

**REPORT ON THE COVERAGE OF THE ROMA IN THE GREEK PRESS**

**JANUARY 2000**

*(Comments in italics are made by the GHM)*

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**1. Doctors of the World Hold Press Conference on the Roma**

(Excerpts from the January 2000 GHM Activity Report to the ERRC).

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

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

**12/1/2000: *Avgi*, p. 10**

«A Population on the Verge of Wretchedness»

The Roma are a population living under the poverty line. 99.6 % of the Roma tent-dwellers in camps around Athens have been stricken by hepatitis A, 65% by hepatitis B (out of which 15% can transmit the disease) and 1.8% by hepatitis C. These are only some of the revealing results of a study conducted by Doctors of World. Using questionnaires and medical data from their visits in the camps, (Chalandri, Agia Paraskevi, Aspropyrgos-rubbish dump and Aspropyrgos-Nea Zoe) the organization has demonstrated that the Roma are indeed a population in despair and danger.

**Also on the same issue:**

**14/1/2000: *Avgi*, p. 1, 12 and 13.**

«Human Dumps the Roma Camps»

Numbers, numbers and statistics. According to research carried out by the Doctors of the World, 65% of the Roma tent-dwellers in four camps of Athens have never been vaccinated, 86% have not gone to school, 42% of the women have miscarried at least once. The average life span of the population is 43 years. Yet, the living conditions are unchanged. The same goes for the prejudices and stereotypes. Roma, despite the existing stereotypes, wish to settle down. They move out of need, not out of their whims or customs. 70% of the Roma have left their place of birth against their will. In most cases they were evicted, and sometimes this was done in a violent manner. Panayote Elias Dimitras -one of the guest speakers at the Doctors of the World press conference- referred to the response of the Greek delegation to the latest OSCE Implementation Meeting in Vienna, when admitting that the situation is «unacceptable.» Christina Rougheri, also from the GHM, criticized the policy followed by the municipality of Ano Liosia. This policy is based on denying residence to the Roma and on openly expressing discontent for already having too many Roma residents in the municipality! The initiative for the creation of a new self-managed camp -this time in Western Athens- was blocked by both the municipal and prefectural authorities. The tent-dwellers in Chalandri and Agia Paraskevi seem to be faring better. The two mayors have committed themselves that they are going to buy, with financial aid from the government, plots of land for the Roma.

**Also on the same issue:**

**14/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia* [Ioana Sotirhu], p. 49**

«98% of the Roma with Hepatitis A»

**14/1/2000: Avriani**, p. 12

«Doctors of the World's Research»

**14/1/2000: Imerisia** [E. Petropoulou], p. 17

«Prefect of West Attica Denies Granting of Land to the Roma Self-managed Camp»

**14/1/2000: Kathimerini** [E. Karanatsis], p. 8

«2,000 Roma on the Verge of Wretchedness»

**14/1/2000: Vradyni** [Stavroula Spiridakou], p. 23

«One in Ten Families Sends Children to School»

**14/1/2000: Adesmeftos Typos** [D. Pananu], p. 1, 20 and 37.

«Freely Isolated. The Situation of Roma Is Tragic»

*Positive reports, focusing on the destitute living conditions of the Roma and the need for imminent action.*

**and 14/1/2000: Rizospastis**, p. 24-25

«Rats Matter More Than People»

«Revealing Research of the Doctors of the World»

*Besides the references to the research of the Doctors of the World, the newspaper had a report on the Roma in Nea Zoe highlighting that the latter showed ignorance when asked about the existing plans for the establishment of a self-managed camp in their neighborhood. Moreover, the newspaper made critical reference to the scientific symposium of the Doctors of the World commenting negatively on the list of guest speakers and panelists as well as on the NGO initiative regarding the self-managed camp in Western Athens. The report misrepresented the facts by speaking about the exclusion of the political parties, with the exception of the Progressive Left Coalition Party and described the idea of the self-managed camp as an idea of «locking the Roma up» against their will.*

**16-1-2000: Athens News** [Derek Gatopoulos]

<http://athensnews.dolnet.gr/athnews.dat/00-01-16/grknews/grn.htm>

«Government Concedes Delays in Battle to Fight Gypsy Poverty»

A GOVERNMENT adviser yesterday admitted delays in public programs to rescue thousands of Gypsies from crippling poverty, after a relief agency this week detailed the desperate conditions at settlements outside Athens. There have been delays... Gypsies who roam the countryside or live at settlements are facing greater problems, said Freddy Stamou, an adviser to Premier Costas Simitis on poverty. Many results (of

government programs) are not yet visible but it would be a mistake to believe that nothing is happening. Stamou spoke at a one-day conference in Athens on Gypsies, organized by Greece's branch of the group Doctors of the World. The agency on Thursday released a two-year study of Gypsies at four camps in Attica, which found that more than 98% had suffered from Hepatitis A and that about 90% are illiterate. The survey spurred criticism against the government, which launched poverty-fighting projects three years ago, aimed at providing thousands of camp-dwellers with basic housing and hygiene. Stamou said about 7 billion drachmas had been spent or assigned to programs involving the ministries of health, interior, education and other government departments.

More than 120,000 Gypsies live in Greece, according to government estimates, and almost half of them live in tents and shacks at 50-60 settlements outside cities across the country. Most of these makeshift facilities have no electricity or water supplies, while residents suffer from poor sanitation and live at least 10 years less than average Greeks. Officials argue the influx of hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants during the 1990s has forced many Gypsies out of unskilled jobs. Stamou said uncooperative local councils often pushed Gypsies further into poverty and repeated a government pledge to create a National Gypsy Council later this year, comprised of public and local officials and Gypsy representatives. Some (local officials) expect to wake up one morning and find all the Gypsies gone, he said. That is simply not going to happen. This approach is a foolish one. Stamou insisted that conditions had improved at some settlements in rural Greece but that life at the Athens camps remained the big problem. Alexandros Ginis, who headed the Doctors of the World survey, told the Athens News that Gypsies at a camp near Athens district of Chalandri have lived there for an average of 30 years. It is a myth that the people at camps come-and-go. They want to settle, he said. The study tracked more than 1,300 Gypsies at Attica camps where the agency is active - in Halandri, Aspropyrgos, Agia Paraskevi and near the landfill at Ano Liosia. Levels of the more-deadly Hepatitis A and B were also abnormally high. Half the camp-dwellers are children.

This is the kind of picture you would see in Greece 40 or 50 years ago, but it is happening to Gypsies today, Ginis said. One-in-five people had suffered a broken limb, while levels of ulcers and gastro-enteritis were also high.

*A very positive report, bringing some of the most important problems of the Roma to the limelight.*

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

Starting from the findings of the Doctors of the World, M. Economeas, journalist with the private radio station Planet, made reference to the destitute living conditions of Roma tent-dwellers in Athens, Thessaloniki and in other parts of Greece. References were also made to their social and economical marginalization, their exclusion from the school system and violations of their fundamental rights. Ms. Elpida Efthimiatos spoke mainly about the existing housing prospects for the Roma of Chalandri and Agia Paraskevi as well as of the Roma in Western Athens (Ano Liosia and Aspropyrgos, Nea Zoe and rubbish dump). She referred to the obstacles set up by the mayor of Ano Liosia and the Prefect of West Attica in relation to the plans for the creation of a local

self-managed camp. She also tried to shatter the well-known myth about the nomad nature of Roma. The tendency at least during the last few decades is that Roma wish to have a permanent base, a home in which to settle down.

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

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

## **2. A Follow-up Parliamentary Question**

**27/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 6**

«Mr. Kouvelis on the Destitute Living Conditions of the Roma»

Is the government going to initiate programs on the health protection of the Roma and the creation of human living conditions for them? That was the question posed by the Progressive Left Coalition MP, Mr. F. Kouvelis, to the Minister of the Interior and the Health Minister. Mr. Kouvelis made reference to the revealing facts of the study of the Doctors of the World based on four Roma camps in Athens.

*A neutral report referring to the specific parliamentary question.*

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

### «Roma Problems in Parliament»

Approximately one billion drachmas will be given in the year 2000 by the Ministry of the Interior to the Panhellenic Inter-municipal Roma Support Network for the improvement of the housing and living conditions of the Greek Roma. Yet, a series of pending issues need to be imminently tackled as Progressive Left Coalition MP Mr. Kouvelis stated in Parliament. What about health and education? Based on data from the Doctors of the World-Greece, Mr. Kouvelis raised two questions addressed to the Ministers of Health and of the Interior respectively: Is the government going to initiate programs on the health protection of the Roma? Is the government going to provide the Roma with human living conditions?

*A neutral to positive report, implying an understanding of the situation and support to the deputy's initiative.*

### **3. Scientific Symposium of Doctors of the World**

**18/1/2000: Avgi**, p. 21

#### «Minority or Not?»

Are the Roma really a minority suffering from social exclusion; or maybe, by emphasizing this, the dividing lines between Roma and non-Roma are reinforced? That was one of the main questions raised by the participants in the Doctors of the World Scientific Symposium entitled «Gypsy Populations in Europe. From Social Exclusion to the Violation of Human Rights.» A problem, which seems to go beyond science divided the participants into different camps. «I do not think that Roma constitute a minority» stated Herakles Kalamiotis, a Roma tent-dweller and member of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations, who refused at the last minute the invitation to participate in the symposium. Instead, he wrote a protest letter claiming that in the absence of the Federation -which was not represented in the panel discussions- his participation would look rather 'folkloric.' The atmosphere was electrified again when the president of the Federation, Mr. Lambrou, took the floor and verbally attacked Mr. Triarides from the DROM Network for Roma Social Rights in during his presentation on the self-managed camps. The president of the Federation accused Mr. Triarides of «entering somebody else's fields.» The response of the organizers and some of the participants that the Federation is never around when evictions take place provoked another counter-response on behalf of the president, Who anyway is entitled to represent the Roma - the Roma Federation or the non-Roma non-governmental organizations?

The Ombudsman's Office was represented in the symposium by Ms. Mitrosilis. The latter made reference to the (only) seven reports sent to the Ombudsman by the Roma. She stressed the fact that Greek Roma still prefer to get redress with the help of the political parties and through other mechanisms with clientele character. In any case, what was clearly brought to the surface by the symposium was the exclusion of Roma from most fields of life: education, health and civilization. Despite the government's will and wish to move on with the smooth integration of Roma into the Greek society,

expressed by Mr. Stamos from the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life, the majority of the participants and panelists made reference to the series of obstacles in this smooth integration. The symposium closed with a speech made by Mr. Konstandopoulos, the president of the Progressive Left Coalition party.

**17/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia*** [Ioana Sotirhu], p. 15

«Desks of Prejudice for the Roma»

Does the definition of a social group as a minority, counterbalance the group's exclusion or does it contribute to its marginalization? Could it be that some prejudices hinder the integration of a particular group into society? In any case, how can a country consider itself democratic if it deprives a population of its fundamental rights? These were only some of the unhappy thoughts expressed during the Scientific Symposium on the Roma, organized by Doctors of the World.

«How many times will you visit somebody at his place if you realize that he/she ignores your presence and does **NOT** even talk to you?» In other words, why should Roma children be enthusiastic about school and make **AN EFFORT** to attend classes, especially those coming from extremely poor families, when they **DO NOT GET ANY SUPPORT FROM THE SYSTEM AND ITS DECISION-MAKERS** (teachers, directors, bureaucrats)? With this rhetoric question a **ROMA MAN TRIED TO EXPLAIN TO** professor Papakonstandinos from the Ioanina University **WHY ROMA ARE NEGATIVELY PREDISPOSED TOWARDS THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.**

*Rather positive reports, bringing to the limelight some of the major issues discussed at the symposium, as well as the existing problems and responsibilities.*

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

«Roma Streets»

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

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

*A positive report.*

#### **4. Roma Criminality. The Case of Zefyri**

**20/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia*** [G. Dama], p. 18 and 47

«Ghetto of Fear and Drugs»

The prevailing feeling among the residents of Zefyri is fear. Nobody is in the streets. The shops, the town hall, the schools are all closed down. There is only one wish, «Keep Drugs out of Zefyri.» «I am afraid when walking in the streets. I see people, whom I pass by, shooting drugs,» says 14-year-old Mary. Olga adds that she never walks alone and Alexandros claims that drug dealers openly sell drugs to older students in school. Approximately 5% of the students use drugs, according to a professor. Daring Tsiganes (Roma) or others approach the children in front of their teachers telling them, «I have good stuff at a good price.»

Today, 700 students, all residents of Zefyri, did not go to school. They went out in the streets demanding «drugs outside their classes.» «When somebody says ‘Zefyri’ the first thing that automatically comes to one’s mind is a drug market. Here is the biggest market in all Greece, a unique supermarket. There is plenty of variety...» Fear among the people. «You expect us to talk to journalists... What if tomorrow I find my shop destroyed?» «Everybody knows the places where they sell. When brand new stuff comes in, they shoot in the air.» Nobody dares to approach the ghetto areas. «Not even the police?» we wonder. «The police are run after youngsters who buy drugs and after sick drug addicts. They are not after the real traffickers. Everything started two years ago when, around noon, cars we had never seen before stopped to ask us for this and that street in Romanes, before disappearing through the small streets. You should see – on Sunday noon, young couples in cars come here and are led by Gypsy children -waiting for them in the corner- to their home markets. Gypsy children dash to the cars advertising the better stuff of their father...» «They do not catch the real dealers, those with the fancy cars...»

We headed towards the north of Zefyri, towards the ghetto. There was nobody outside. The doors were shut down. There were some BMWs around. We wanted to talk to their owners. A Roma woman, a stick in her hand, threatened us to go away. Her husband shouted out «Go away» from inside. We left... The mayor, Mr. Apostolos Zervas, described the situation in the following way, «The north side has become a drug dealing center. Drugs are being sold in the shucks, which are also used as shelters for the criminals. Robberies, beatings and numerous criminal acts take place.» «What could possibly have gone wrong?» we ask. «Gradually, the region has been turned into a ghetto. Not even the police dare approach it. In the night we hear gunshots. The lack of police presence made things go out of control.»

**Also on the same subject:**

**19/1/2000: *Ta Nea***

[http://tanea.dolnet.gr/demo/owa/search.print\\_unique?entypo=A&f=16645&m=N20&a=1&cookie=](http://tanea.dolnet.gr/demo/owa/search.print_unique?entypo=A&f=16645&m=N20&a=1&cookie=)

«Zefyri: the Drug Dealers’ Hostage»

*Negative reports. There is too much sensationalism, used maybe as an alibi for a potential police raid on the camp. Ta Nea does not even attempt to have the Roma point of view in the report.*

**22/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia*** [G. Dama], p. 18 and 47

«We Also Pay a High Price»

«We denounce the few bad Tsiganes who trade in drugs and we fully agree that they should be arrested and punished. We, however, protest against the fact that, in the last few days, the Greek Roma have been repeatedly described in negative terms by the majority of the media.»

This is the first voice on behalf of the Tsiganes, expressed by the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations, right after the recent tragic reports. The media continuously referred to Zefyri as «China Town» and «Chicago,» transmitting and reinforcing (an unfair) public aversion towards the Roma. No references were made to the majority of the Roma in Zefyri who openly denounce the criminal activity of the minority. Mr. Christos Lambrou, president of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations, claims that in the triangle of Zefyri, Menidi and Liosia racist practices are the rule, rather than the exception. Roma are denied registration, building licenses, electricity and water supply only because the authorities and the other locals do not welcome them. The authorities are those who react against any positive initiative related to the Roma. They have taken their own children away to prevent them from getting in any kind of contact with the Roma children. For the police, raiding camps is the easiest thing. The most difficult task is for them to open the doors of society to everyone. Police surveillance in the region might help but as long as there is no cultural intermixing, there cannot be a viable positive solution to the problems. In any case, the locals demonstrate against the strict police control in their neighborhood instead of the Roma ghetto.

The Doctors of the World expressed their discontent with the way the state dealt with the issue, signaling that Zefyri can only be the beginning of a process of complete isolation and marginalization of other areas as well. «Only with the respect of basic human rights will it become possible to fight phenomena like the ones in Zefyri» stated the organization.

*A positive report, highlighting the role of the media in propagating negative images and in instigating feelings of public aversion towards certain groups.*

**31/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia***, p. 54

«Chasing a Hearse»

Scenes from a police movie in the center of Patras (Peloponese). Police officers were chasing a hearse all over town and passers by thought a movie was being shot! Yet, when they saw police officers pointing their guns at the ...alive and kicking passengers of the hearse, they finally realized that this was not a joke. The policemen had

information that the hearse, transferring a dead Rom from Athens to Peloponese, was full of drugs. The subsequent investigation showed that there was nothing more in the car than a dose of hashish for which the 31-year-old driver of the hearse, Th. F., ended up in the police station for further investigation.

*A neutral to negative report, mentioning only the initials of the suspect. Yet, from the context and the reference to the ethnicity of the dead in the hearse, one can draw the conclusion that **ROMA WERE INVOLVED IN THE ALLEGED DRUG-TRAFFICKING.***

## **5. Educating the Police**

**21/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia*** [Ioana Sotirhu], p. 8

«Roma»

The Ministry of Public Order bought 200 copies of the book «The Great Shadow and the Tsiganes,» in order to distribute them to the police stations of Zefyri and Menidi [densely populated by Roma], as well as to the Police Academy. The book was published recently. The author, Filipos Mandilaras, deals with a social group with lots of particularities and a gruesome everyday reality. This is the group of the Roma. Had it not been for the last days of ‘war rhetoric’ against the Roma in Zefyri, we could easily speak about the good effects of modernization without running the risk of being labeled naive or even idealistic. In any case, ‘blind’ police raids with no results (should) belong to the past. Let’s not bring these back to our memory...

**Also on the same issue:**

**25/1/2000: *Avgi***

«Gypsy Stories»

*Very positive reports in favor of the initiative.*

**1/1/2000: *Avgi*** [Maroula Plika], p. 39

«The Great Shadow in the Galikos River»

Around 3000 Roma, who happen to be Greek citizens, live in the bed of the Galikos River. For all of them the new century and millennium have come only on paper and in calendars. Their children grow up barefoot, almost naked. For most of them, school is an unknown and distant place. Our country states at international forums that it has no homeless people. Roma tent-dwellers are registered as a «particular» social group with a particular way of living. This approach is very convenient indeed. Manolis, the godson of Mr. Konstandopoulos, the president of the Progressive Left Coalition Party, is already 2 years old. All he knows from life is wretchedness. The shuck is freezing cold. What matters is for him to have some bread on the makeshift table and to survive in the face of diseases, microbes, rats and insects. «I just hope that the year 2000 will be the year when social discrepancies and isolation will be eliminated and humanity will

be brought into our lives,» wished Mr. Konstandopoulos following his visit to the camp. «It is a shame for all of us that these children and their families have to live for yet another year with the fear of floods and in the mud» added the president of the Progressive Left Coalition Party, also committing himself to address the government on the issue.

The book «The Great Shadow and the Gypsies» -a contribution to the self-knowledge of the Roma by the Doctors of the World, DROM Network for Roma Social Rights and the Patakis Publications- written by F. Mandilaras, is a book for everyone.

*A very positive report, highlighting the destitute living conditions of the Roma tent-dwellers in the Galikos River and the state's responsibility for that. The report also covers the initiative of the new book on the Roma.*

**29/1/2000: Ta Nea** [E. Falida]

«Travels and Wanderings»

Roma have good reasons to be present in books. They now have a chance to be somehow compensated for their sufferings with two books.

Roma and travelers have a unique sense of identity. Their clothes, houses, caravans, customs, music and professions all express a certain way of life. Roma culture is based on their constant wandering, on their diaspora and on the surrounding environment. Roma, Gypsies and travelers form a European community of approximately 8 million people. Yet, we tend to treat them through stereotypes and negative images. They are the population to which extermination policies were mostly aimed.

The organization Doctors of the World-Greece, in cooperation with DROM Network for Roma Social Rights have recently published a book for children as well as adults on the history of the Roma based on facts and testimonies. The book consists of 12 fairy tales and will be distributed to schools with Roma children and camps with NGO presence.

*A rather stereotypic and folkloric portrait of the Roma. Still, it is a report in support of the initiative.*

## **6. Housing Scheme Underway in Sofades (Continental Greece)**

**25/1/2000: Eleftherotypia**, p. 17

«The First 85 Signatures»

The municipality of Sofades, the Public Land Society and the Organization of Workers' Housing are planing the construction of 150 houses. Roma families, residents of the municipality, are included in the beneficiaries' list. The first 85 contracts -for 85 Roma households- were already signed between the three counterparts. Let's just hope that this is not simply an election promise, rather than the result of a coordinated political effort.

*A positive report, in favor of the initiative.*

## **7. Roma Victim of the Police**

**18/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia*, p. 59**

### «Gypsy Killed by Police»

The 24-year-old Roma Themistocles Vasilopoulos was found dead in the coach of a Mercedes truck. He was shot dead by police officers, while he attempted robbery in a factory producing aluminum gadgets. According to the police, officers exchanged shots with robbers who were caught stealing from the factory. At dawn, somebody called the police to inform them that there was a dead body in a Mercedes truck deserted in the area of Nea Zoe of Aspropyrgos. Most probably, after the clash with the police, the two accomplices in the robbery abandoned the truck as well as their third dead partner. The latter was a branded criminal.

*A neutral to negative report. It does not even attempt to question the police version of the story.*

## **8. On Roma Women in Metaxourgio**

**9/1/2000: *Epohi*, p. 14**

### «Shattered Dreams»

(Based on a study of women in Metaxourgio)

There are families in Athens living under the poverty line. Most of them came to Athens from Western Thrace in search of a more prosperous life. A study conducted by the Research Center for Equality, the Center of Pedagogical and Artistic Training 'Shedia' [Raft] and the Social and Educational Action shed light on the Roma and Turkish women's point of view. What do they know about contraception? Most of them referred to the pill as one of the most known means of contraception. Yet, the vast majority stated that they avoid using this method for fear of gaining weight. Some of them are also informed about the use of condoms. Yet, it seems that there is too much resistance on the part of their husbands to use them. Much fewer women made reference to the spiral as a means of contraception and one of the interviewees did not understand the question and thought she was asked about aspirin. As far as their psychological health is concerned, most of the interviewed women admit that they feel unhappy and stressed, attributing the source of their anxiety mainly to family matters (e.g. relations with the husband, with the mother in law, poverty and unemployment of the husband). They have already developed a rather passive attitude towards stress. Stress and depression are either internalized, or treated with sedatives. Others externalize their fear and anger. In any case, the conclusion of the study is that those women have nothing but a dead-end in front of them. There seems to be no way out from misery and illiteracy unless something is done promptly.

*A positive report, bringing to the limelight the very human dimension of the issue: minority women - a minority on two counts.*

## **9. On Roma Dictionaries**

**1-2/1/2000** *Eleftherotypia*, p. 75

«Roma Glossary»

(Reply from A. Liapis to Elias Petropoulos, for more information please consult GHM Report No. 76 to the ERRC, December 1999 Press Coverage)

Mr. Elias Petropoulos gave me the impression that he has not really read the book. How else can I explain the fact that he overlooked a whole chapter clarifying precisely this: that the word Roma written with an /**ũ**/ instead of an /**o**/ in Greek does, in no way, imply any connection to Greekness. In the very same chapter I also explain that the term 'Roma' derives from the Sanskrit words 'domba' or 'Raama.' Furthermore, Mr. Petropoulos claimed in his report that I, and some «ignorant journalists» presented my glossary as the first of its kind. Nobody has ever made such a claim. In the introduction, the bibliography and the references to words I made references to the work of other scientists and the dictionaries of other researchers. My glossary -and not dictionary- is the only one in Greece and the only one in Western Thrace where many Muslim Roma live. The latter have accepted this work and are enthusiastic about the glossary, which is the end product of work done in the field, rather than in an office.

Antonis Liapis, Komotini December 27, 1999

### **Also on the same topic:**

**16/1/2000:** *Eleftherotypia*, Nikos Hiladakis, writer.

(In response to Elias Petropoulos and A. Liapis)

Mr. Liapis is wrong when claiming that his glossary is the only one in Greece that covers the idioms of the Muslim Roma of Western Thrace. The first one ever to deal with this region and these people was a sultan's envoy, who around 1660 on his way to Crete, passed by today's Komotini and was impressed by the customs of the Gypsies living there. Elvia Tselebi (that was the envoy's name) prepared the first glossary. Moreover, Mr. Liapis should have followed A. Paspatis' -reportedly his main source for the glossary- example and avoid writing the word Roma/Romani in non Latin characters. Mr. Petropoulos should be encouraged to use a different tone in his speech. He should be informed that Mr. Paspatis' book came out of print only recently (1995) and can be found at a reasonable price.

**30/1/2000:** *Eleftherotypia* [K. Karaiskos], p. 87

(In response to the response of Mr. Hiladakis)

I would like to state in advance that I am prejudiced in favor of Mr. Liapis. The latter gave a decent response to Mr. Petropoulos, who probably did not deserve it. Mr. Hiladakis' intervention was based on motives of self-promotion. To start with, Liapis acknowledges Tselebi's work in his glossary. At any rate, how can Mr. Hiladakis be sure about the religious identity of the people Tselebi met in Komotini some centuries ago? How does he know they were Muslims? Liapis was indeed the first one to deal with this region and its Muslim Roma inhabitants. Mr. Hiladakis falsely mentions Paspatis' first name as Antony instead of Alexander. This is a pure demonstration of his own ignorance. Last but not least, he vaguely talks about the «new philological developments» regarding the appropriate spelling of the words Roma/Romani without mentioning anything specific.

## **10. Roma and the Wall in the Czech Republic**

**27/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia*** [Teta Papadopoulou], p. 34

### «The Invisible Wall of Shame»

In a Czech town, an important industrial center in Northern Bohemia, the municipal authorities built a wall to segregate two blocks of flats - one with Roma residents and the other with 'normal' Czechs. Fortunately the wall did not stay for long. The reactions expressed -both internally and externally- resulted in the collapse of the wall only a few days after it was built. Yet the fact of an extreme racist act is haunting, especially when one keeps in mind that the town in question is only a few kilometers away from two infamous concentration camps of the Nazi era. For the sake of history it should be reminded that apart from the abhorrent 'ethnic cleansing' of the Jews, some 600,000 Roma were also exterminated. The wall demonstrates in a crystal clear way the extent to which the suffering of the Roma can go. This does not apply only to the Czech Republic, but to all post-Communist countries of Europe, living aside the so-called 'Western democracies.' The Roma of the former Soviet block have only lost from the change of the system. During the Communist era, they were under strong (assimilation) pressure. Since 1989, Roma have been struggling with poverty, unemployment and violence. Even though violence against the Roma is a new phenomenon, its racist underpinnings are everlasting.

The wall is gone. Instead, a series of uninhabited residencies is now between the two human blocks - of the Roma and of the non-Roma. To appease the non-Roma, the municipal authorities bought their houses and compensated them. This is another wall, an invisible wall.

*A very positive report.*

## **11. Roma House Set on Fire**

**27/1/2000: *Eleftherotypia***, p. 61

### «The Children Were Saved»

Three Roma children were miraculously saved in Dendropotamos (Thessaloniki) after their house had been set on fire. The children were alone when the fire started, most probably from a burning stove. Neighbors listened to their cries for help and called the fire brigade. The house was totally destroyed but luckily the children were saved in time.

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

## **12. Theodoros Pangalos (Former Minister of Foreign Affairs) on the Roma**

**31/1/2000: *Ta Nea*** [Theodos Panagalos], p. 12

«Three new provocations in our society: the Pontics' repatriation, the urbanization of the Tsiganes and the immigration of foreigners»

The report is an introduction to a forthcoming series of articles presenting the former Minister's position on the Greek state's normative policy towards three groups of people: the ethnic Greeks from the former Soviet Union, the Roma and the immigrants. The introduction already gives an idea of Mr. Pangalos' point of view. In the last two centuries, the Greek state has shown a remarkable ability to assimilate groups of people who came to modern Greece through immigration (like the Greeks from Asia Minor after the events in 1922) or after the acquisition of new territories. Lately, the prevailing idea seems to have changed to the suggestion that the assimilation procedure has no place in Greece anymore. Those who, at a certain period of history, needed to be assimilated, were assimilated. Yet, we tend to forget the existence of three groups of people different from one another and certainly from the rest of the population - Pontics, Roma and immigrants. The Greek state should take immediate action in this respect, because too much time has already been lost.

*The first introductory remarks of Mr. Pangalos give an idea of what his arguments are going to be when it comes to the Roma. The first part of his contribution dealt only with the Pontics. To make a valid judgment and critique of Mr. Pangalos [assimilation] approach and position one should wait for the whole series of articles to be published. In any case, what Mr. Pangalos seems to express is the 'assimilation stream' in Greece, which, through a leveling speech undermines the importance of difference - in religion, language, ethnicity, culture. Difference is regarded as a potential threat and problem rather than as a sign of wealth.*