

REPORT ON THE COVERAGE OF THE ROMA IN THE GREEK PRESS

MARCH 2000

(Comments in italics are made by the GHM)

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1. Roma criminality

14/3/00: *Ethnos*, p: 23

Two underage Gypsies were arrested for robbery in Kiato (Korinthos, Peloponese). They had stolen a wallet.

Neutral to negative report highlighting the suspects' ethnicity.

21/3/00: *Ta Nea*, p. 26

“Heavy sentences for three Gypsy thieves”

Three young Gypsies were sentenced to 10 years in prison. They were found guilty of having committed ten robberies within three hours in new year's eve.

Negative report, highlighting the ethnicity of the persons in question, also mentioning the name of an underage youngster.

22/3/00: *Vima* [D. Vithulkas], p: A24, 52

“Zefyri: Drug traffickers are threatening the lives of the mayor and the residents”

The extra measures taken by the municipality and the police in Zefyri do not seem to discourage the Gypsy drug dealers. Not only have they not given up their unlawful behavior, they even dare to threaten those who tried to put an end to their illegal

activities. Especially after the destruction of several Gypsy shucks, the mayor of Zefyri, A. Zervas, has become the recipient of numerous threats against his life and his family's integrity. Similar threats have received all other municipal servants as well as residents who reacted against the presence of drug dealers in the region. 'The feeling of security is more or less present among the residents following the series of measures taken by the authorities, the use of guns and the uncontrolled circulation of vans driven by young Gypsies has been limited' stated mayor A. Zervas. Nevertheless, there has been no much of a progress in fighting drug dealing. Police officers mainly arrest users instead of traffickers. 'Drug dealers continue their unlawful activities, beyond any control. During the last days, young addicts consume drugs in the traffickers' shucks to escape prison. Then, [stoned as they are] they promote drugs in central parts of the town' claimed mayor A. Zervas. Local residents ask for more measures as well as an imminent police raid in the nearby Roma camp. Some others gave up the region and moved to other parts of the town following the damaging earthquake of September 1999 and the high scores of criminality present at Zefyri. Unless the traffickers go away, they refuse to come back.

Very negative one-sided report. Romanies' point of view is not taken into any account.

23/3/00: Ethnos, p: 27

“Raid in a Gypsy camp”

In the early hours, police officers -in search of drugs- raided the Zefyri Roma camp. As a result of the raid, 10 Gypsies were brought to the police station for further investigation while small quantities of hashish and heroine were confiscated. Police officers wanted to check whether the persons in question had been involved in the trade which is rife in the region.

Negative report highlighting the ethnicity of the suspects. The confiscated (small) quantities of drugs do not justify the tone of the report.

24/3/00: Eleftheros Typos [Manos Tsaldares], p: 29

“Gypsy family drug dealing business”

A whole Gypsy family was trading drugs in Zefyri including a 14-year-old girl. Police confiscated 15 million drachmas, 740 grammars of heroine, a gun and 5 mobile phones found in the family's makeshift home. Gypsies were followed for days.

Also on the same subject:

24/3/00: Ethnos

24/3/00: Vima, p: 21

24/3/00: Kathimerini, p: 7

Negative reports highlighting the ethnicity of the suspects. The name of the 14-year-old girl was not published.

2. Pre-election visits to camps

10/3/00: Avgi, p. 3

“Overcoming reservations”

(Progressive Left Coalition President, Nikos Konstandopoulos, visiting Roma in Nea Alikarnasos, Crete)

Progressive Left Coalition President, Nikos Konstandopoulos, visited the school for Roma children in Nea Alikarnasos. Following initiatives of the Heraklion prefect authorities, the school was established in 1996 with a view to prepare children’s smooth integration in the school system. With the teachers’ help, the institution soon gained the confidence of both, Roma and non-Roma. President Konstandopoulos had the opportunity to chat with the children, giving them books as presents.

Positive report, in favor of the initiative.

21/3/00: Avgi, p: 5

Progressive Left Coalition President, Nikos Konstandopoulos, visited the Roma settlement in Sofades/Karditsa (Continental Greece). Children took pictures with him smiling at the camera. Yet, their everyday life leaves no latitudes for smiles. Mr. Konstandopoulos committed himself to take action towards the improvement of their living conditions. He did the same while in Nea Alikarnasos and Thessaloniki.

Positive remarks, framing a picture of Mr. Konstandopoulos with Roma children.

9/3/00: Rizospastis, p: 14

(Litsa Undria, candidate with the Greek Communist Party visiting Roma in Larisa)

Litsa Undria, candidate with the Greek Communist Party, visited the district of Nea Smyrni in Larisa and had discussions with local residents and professionals. In the frame of her pre-election tour in the region, Mrs. Undria also visited a place called “Damaria” [Quarries] where approximately 1.000 Roma live without any infrastructure. Conditions are rather destitute. Local Roma expressed their discontent with the situation, criticizing both the government and the conservative opposition for their inertia and lack of sympathy.

Neutral to positive report, with references to the problems of local Roma.

3. Roma tent-dwellers

(Western Thrace)

15/3/00: *Paratiritis*, [M. Nikolaou], p: 1, 12, 25

“The time of the Gypsies”

All of their property (blankets, kitchen equipment, food, children) fits in a car. They live in makeshift homes, in the open air. From Volos, through Thessaloniki, they reached Thrace. They settled down some few kilometers away from village Messouni, very close to the highway, without infrastructure, nor school. Prejudice is quite diffused. To the others, they are just a threat: committing crimes and selling drugs. Yet, all they ask is a home with water, electricity and telephone. Unlike repatriated Greeks from former Soviet Union, Roma were never given much of attention. Despite their long-lasting presence in the country, they still are half-way through integration.

Positive report highlighting the needs and problems of Roma tent-dwellers as well as the lack of adequate state initiatives aiming at their integration.

4. Special supplement on Roma

11/3/00: *Eleftherotypia*

(a twenty-four pages' supplement on Roma entitled:

“What if we are Roma, do not be afraid of us...”)

- I) “Does racism belong to the past?” [Ioana Sotirhu], p: 2-3. Introductory remarks about the need for such a supplement reflecting -in a way- Romanies' need for integration. In the turn of the century, Roma still find themselves in the social margin; poor and illiterate, thus susceptible to criminality, Roma seem to be in worse position than immigrants. Most of them still live in destitute camps lacking infrastructure. Yet, there seems to blow a wind of change.
- II) “Roma through the existing sources in Europe and the Balkans”, p: 3. An overview of Romanies' history with references to their presence in Europe, evictions and coercive policies, based on A. Fraser's book, *The Gypsies*.
- III) Statistics, p: 4-9. Based on a research conducted by three associates of the University of Ioanina -in charge of the education program on Roma under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education- Romanies' nomad life is a myth. Nine in ten Roma living at present in Greece are permanently settled in houses or camps. The thesis regarding the myth of nomad life is additionally defended by the fact that most of them have as priority the acquisition of real estate (mainly land and houses) and a steady occupation. Despite their overall marginal position in Greek society, Roma have made efforts to integrate themselves in the country's economy, giving up traditional old-fashioned professions and “updating” their knowledge and skills. Yet in the year 2000, illiteracy is definitely the rule and not the exception, even when it comes to younger generations where admittedly there has been some progress in the last few years. Half of Greek Roma have rather large families (3-5 children). They mostly identify themselves as Greeks. In their majority they are Orthodox Christians (84,1%) and speak Romanes (84, 7%). Furthermore, 70% have expressed the wish to preserve their language. Those living in camps lack the

- basic infrastructure, mainly water and toilets. Although far from perfection, the situation seems to be much better for those living in houses.
- IV) “What did you do for the Roma, teacher?” [A. Gotovos, professor in the University of Ioanina, in charge of the education program on Roma], p: 10-11. Remarks based on a research conducted in schools with a view to detect teachers’ attitudes and stereotypes towards the Roma.
- V) “Romanies’ evictions” [Ioana Sotirhu], p: 12, an overview of the evictions as well as racist practices against Roma in the whole Greece since 1996. References to the comments made by the mayor of Zefyri following the September 1999 earthquake (‘Do not bother me anymore with the Gypsies...’), the eviction of 30 Roma families from Ioanina, the destruction of 3 Roma shucks in Nea Zoe (Aspropyrgos), the eviction of approximately 3000 Roma tent-dwellers from Evosmos in 1998, the ill-treatment of Lazaros Bekos and Eleftherios Kotropoulos by police officers in Mesologhi, the killing of A. Celal by police officers in Thessaloniki, the attempted evictions of 10 and 28 Roma families from Chios (Aegean Sea) and Agia Paraskevi respectively in 1997, the eviction from Ano Liosia and the police raids in the same region in 1997 as well as in Aspropyrgos in 1996.
- VI) “Sanitary conditions in camps” [Haralambos Chrystofides from Doctors of the World-Greece], p: 13, with data regarding the frequency and the kinds of diseases spread among Roma tent-dwellers. The author highlights the lack of hygiene in the camps, mostly attributed to the destitute living conditions.
- VII) “Self-managed camps: Two in one: Housing and social integration” [Christos Lambrou, President of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations], p: 15, opposing the draft law proposal on self-managed camps. Rights granted for every citizen (water supply, electricity, telephone) need no extra laws to be reinforced. Better living conditions do not necessarily imply social integration. Roma should be given the chance to interact with the rest of the population and self-managed camps are only increasing the ghetto effect.
- VIII) “Responsibilities of the local authorities and societies” [Freddy Stamos, from the Prime Minister’s Office for the Quality of Life], p: 14-15, with references to the last year’s governmental efforts to precipitate Romanies’ smooth integration into society and the obstacles set by local authorities and societies. Ending statements: non-governmental organizations’ contributions are important and need to be utilized more. The role of local Roma associations as well as that of the Panhellenic Federation should be reinforced in all possible ways.
- IX) “A courageous decision” [Panayote Georgoudes], p: 16-17. Report mainly focused on a decision taken by the Heraklion county court stopping Romanies’ eviction from Nea Alikarnasos.
- X) “The self-managed settlement in the former military barrack of Gonou” [Lambrini Mazarakis], p: 17, with an overview of the eviction and the subsequent efforts made by the prefect authorities and non-governmental organizations.
- XI) “Gypsy archetypal and reality” [E. Politou, associate of the University of Ioanina], p: 18. Featuring Roma as a distinct ethnic group with Indian origins, common history and civilization is a rather false picture. The existing “fragmented” and rather controversial data leave many question marks, enough to discourage [serious] scientists from easily adopting that picture.
- XII) “Draft law proposal on self-managed camps” [DROM Network for Roma Social Rights, Doctors of the World-Greece, Greek Helsinki Monitor, Progressive Left Coalition and Prefect of Thessaloniki], p: 20-21.

- XIII) “The bad time of the Gypsies” [Vicky Tsiorou], p: 22-23, an overview of the hazards faced by Roma in the course of the centuries. Although not mentioned, the text is based on the introductory chapters of Liegeois Jean-Pierre and Georghe Nicolae, *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority*.
- XIV) “Roma in Kosovo” [Vicky Tsiorou], p: 23.
- XV) “They were claiming to be Greeks” [Maria Dimitriou], p: 20-21
- XVI) “Preserving a heritage” [Giannis Georgiou], p: 24

The supplement was definitely a positive initiative. Yet, it should be stated that most of the contributions were from associates of the University of Ioanina, known for their assimilationist and anti-multicultural approaches.

23/4/00: Eleftherotypia [I. Sotirhu (journalist), M. Dafermakis (associate with the University of Ioanina Education Program on Roma; clarifications regarding the aforementioned supplement)]

For the sake of not being misunderstood by the readers of the Eleftherotypia supplement on Roma, M. Dafermakis clarifies that he is not opposing the transferring of Roma residents of Nea Alikarnassos (Crete) to the new site indicated by the Secretariat General for the Region of Crete. Based on his field work and experience, he is however against the idea of cultural centers and houses of worship within Roma settlements, very much favored by certain non-governmental organizations: ‘Such a proposal can only reinforce Gypsies’ housing and social marginalization’ claimed M. Dafermakis.

On the occasion of this clarification, journalist, Ioana Sotirhu, referred to GHM as one of her sources for the supplement on Roma.

5. Literature on Roma

26/3/00: Epohi [Eleni Sideris, Doctors of the World], p: 2

“We and the Great Shadow”

DROM Network for the Roma Social Rights and Doctors of the World-Greece, besides their constant presence in the Roma camps, through a book, made their own contribution to Romanies’ self-knowledge. The author, Filipos Mandilaras, describes Romanies’ trip to Europe from India. The title “The Great Shadow and the Gypsies” suggests more than an instructive way to approach Roma; above all the book is a mean for Romanies’ self-knowledge. Copies of the book have already been distributed in schools and camps.

Positive report.

6. Housing schemes

28/3/00: Avgi, p: 21

“Government remembers Roma tent-dwellers”

Fourteen days before the elections, while in power for fifteen years, the Greek socialist party remembered the existence of Roma tent-dwellers. Loans with favorable conditions will be given to 940 Roma families (not even one thousand!) for acquiring their own house. Eligible will be Roma families living permanently in municipalities throughout the country. The loans will be for 15 years and the price per square meter will not surpass the amount of 120.000 drachmas.

Also on the same subject:

28/3/00: *Kathimerini*, p: 35

“Favorable loans for Roma”

Both reports are neutral simply reporting the fact. Avgi though puts emphasis on the pre-election timing of the announcement of such a decision.

Also on the same subject:

28/3/00: *Karfi*

In addition to the aforementioned reports, this one states that most of the loans concern homeless Roma living in Tyrnavos (Continental Greece) and Orestiada (Western Thrace).

7. Police brutality against Roma

28/3/00: *Rizospastis*, p: 3

“Police provocation”

Following their meeting with representatives from the Greek communist party in Heraklion (Crete), members of the Association of Roma in South Heraklion were stopped by police officers for inspection. The officers’ attitude towards the Roma was more than improper, humiliating and degrading. Treated as guilty until proven innocent, Roma were threatened with arrests while the inspection was still in process. Members of the communist party who dared to oppose this practices, were provocatively told by the officer in charge ‘to go to Russia and complain.’ The Communist Party denounced the fact, calling the incident ‘an effort to terrorize anyone who turns himself to the party for help’.

Positive report. Pre-election timing is also important. Rizospastis is a communist newspaper.

30/3/00: *Eleftherotypia* [N. Fotopoulos]

On March 29, 2000, the Council of First Instance Judges of Thessaloniki issued an order of dismissal of all charges against the police officer who, on 1 April 1998, killed Rom Angelos Celal. Despite the Public Prosecutor’s Office 1998 indictment of the

officer in question for manslaughter, the court ruled that he was acting in self-defense. Police had information about a Roma gang, specially active in the west side of the city of Thessaloniki. Three officers set up an ambush in Partheni, outside a warehouse. Reportedly, the victim was a suspect for robbery. Together with Roma, Vassilis Rasimiglu and Theoharis Fragoulis, Angelos Celal resisted police inspection. Following an exchange of shots, Angelos Celal was killed on the spot while the rest escaped. In the course of the clash, police officers made use of 17 bullets. The court indicted the escapees Roma suspects for attempted murder as well as illegal bearing and use of weapons.

Neutral to positive report, overall dedicated to a series of relatively recent phenomena of police brutality against citizens, giving the impression that distances itself from the [police] version of the story.

Also on the same subject:

1/4/2000: Avgi [D. Gousetis]

http://www.avgi.org/cgi-bin/hweb.exe?-A=135284&-w=20000401_&-V=AVGI

The case of Rom Angelos Celal is included in the list of examples which -in the eyes of human rights activists- reinforce the impression that in Greece impunity prevails for police officers who torture or kill civilians.

Positive reports touching upon an issue which rarely forms part of the media agenda-setting in Greece.

8. Roma in Kosovo

30/3/2000: Avgi

http://www.avgi.org/cgi-bin/hweb.exe?-A=135077&-w=ÍÔÑÁÃÊÊÔÓ~_&-V=AVGI

“One year after”

One year after the action taken by NATO against Milosevic, Dragica Mugoza member of the AIM (Alternative Information Media) network of independent journalists in the Balkans assesses the results of the operation, making reference to the current situation in Kosovo and speculating about the future of the region. In her interview, among others, Dragica Mugoza speaks of a reversed ethnic cleansing taking place in Kosovo following the bombing, with Serbs, Roma and Bosnians being the victims this time.