb.exe?-A=138624&-w=20000216_&-V=AVGI

A report dealing exclusively with the relations between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo. There is one reference to Albanians' violence against Kosovo Roma.

10. Housing programs

18/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 18

“Roma Housing”

The inter-ministerial committee on Roma, set up on Prime Minister K. Simitis' initiative, decided to implement housing programs of immediate action in areas with destitute Roma camps (Mesolongi, Theva, Thessaloniki, Agrinio).

A neutral report without further comments.

Also on the same subject:

18/2/2000: *Avgi*

http://www.avgi.org/cgi-bin/hweb.exe?-A=139034&-w=20000218_&-V=AVGI

“Gypsies Too, in the Pre-election Scenery...”

The inter-ministerial committee on Roma, at the head of which is the Minister of the Interior, Ms. Vaso Papandreou, started with a review of the governmental action taken since 1996. The new plan of action provides for a few billions of drachmas for housing, education, health and employment. Competent ministries, together with the General Secretary of Popular Training and the inter-municipal Network ‘ROM,’ will be in charge of areas involving social security, training, employment, and housing. Thanasis Triarides, Spokesperson of DROM Network for Roma Social Rights, expressed his hope that all these ambitious schemes would be carried into practice in the post-election period. The need to move on with a concrete set of actions and a monitoring procedure is more than imminent. Thanasis Triarides made also reference to the scientific research of Doctors of the World-Greece, encapsulating in diagrams and statistics their three years' experience in (destitute) camps.

A positive report, with both skepticism and enthusiasm for the initiative.

21/2/2000: *Macedonian Press Agency*

http://www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc_id=98860

“Houses for the Roma of Drama”

Town of Drama: On the municipality's initiative, a plot of land of approximately 10 acres was allocated for the housing of 28 Roma families, who have been living in a destitute camp at the entrance of the town. The plot is close to the local university

facilities. In addition, 40 prefabricated houses --used for the Athens earthquake victims-- will also be provided for this purpose. The initiative is within the larger housing program of the inter-municipal network 'ROM.' The bigger housing program includes another 32 towns besides Drama.

Also on the same subject:

22/2/2000: *Paratiritis*, p. 11

Positive reports, in favor of the initiative.

11. Reactions against Roma in Tripolis (Peloponese)

24/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 9

“Angry Bourgeoisie”

Lately, in Tripolis, some ‘full-blooded bourgeoisie’ --the way they refer to themselves- who own property at the entrance of the town, have initiated an information campaign against the Roma. This campaign speaks of the danger of the town falling into the hands of the Gypsies, in the same way it did years ago during the Greek revolution against the Ottomans. This is not a joke. This is a position that has repeatedly been published anonymously in a local daily newspaper. What could possibly be the explanation? Probably some Roma in the area saved some money and bought some plots of land with the hope to eventually provide a home for their barefoot children, who live in frozen and humid shanties. The ‘bourgeois landowners’ are afraid that their property will be devaluated, if the Roma manage to do so.

A very positive report, critical of the unfair racist propaganda against the Roma

12. Run off to the elections in Greece - human rights and Roma

29/2/2000: *Eleftherotypia* [Ioana Sotirhu]

“The Rock of Our Future”

Going through the leaflets, published by our government, which talk about our new metro, our reform in education, in social security and so on, an idea crossed my mind. Why don't I make my own (pre-election) contribution to the government? Maybe provide ideas and material for a new leaflet on human rights. With much satisfaction we enjoyed scenes of policemen raiding a camp in Thessaloniki [Menemeni]. This was the moment we came to realize that the former military barracks of Gonos should have been ready six months ago, if not earlier. At any rate, I am not sure I know many (drug) dealers who live in tents! ‘We had a rather good harvest,’ a police officer stated happily before the TV cameras. He was in charge of the umpteenth operation against illegal immigrants. Well, somebody should tell him that the word ‘harvest’ refers to fields and crops, not to human beings! But what can we expect when the level of education of our police officers is lower than that of our illegal immigrants? Only 8%

of our guards of order have a university degree, while the same percentage for illegal immigrants is 26.7%!

A very positive report, bringing into the light Greece's 'human rights' deficit.'