

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

**MAY 2000**

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

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**1. Eviction protocols serviced to three Roma families in Phoenikas**

**20/5/00: *Eleftheros Typos*** [P. Glendadakis], p: 24

«Phoenikas (Thessaloniki): Roma outraged by the authorities' sudden operation to demolish their houses»

There was an attempt made by the authorities to demolish the houses of three Roma families living in Phoenikas (Thessaloniki) on the ground that they were illegally built. Reportedly, Roma were caught by surprise as they had no prior notice of the legal action taken by the landowners in the region against them, accusing them of trespassing private land. Roma protested against the decision and tried to prevent the operation. The incident took place at the presence of judicial functionaries, the police and employees of the Kalamaria municipality. Roma were given three days' time to leave their homes. The housing problems of Roma in the wider district of Thessaloniki are immense. The evicted Roma from Evosmos are still living in the bed of the river Galikos, despite governmental promises for their immediate transfer to the former military barrack of Gonou. From the Prefecture of Thessaloniki it was announced that another 190 prefabricated houses will soon be transferred at the site, postponing the date of Roma's relocation to the former barrack till the end of July.

**Also on the same subject:**

**20/5/00: *To Vima***, p: A20

«Reactions against the demolition of illegal buildings»

*Neutral to positive reports; Eleftheros Typos criticized the national and local authorities for not showing real interest in solving the housing problems of Roma in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki.*

**2. Racist practices of the local authorities and communities in Velo and Tarsina (Korinthia, Peloponese) against Roma**

**22/5/00: *Eleftherotypia*, [M. Nodaros] p: 51**

«The desks of racism»

Roma currently living in Velo (Korinthia, Peloponese) are victims of the racist practices of the local authority and community who oppose the idea of mixed school classes. Parents and teachers locked the school, seriously impeding the education of the local Roma children. It should be noted that Roma children in the Prefect of Korinthia participate at the University of Ioanina Educational Program for Roma, taking place under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The very same children were victims of similar racist practices in the neighboring municipality of Tarsina, some time ago before settling down in Velo. With the help of the municipal authorities, non-Roma residents of Tarsina bought off the land where the Roma families had settled in, aiming at precipitating their eviction from the region. For the reason of lack of space, the school authorities refused to accept the Roma children or to allow them to attend preparatory classes under the framework of the University of Ioanina Educational Program for Roma. Afternoon classes were not allowed either. Non-Roma children play football in the schoolyard in the afternoons and Roma children would be a nuisance to them! So, for three years now, because of the reaction of the local authorities and communities in both Tarsina and Velo, these Roma children have been deprived of their constitutional right to education. Neighboring municipalities have showed similar discontent for the presence of Roma in their region. In 1999, seven children were allowed to attend classes in the municipality of Poulitsa, provided that next year they would be transferred to other schools. Some local political cadres oppose the idea of preparatory classes for Roma children under the pretext that there is no Roma permanent resident in Poulitsa. Reportedly, from the Directorate of First Grade Education in Korinthia it was announced that Roma's right to education is not to be negotiated with anyone.

*Very positive report highlighting the rejection of Roma in all aspects of life from the local authorities and the communities.*

**3. Racist municipal decision in Nea Kios (Argolida, Peloponese)**

**23/5/00: *Exousia* [editorial], p: 3**

«Racism is in the air»

*Talking about racism in Greece and in Europe in general, with victims the immigrants, a Roma reference is made to the «incredible» municipal decision in Nea*

*Kios to evict all local Roma within 48 hours. Positive report highlighting the dimensions of racism in today's Europe.*

**23/5/00: Exousia**, p: 13.

«We are all the same...»

The Roma in Nea Kios seem to have lost hope. The municipal council took the decision to evict all Roma from the region. In the municipal resolution, those who have sold land to the Roma are publicly characterized as morally responsible for the situation in the municipality; Roma themselves are publicly characterized undesirable and are called upon to sell their properties and leave as long as they do not abide with the rules. Roma are accused of stealing electricity, building illegally, showing disrespect for the laws and being involved in crime. «The local authorities never took action to integrate those people» states a municipal citizens who was not carried away by the wind of racism in Nea Kios. What if the government has expressed the wish to precipitate the Roma's smooth integration into society... Most of them still live in camps without any infrastructure, lacking the basic, without employment nor education. Reportedly, in the municipality of Velo, besides mixed schools, mixed cemeteries are also a problem. Non-Roma wish not to be buried in the same cemeteries with the Roma. In the Vatos community in Corfu, one year ago, 24 Roma children were deprived of their right to education. The latter were attending classes in a building which used to be a school together with their teacher. One day, the children found the school locked and the lockers changed. The President of the community claimed that he needed the building to change it into a cultural center. The teacher and the children did not give up; they had classes in the middle of the street.

Statements by:

Christos Lambrou, President of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations:

«Although there exist some examples of racist practices against Roma in Greece, these happen at the local level. The inter-municipal ROM Network has taken action in many areas, including education. Yet, the resistance of the local communities sets obstacles to this effort.»

Professor Athanasios Gotovos, in charge of the University of Ioanina Educational Program for Roma: «Roma want to go to school, that is the most important issue. Little by little the resistance of the local authorities and communities will be reduced. The government has to make brave efforts especially in the area of housing. The Educational Program should continue.»

Christina Rougheri, Greek Helsinki Monitor: «The situation in our country is very bad; although evictions without alternates are abusive, they do happen.»

Vasilis Paiteris, Rom and popular singer: «Roma should be integrated not fought against. What several municipalities are doing is wrong. Roma go to the army, pay taxes and are not even allowed to stay at their own place. This is insane... We have a Roma Federation to speak about all those matters. Yet, this Federation does not raise

its voice publicly before the media, and I don't know why. The state should be informed, should take action and position.»

*Positive report denouncing the municipal decision.*

**23/5/00: Exousia**, p: 9

«Nea Kios, new Cyprus» «

*Comments on the recent decision of the municipal council in Nea Kios --parallelism with Cyprus-- and reference to the racist practices against Roma in Velo and Ano Liosia. The bright example of Agia Varvara --Roma, if given the chance, can do miracles. A very positive report.*

**Also on the same issue:**

**24/5/00: Avgi**, p: 6

«Roma at gunpoint»

*Reference to the latest racist examples in Nea Kios and Velo and the attempted eviction of three Roma families in Phoenikas. The report is entirely based on a relevant NGO (GHM, MRG-G and DROM Network for the Roma Social Rights) press release. Positive report.*

**24/5/00: Eleftherotypia** [M. Nodaros], p: 45

*Reference to the electrified atmosphere in Nea Kios, the denial by the Police Directorate of Argolida of the allegation regarding increased criminality in the municipality, the one-sided coverage of the story by some local media calling the Roma «Gypsies» and the aforementioned press release. Very positive report.*

**24/5/00: Exousia**, p: 13

«Efforts to calm things down in Nea Kios»

**26/5/00: Avgi**, p: 57

«The problems of Roma» in Nea Kios

**28/5/00: Epochi**, p: 2

«Solidarity with the Roma»

*Common press release of the Network for Social Support of the Immigrants and Refugees and the Network of Movements for the Civil and Social Rights, in favor of the Roma in Nea Kios.*

**26/5/00: Vradyni**, p: 18

«Police raided a Roma camp»

Approximately 100 police officers raided the Roma settlements in Nea Kios. 16 people were arrested for stealing electricity from the suppliers, another 12 are wanted by the police. Fourteen pending warrants were found against two women and one man.

*Neutral report, simply referring to the incident.*

**Also on the same subject:**

**26/5/00: Athens News, 3**

«Police raid Gypsy settlement»

*Neutral report.*

**May 31, 2000: Associated Press**

«Greek Town Rules: Gypsies Not Wanted»

NEA KIOS, Greece (AP) -- They are not allowed into the supermarket or pharmacy. Their children are afraid to go to school. Gypsies simply are not wanted in town -- and an official document from town hall says so. Suspicion and discrimination are nothing new for Greece's Gypsies, also known as the Roma. But the move by Nea Kios stands as a possible test case on how far Greek communities may go in deciding where and how Gypsies -- and perhaps others -- can live.

The bans also come at a particularly sensitive time in Greece, where the powerful Greek Orthodox Church insists the nation's cultural and religious identities are under direct threat. Immigrants, many from the Balkans and Eastern Europe, now comprise of nearly 10 percent of the population in Greece -- a nation that was almost completely homogeneous a decade ago.

Last year, a town in northern Greece imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew on foreigners -- who are mostly Albanian -- and other communities banned alcohol sales to immigrants.

"In general, there is a discussion in Greece that shows great xenophobia," said Christina Rougieri of the Greek Helsinki Monitor, a human rights group.

In Nea Kios, a town of 3,000 people 60 miles southwest of Athens, all the opinions and theories about growing intolerance carry a tangible urgency. Gypsies claim that those who dare a foray into the main square risk being beaten and having their vehicles smashed by angry mobs. Some of the Gypsy families have lived on the edge of the town for years on land they bought.

"They smashed up his car," said Maria Kalamioti, who claimed her husband was dragged from the vehicle and beaten and her 9-year-old son was injured by flying glass in an attack in early May. The white pickup truck, its windows and windshield

smashed, stands just outside her tent. The trouble began as a parking dispute. Officials say Gypsies blocked the car of the deputy mayor outside the town hall. An argument ensued and tempers rose. After the alleged attack on Kalamioti's husband and son, the town imposed new rules.

"We state that we do not desire the presence, passage and residence of Gypsies in our municipality until the situation is resolved," says the ruling, which also contains thinly veiled threats to any residents who decide to sell more land to Gypsies and shopkeepers who continue to serve them.

The ruling also invites "all Gypsies who have bought fields in the area, if they cannot conform with the rule of law, must return their properties." The town has said that it could help buy back the land provided the Gypsies leave. Gypsies have called it outright discrimination. Nonetheless, Nea Kios officials insisted that their move was the only solution after residents alleged the Gypsies as being responsible for frequent theft, random gunfire and dangerous driving in the town square.

"We want to live with them as long as they abide by the rules we all obey," said the president of the municipal committee and spokesman of the local authorities, Giorgos Maninis. Maninis also claimed there have been widespread reports of drivers being held up at gunpoint and robbed if they drive past Gypsy areas. Gypsies have denied the allegations.

"We have to take a stance and fight for the people who voted for us," he said. "It's not as if the fly of racism suddenly stung a whole community." A "protection force" has also been created to inform police and the town hall of any incidents. Maninis insists the force is not armed.

"I don't have a problem with the Mayor," said Eleni Karagouni, a Gypsy who bought land in the area a year ago and is now building a house there. "Why does he have a problem with me?"

#### **4. Roma from the Balkans living in Kalogreza, 100 meters away from the Olympic Stadium**

**22/5/00: *Eleftherotypia* [G. Dama], p: 51**

«Roma in the Olympic Stadium: Abandonment deserving a medal»

Just 100 meters away from the Olympic Stadium in Kalogreza (Athens), live approximately 800 Roma coming from the Balkans. Among them, 200 Albanian Roma begging for a chance to integrate into the Greek society: «We are Christians. We want our children who were born in Greece to be baptized. We are looking for godfathers for them as well as for us. During the communism we were not free to express our religious beliefs.» Most of them live on seasonal occupation in the fields, traveling all around Greece for three thousand drachmas per day. Their main problem is their illegal status. They have no papers, nor social security. They live constantly under the threat of deportation. Their children beg in the street lights, they do not go to school.

Efthymios Demetriu, Rom and president of the Association «Filiki Eteria» [Friendly Association], favors the idea of their legalization: «We want this chasing to stop. We want these people to stay with us. They live harmoniously all together: Albanians, Bulgarians, Turks, Romanians and Polish.»

*Very positive report, highlighting the serious everyday problems of Roma who resort to Greece from other countries.*

## **5. Housing schemes in Elia (Peloponese)**

**30/5/00: *Eleftherotypia*** [M. Nodaros]

<http://www.hri.org/E/00-05-30.dir/keimena/greece/greece3.htm>

With the help of the municipal authorities, the Greek government shows determination to solve the housing problems of approximately 4.000 Roma in the Prefecture of Elia (Peloponese). Roma will be temporarily transferred to prefabricated houses while the government's long-term housing plans provide for a permanent solution to the problem within three years' time. This was announced by the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life, following contacts of two of the Office's counselors with the Prefect of Elia. In the meeting, the mayors of the municipalities with considerable number of Roma inhabitants were also present. Reportedly, a housing scheme is already underway in the municipality of Amaliada where 30 prefabricated houses are to be allocated to the local tent-dwelling population. In the municipality of Gastuni, as stated by the mayor, Thanasis Christopulos, Roma live in the social margin, without hygiene and employment. The biggest problem in the Prefecture seems to be with the Roma tent-dwellers who reside seasonally in Elia. The idea of a fully organized camp was also thrown on the table.

*Positive report, in favor of the initiative.*

## **6. Death of an Albanian Roma boy in the garbage dump of Ano Liosia and Aspropyrgos**

**19/5/00: *Kathimerini***, p: 6

«Tragic death of a Roma child»

A 13-year-old Roma boy from Albania was killed while searching in the Ano Liosia - Aspropyrgos garbage dump. The driver of a municipal truck killed the boy by accident while trying to empty the vehicle from the garbage. He did not see the boy who was mortally injured. This kind of accidents are not rare. On the contrary, Roma who have settled down in the region around the dump are often victims of accidents while searching for metal scrap and paper among garbage. In July 1996, a Roma woman was buried under tons of garbage while digging in the dump. She was never found. Municipal employees have many times protested against the presence of Roma in the dump. Yet, despite the accidents and the protests, the problem has not ceased to exist.

*Neutral to positive report, indirectly highlighting the survival needs of the Roma who end up digging in the dump, in search of anything possible to provide them with some sort of income.*