

REPORT ON THE COVERAGE OF THE ROMA IN THE GREEK PRESS

NOVEMBER 2000

(Comments in italics are made by the GHM)

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1. Menidi and other Roma settlements accused for trafficking drugs:

"In Menidi terror is their neighbour: Trafficking of drugs debauches in the Gypsy settlements; an open meeting of the municipality to take measures" 3/11/200:Ta Nea

The author of the article, though in a very limited scope, tries to be objective in his presentation of the dramatic situation that has developed in the Roma settlements of Menidi, which has developed into a centre for trafficking drugs, with all the inevitable consequences: hang outs for addicts, circulation of guns, criminality, prostitution, rape etc. The author nevertheless leaves out the central issue. The state knew a long time ago that things were developing towards this direction, due to the fact that the Roma were completely marginalized by the local society and the central authorities. Yet it never did anything to help them out of this destitute situation; on the contrary, it watched all along their progressive yet inevitable turning for a solution to their distress into drug trafficking. The author also leaves out the issue whether the whole Roma community is involved in drug trafficking and finally whether the Roma involved in such transactions act on their own or whether they are involved in a much more complex network of drug trafficking. In fact the author takes for granted that the whole Roma community of Menidi is involved in drug trafficking. Last the author never questions why the state has not taken any measures to stop this situation, and if it does not so long, he does not ask why does the Greek state hold such a pathetic attitude confronted against drug traffickers when it does not hesitate to beat, imprison, humiliate and often kill Roma for insignificant acts of violating the law.

The population of Menidi, which is over 100,000 persons, is outraged from the trafficking of drugs that takes place for 24 hours a day in the Gypsy* settlements. The

municipality is organizing a town meeting for the 6th of November. The inhabitants complain that their life has become intolerable, particularly for those living very close to the settlements. Menidi has been recently inhabited also by sections of the Russian Mafia and a significant number of repatriated Greeks from the former Soviet Union. The police is present everywhere and police raids are very common. The police does not make raids within the settlements, therefore they have not only turned into centres of trafficking drugs but also for using them not to be caught by the police outside. The population feels however that the issue is a political one and cannot be resolved by putting down some gypsy shanties or by arresting some drug users. No matter which shanty you pass by, the Gypsies will call you to come and buy. Young people come to the settlement from dawn to buy drugs.

Stefanos Krikkis

*The term Gypsy (Tsiganos) is used in the original text and we don't change it whenever that is the case.

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“A desperate cry in Menidi: A town meeting against drugs and criminality”
7/11/2000:Ta Nea

Over 500 persons met at an open town meeting in Menidi to condemn and seek action against drug trafficking and criminality in the municipalities of Menidi and Zefiri. The scene was dramatic since one of the guest speakers was a mother of a young man who was found a few weeks before dead outside of the Gypsy settlements from an overdose. According to the journalist the Gypsies in the settlements continued all along to invite and deal drugs with the people who kept on coming from town. The people at the meeting complained that politicians don't understand what it means to have drugs literally outside the door of your home, to be constantly threatened and not to be able to do anything. During the meeting the vice president of Parliament, K. Vrettos [see below] shouted that this is a jungle. The General Secretary of Public Order, Dimitrios Efstathiadis, present at the municipal meeting, said that the problem cannot be solved with a strong police force alone. At the same time there must be also infrastructural projects that will establish communication with the other part of the city overcoming isolation. We must install electricity, provide water and blacktopping of the roads. And he added that Social Welfare services must be careful to whom they give allowances. The inhabitants of Menidi together with the local authorities decided to undertake dynamic mobilization if the government does not take drastic measures on this issue.

Some interviews follow with residents of Menidi who declare that the Gypsies have threatened them, because they tried to intervene in the trafficking of drugs by sending away the drug addicts who were hanging around in their area.

Ironically the general secretary while recognizing that the state failed to provide the necessary infrastructure for humane living in Menidi, precisely because it was inhabited by the Roma, he nonetheless considers that part of the solution could be cutting allowances from the Roma, who generally get them because they have many children, as if at this point any of those dealing drugs continue to live on the income of state allowances.

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“I will always work to serve the citizens of my municipality” 11-12/11/2000: Ta Nea

The mayor of Menidi, Dimitris Papanikas, argues in an interview, that the greater problem of Menidi is trafficking of drugs in the Gypsy settlements.

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“Discussion in Parliament about a question by the deputy of PASOK and Vice President of parliament, Dinos Vrettos, on the issue of Criminality and Roma living in Menidi and Zefiri” Minutes of Parliamentary Debate 16/11/200

PASOK MP and Deputy-Speaker Mr. D. Vrettos asked raised a question to the Minister of Public Order about the measures taken to combat the phenomenon of drugs trafficking in the Gypsy settlements that plagues the municipalities of Acharnes (Menidi) and Zephyri.

The minister, M. Hrisohoidis, explained that the inhabitants [the Roma] of the area are new and they have not been fully “assimilated due to the lack of the necessary infrastructure”, social and political, so that they live under humane conditions. He argued that this is not only an issue of criminality that concerns the police alone. He added that cooperation with the local authorities has begun to resolve the problem. This cooperation has led to the reinforcement of police presence in Acharnes and Menidi. Another police centre opened in the Municipality of Liosia.

Mr. Vrettos poses a new question on the issue. “Mr. Minister and Mr. Speaker of Parliament, I would not like in any way to be attributed racist intentions. You know very well my convictions on the issue of human rights. I consider that the Gypsies are a category of fellow men who must be provided with state support. However, unfortunately in the Gypsy areas, in the municipalities I referred to previously, there is a big criminality problem. Young children are drafted to trade and push drugs. One can find there any kind of drugs...they have even warned us with gunshots after a police raid that “we are here and we will continue to do the same work”. Mr. Minister, children and young women in spite of the fact that they pay they are raped before they take their dosage...the problem is huge and all of us must work to confront it effectively. The inhabitants of these areas expect us to do so and they are organizing to succeed in it.”

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“ Young children also involved in drugs in Menidi, Zefiri and Liosia” 17/11/2000: Eleftherotypia

See report above on the discussion in Parliament with the Minister of Public Order

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“Criminality in the Municipalities of Acharnes and Zephyri. A question in Parliament by the deputy, V. Ikonomou” 18-19/11/2000: Alpha Ena

[text of the question discussed on 20/11; see below]

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“Discussion in Parliament about a question by the deputy of PASOK Vasilios Oikonomou on the issue of Criminality and Roma living in Menidi and Zefiri”, 20/11/2000

PASOK Deputy V. Oikonomou asked in Parliament the Minister of Public Order what are the measures that will be taken by the government to squash criminality in the the Attica Municipalities of Acharnes and Zephiri which find themselves in a “state of siege.” “Trafficking of drugs has moved from the center of Athens to these suburbs and the people together with the local authorities will not tolerate anymore these state of peculiar captivity in their own area.” The deputy requested to be told in what ways does the ministry intend to enforce the Police forces in those municipalities. More importantly he asked: “How does the Ministry intend to confront the peculiar and paradoxical form of criminality that undertake Gypsies, creating in fact a ghetto, terrorizing and oppressing the peaceful inhabitants, in the midday using even automatic guns (Kalashnikof) and trafficking large quantities of drugs...it is essential that the police undertakes immediate, dynamic and definite solutions on this issue.” Further he adds that it is not possible that a few miles from the center of Athens, Greeks cannot circulate because even in daylight they hear shooting in the neighbourhood. “This is a tragic situation for the security of children, and generally everyone who works and struggles to make ends meet...Special forces are necessary that will remove the problem by entering the houses of the Athiganoi [Roma], anyway, these people, to find out where the arms and the drugs are.”

The Minister of Public Order states the government’s position that this is not only a police matter but also a product of lacking infrustructural institutions, which can provide humane conditions of life in this area where these social groups [the Roma] have moved. And he adds, that this requires the cooperation of several ministries.

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“The state of Avliza” 23/11/2000: *Kathimerini*

A rare exception is this commentary by *Antonis Karkagiannis* on drug trafficking and criminality in Menidi. The author argues that the situation in Menidi does not involve the whole of the Gypsy community in the Menidi settlement but rather only a small mafia of 5 families behind whom operate Greeks of a very old stock, and who terrorize the entire population living in the settlement and outside of it. Of course the entire population of Menidi is outraged against the entire Gypsy population, a serious mistake that is fomented by the inaction both of the police and the Ministry of Public Order. A few Gypsy families and some Greeks of old stock have founded their own state in Avliza [the exact area in Menidi where is found the Roma settlement]. The Gypsies according to Mr. Karkagianis are terrorized by this mafia and they are aware of the cost this action by a small number of families has on the entire community. The author also informs us that during the open meeting of the municipality there was also present a representative of the Gypsy settlement. The journalist claims to be shocked by the declaration of the Mayor of Menidi who said “he does not see a solution in the

visible future.” A. Karkagiannis sums up: “They don’t want to give a solution because the Menidi mafia has high placed protectors.”

2. Settlement or Resettlement of Roma communities throughout Greece

I. “Aghia Sofia”: The first Roma self-managed settlement:

“Festivities of Roma at the former military barracks of Ghonos”, *Macedonian Press Agency, 10/11/2000*

Two days of organized festivities in the self-managed settlement of Ghonos will be organized by the Roma. Films will be projected, Gypsy festivities will take place. The Prime Minister was invited to visit the settlement.

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“A visit of Prime Minister Simitis” *11/11/2000: Ethnos*

[announcement of impending visit; see below]

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“The Prime Minister’s visit to the Gypsy Settlement”, *Macedonian Press Agency, 11/11/2000*

The Prime Minister during his visit promised that the government will make sure so that the Gypsies will be able to follow the development of the region and will stop being socially excluded. The Ministers of Defence, Health Care and Macedonia-Thrace accompanied him during the visit, along with the Prefect of Thessaloniki. They visited the Daycare Center, the Kindergarten, Health and Social Care Center, and other parts of the new settlement. The government considers these types of settlements models for the transition period until the Gypsies settle into houses permanently. The government through the P.M. and also the Minister of Interior promised that many more such self-managed settlements will be established in other areas of the country. Our government the P.M. explained has elaborated a program for the social integration of the Gypsies, which includes housing, education, professional training, health care, and it is administered by several Ministries. Here in the region not only the governmental representatives and representatives of the Gypsies themselves, but also non-governmental representatives like Doctors without Frontiers and Doctors of the world are trying to confront the problem. The P.M. promised that this settlement will be developed to include more houses.”

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“Home for 1.500 Gypsies: New settlement in Thessaloniki” *11/11/2000: Exousia*

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“Rights groups welcome Gypsy settlement in Thessaloniki” 11/11/2000: Athens News [full text]

PRIME Minister Costas Simitis is scheduled to visit Greece's first ever self-managed Gypsy settlement today. Established last month in Thessaloniki, northern Greece, it is home to 251 families.

The settlement, which is located at former military barracks in the district of Ionia, consists of 251 40-square-metre prefabricated homes. All homes have running water, toilets and electricity. There is also a health clinic, day care centre for pre-school aged children, basketball court and a school bus service.

The settlement was designed by a number of non-governmental organisations, including the Greek branch of Doctors of the World, the DROM Network for Gypsies' Rights, the Greek Helsinki Monitor and the Minority Rights Group in Greece.

The Gypsy families now residing at this settlement were tent-dwellers who had been evicted from various areas and forced to live near the Gallikos River in Thessaloniki. Since 1996 the NGOs had applied pressure on the government to provide these Gypsies with better living conditions. A major reason for the delay was opposition from Ionia locals who did not want Gypsies as neighbours.

Human rights groups welcomed the creation of the settlement as one of the "rare exceptions to the rule of discriminating against Gypsies".

"There are still 120,000 [Gypsies] who live in deplorable conditions," Thanassis Triaridis, a representative of Thessaloniki-based DROM, told the Athens News. "Their children have never seen running water and do not know what a toilet looks like." He also expressed his hope that Simitis will today stress the need for such settlements to become the rule and not the exception.

In related news, representatives of the Greek Helsinki Human Rights Monitor told a conference on Gypsies organised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) last month that Gypsies were being thrown out of areas around the capital where sports facilities for the 2004 Athens Olympics will be built.

These reports have been brought to the attention of the International Olympic Committee whose president Juan Antonio Samaranch sent a letter to the Greek government expressing his concern.

Kathy Tzivilakis

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“Simitis in the (Lilliputian) houses of the Gypsies” 13/11/2000: Eleftherotypia

The Prime Minister promised during the inauguration of the Aghia Sofia Roma settlement that “the government will take care of those groups of the population that stay in the margins of economic and social progress.”

...The President of the settlement gave to the Prime minister a plaque with an inscription in the Romani language while the priest who sanctified the place, addressed them in Romani and invited the P.M. to show personal interest for a final restitution of the community.

The P.M. noted that there are pockets that lag in society, groups of the population which don't follow the economic and social progress and stay in the margins. "In a modern society no one should stay in the margins. We all know that Gypsies are part of the population, which cannot quickly adapt to the new developments. This is why intervention and presence of the state is necessary. We want to show that our society is a society of coherence and tolerance. That we take care of those who have problems, because a progressive society should have this character."

He also added that the government has elaborated an extensive program for the social incorporation of the Gypsies. It includes housing, education of the children, establishment of the students card allowing them to go from one school to another, when their parents move, their professional education and provision for their health.

The settlement in the former Ghonos military barracks is a product of the creative cooperation between NGOs and the ministries. The objective of the government is the creation of many other such settlements in different regions and the Minister of Interior, V. Papandreou is occupied with that issue.

Nikos Roubos

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"A society of solidarity: Simitis at the Gypsy settlement" 13/11/2000: Ethnos

[coverage of same event]

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"A Provisional Solution" 14/11/2000: Avghi

The position of the Coalition of the Left party on the settlement of the Roma of Gallikos River to the Ghonos former military barracks: the self-managed settlement by the Roma should not be viewed as a permanent solution. The only permanent solution is to ask each family where they want to live and to provide them with the choice of living in normal houses anywhere they wish or to stay together with the other families. The education of the Roma from 'Aghia Sofia' should take place in the settlement and not in many different schools, something that will probably turn them away from the schools.

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"Seven Roma in one room" 26/11/2000: "E" Sunday Supplement of Eleftherotypia

An objective coverage of the settlement, of one of the most miserable and highly populated tent-dwelling Roma communities of Greece, to the former military barracks of Ghonos in Western Thessaloniki. Guest speaker for the inauguration the Prime

Minister himself who dared to admit that cohesion and solidarity came a bit late. *One wonders whether this was intended for all those authorities local and central, which resisted strongly and did their utmost against to prevent the realization of this revolutionizing project for Greek standards.* This first self-managed settlement has 250 little prefabricated houses for the same number of families in an area of 150 square meters and provides them with what every other Greek citizen knows to be self-evident: drinkable water, housing and electricity. “Aghia Sofia” is the name given to the settlement and also to the [Roma] association that will manage it. As its President, Mr. Panyotis Fragoulis, notes some of the Roma here for the first time in their life have the experience of living in a house with walls; however, he asks “How could families with 6 and 8 children fit in 25 square metres?” They can hope always, since the Prime Minister promised that they would add two more rooms in front of each house. The President does not want to show dissatisfaction and be whining, considering that the same people were living before in nylon shanties without any water supply, sewerage, electricity, garbage collection or public transportation, in other words without the essential sanitary care, pray to the racist intentions of some municipalities. As he summed up to the journalist, “we live better, we don’t live with the mice. Our children will not run the risk of getting ill and they will be able to get educated with the school that has been constructed here.” In fact he means the kindergarten and baby farm that have been constructed along with an infirmary and a room for general use. He has a word for the other 45 families of Menemeni and 10 families of Finikas who were left out. “There are dozens of families that will continue to live the same way we lived before. I tell them to be patient and that they will arrange things. Mr. Tsohatzopoulos (Minister of Defence) promised that he will give us more space here at the former military barracks.” *Promises are easy handouts at moments of such euphoria. Undoubtedly realizing them it will require again another campaign by all those who realized this idea of a self-managed Roma camp.*

Amongst those involved is Thanassis Triaridis of the DROM network for the social rights of the Gypsies. The idea “he explains took shape after four years of voluntary action in the Gypsy settlements and not only there. It took shape in the settlements together with the gypsies and it was discussed with several institutions, persons and organizations. They all inoculated the idea with their philosophy and ideas.” The government he goes further on, adopted the proposition for a draft law on the self-managed settlement of the tent-dwelling gypsies that was made public on March 1999 the NGOs Network DROM, Doctors of the World-Greece, Greek Helsinki Monitor, the Coalition of the Left Party, and the Prefectural self-government of Thessaloniki. The idea was to create an institution that will safeguard the constitutionally consolidated rights: education, health, security in life and at work.

Though this draft law remained as such, the Prefecture of Thessaloniki, together with the Prime Ministers office and the above NGOs realised politically this law with the creation of the “Aghia Sofia” settlement. Self-management here does not yet have an institutional framework. Simply there is a Roma Council for the Administration of the settlement, which is to decide upon the internal matters concerning the settlement in cooperation with the superintending office of the Prefecture. This office is made up of NGO, local municipalities’, Roma and Prefectural self-government of Thessaloniki.

The President of the Council elected to administer the settlement, Panayotis Sabanis, explained succinctly: “tent-dwellers are neither thieves nor transgressors. We are faced everyday with vital problems and we find ourselves often at the mercy of racist and inhuman conduct by some municipalities, which consider us undesirable and dangerous. I believe however that all of us are entitled to a dignified life.”

It is still a fact that 117 thousand tent-dwelling gypsies continue living in 70 miserable settlements around the country demonstrating that Mr. Simitis will need to make many inaugurations to prove that as he said, “in a modern society no one should remain in the margin.”

Dina Karatziou

II. Resettlement of Roma of Halandri:

“The Gypsies of Halandri in a Settlement; an old problem soon to be solved”
4/11/2000: Ta Nea

After many meetings with the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Interior, the Prime Minister’s Office on Issues of the Quality of Life and several other central and local authorities, a decision was taken for the resettlement to organized settlements of the Roma living in Halandri. The municipality must declare the contest for finding land within the Halandri area for those Roma who are citizens of the municipality. For the other Roma such land must be found in the neighbouring municipalities. Also, a sufficient number of prefabricated small houses used for the earthquake-ridden population in Athens, will be provided. Low interest housing loans will be provided to those Gypsies who are interested. The Ministry of Interior will provide the necessary economic support for the needs that will develop in the resettlement process.

Andreas Takis from the Ombudsman’s office explained that the most difficult part was to coordinate all the interested parties. Out of the 42 families living in the area of Halandri 24 are citizens of the municipality. *The Ombudsman’s office had to deal both with the claims made by the Roma and those made by the owners of the land who were demanding that the Roma move away from their property.*

In spite of the fact that the owners of land won their case through the courts, the police never implemented the court decision. The Municipality intervened and stopped them from casting out the Gypsies. In any case as Mr. Takis explained even if they were cast out, they would have to be placed somewhere else. “Though the legal owners of land had to be satisfied, it was necessary also that these people could go elsewhere. Everyone had to be morally and politically satisfied.”

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“This is an answer to the publication from “Ta Nea”: Cultural Association of Greek Rom ‘Hope’” *7/11/2000: Press Release by the Roma of Halandri:*

The Association of Roma from Halandri decided to prepare a press release explaining their position on their resettlement. They explain that they have lives for over 30 years in that area in Halandri, though without running water or electricity in self-made shanties. We are detached from the rest of the population and are considered second

category citizens, since even education and work are constantly obstructed by the administration. The effort made by the Ministry of Interior to resettle us in another area is nothing more than a continuation of the logic of ghettoisation and isolation. We must be able to integrate harmoniously with the rest of society and in order to achieve this each family must obtain a house of 300 square metres with the diffusion of the Gypsy population within the city. The Roma of Halandri explain in their press release that they will not move from their shanties in exchange to go to another ghetto, which will only reproduce conditions of misery, isolation and racist prejudices.

This press release is an interesting reaction by the Roma community of Halandri, which in its effort to combat exclusion and discrimination, it seeks diffusion and assimilation in the general Greek society. It is difficult to see how this community will be able to maintain its identity if the families disperse all over the Athens area. Considering that the infrastructural institutions, which could provide support for the cultivation and maintenance of the Roma identity are absent, assimilation is more than inevitable once the community breaks up. The letter was never published by the newspaper.

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“Gypsies of the Athenian suburbs request their ‘social integration’” **9/11/2000: Agence France Press**

The journalist summarises the main themes of the press release pointing out how the Gypsies of Halandri live in miserable conditions and they demand that they be socially integrated rather than continuing to be marginalized in Gypsy ghettos.

3. Education and non-education of Roma:

“Who wins from racism; an interview with G. Tsiakalos” **12/11/2000: Eleftherotypia**

George Tsiakalos is a professor of the Department of Pedagogy at the University of Thessaloniki. **Dina Karatziou** interviews him.

Professor Tsiakalos is very critical of the racism towards immigrants and minorities that comes out of the methods and organization of the Greek system of education. He considers that when the state takes the Gypsy student from the Ghonos settlement and divides them in groups to send them to various schools in Thessaloniki as if they were dangerous, it will lead to students of two speeds. Further he describes how in schools near Roma settlements attended by the Roma children, the teachers do not make any special efforts to help these children though they know, that if they don't take special measures most of these children will give up on their education. “This not only does not mobilize them to take or to request special measures, but on the contrary it satisfies them.” “These kind of people,” he adds, “fight with means against any efforts of change towards something better.” He is talking about improving the educational methods in Greek schools for the Roma. “If you think this bothers the state, I tell no.”

Professor Tsiakalos is controversial in his positions about the education of minorities. Certainly he amongst others has opened up the debate in Greece as to the appropriate type of education for minority groups. Read about his debate with NGOs on the education of the 'Aghia Sofia' settlement Roma.

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"Gypsy students don't fit...they made the primary school students throw out their classmates" 16/11/200: *Avgi*

32 Roma students found the doors closed of the 2nd Primary School of Halastra, confronted once again with the racism of young and old. The students and their parents insist that they have no racist feelings, but that there is no room for more students in the school.

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16/11/2000: *To Vima*: In the same day *To Vima* on the same issue, tells us that the parents of students from the Halastra Primary argued that they were not against the registration of Roma students, as long as not all of them came to that school. They argued that they should be divided amongst several schools.

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"Desks of tension: discord in Halastra about 32 Gypsy students" 16/11/2000: *Eleftherotypia*

Students and parents react to the registration of 32 Roma students at the Halastra Primary. They argue there is no room for them. The assistant of the Prefect of Thessaloniki, Avraam Kalteridis, argues that the students were sent to different schools respecting the pedagogical program suggested by the Ioanina University, which foresees the incorporation of children in classes that correspond to their age. Drom Network, which participates in the Municipal office that will oversee the settlement, argues against having a school in the settlement. On the other hand, the dean of the Pedagogical School of the University of Thessaloniki argues that: "So far experience has shown that the solution of dispersion of Gypsy children to the existing schools, in most cases leads to quick abandon of their studies and return to the settlement. A settlement with 1500 Gypsies which has a day care centre, kindergarten and will have a church, it has the right to also have its own school."

Nikos Roubos

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"A question in parliament by the deputy of the Coalition of the Left Asimina Xyrotiri-Ekaterinari to the Deputy Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, on the issue of education of the Gypsy children in the settlement of the former military barracks of Ghonos", 20/11/2000

The Deputy argues that the decision to disperse the Roma children from Aghia Sofia settlement in schools of the area, forcing them to travel every day as much as 10 miles in order to arrive to their school, is to exclude them from elementary education. I am

afraid, she claims, that very soon they will abandon school. Particular problems developed with this distribution at the 2nd Primary School of Chalastra where out of 198 students study 27 Roma students of the area, which have fully integrated in the school system. The addition of 32 more Roma students from Aghia Sofia in this more than completely full school, without any previous discussion with the teachers and the administration on the actual possibilities. The Association of Parents and Guardians took dynamic action without putting forward the issue of the origin of the new students, but only the fact that the school was more than full. This problem would have never come about if, from the beginning, it had been decided to establish and operate a school within the settlement.

Having developed her positions on these issues the Deputy of the Coalition Party asked the Minister if there is a plan to establish such a school within the settlement and what is the complete plan of this Ministry concerning the education of Roma children, something that may contribute significantly to the integration of the Roma in the society.

The Deputy Minister of Education, F. Petsalnikos, in his answer explained that according to the principles of intercultural education and the results of research concerning the education of Gypsy children, it was decided to apportion the children of the settlement to several schools in the area because education of the Gypsy children in one school in the past had negative results because it leads to ghettoization, which instead of solving their problems it aggravates them. He adds that in fact only 8 students, under the program of dispersion, were sent to the 2nd Primary School of Chalastra.

The Deputy Minister pursues the argument by insisting that these children in the early stages of their education should be provided with schools in the settlements to be able to obtain special treatment allowing them to handle the requirements rather than drop out. This does not result into racism nor does it create a ghetto. The Minister responded that the number of Gypsy students has more than doubled in the last years precisely because the planning of the Ministry in cooperation with specialists and interest groups, has taken account of all these issues, requiring special care for the education of these children. He concluded that the great majority of specialists who deal with the issues of intercultural education and particularly the education of the Gypsies, do not consider appropriate the creation of schools strictly for the Gypsies in order to avoid any kind of ghettoization.

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“Parliamentary Question by Colation MP Maria Damanaki on expulsion of Roma Pupils from Halastra School.” 21/11/00 [text made available by the MP to GHM].

Calling the closure of the Halastra school illegal and unconstitutional, the MP asks the government for its reaction and its measures to avoid similar incidents from happening in the future.

This is a question based on the NGO reaction to the incident, diametrically different from that of the fellow Coalition MP’s question that implicitly supported the parnets’ decision to close down the school in protest [see above].

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“Intensive classes for the Gypsy children; after a question in Parliament by the deputy of the Coalition of the Left Party, As. Xyrotiri” 23/11/2000: *Avghi* [this is the newspaper of the Coalition Party]

Ms. Xyrotiri, in light of the mobilization against the registration of 32 more Roma students by the parents and students of Halastra 2nd Primary School, asked the Deputy Minister of Education, F. Petsalnikos, to provide intensive classes at the schools attended by Gypsy children from the “Aghia Sofia” settlement to support their educational needs. The Minister said that the issue is being examined seriously after a recommendation made by a professor from the University of Ioannina. *The University of Ioannina houses one of the research centres funded by the Greek state on the Roma language, on the education of the Roma, on their culture etc.* He also added that the government decided to exclude any possibility of constructing a school within the settlement since that would lead to ghettoization.

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“Educating the Gypsies”; Primary schooling in the settlement or dispersion to schools in the region. What happened with the children of the ‘Aghia Sofia-Ghonos’ settlement” 24/11/2000: *Avghi*

A ‘peculiar’ brawl spurred on the issue on education of Gypsy children living in the ‘Aghia Sofia-Ghonos’ settlement. Everything begun when the association of parents and guardians of the children at the 2nd Primary School of Chalastra occupied the school together with the students for four days protesting against the admission of 32 more Roma students to the school. The argument they posed was that the school does not provide the infrastructure for 32 more students. However the way they reacted it left lots of room for the allegations made against them that their motives were racist.

The issue that emerged was whether a school should be created within the settlement or whether children should go to the existing schools in the region.

DROM Network’s position, an NGO, was that Gypsy children should go to schools in their region and not to a “ghetto-school” within the settlement. It reminded all the relevant authorities of their responsibility to provide access to education to Gypsy children, enhanced instruction, preparatory classes respecting their bilingualism. It condemned the reaction by the parents’ association as ‘illegal, inhuman and racist’ pointing out that the right of children to education is not something to be placed at the verdict of any majority of ‘enraged citizens’”

In opposition to this, Angelos Hatzinikolaou, a former teacher in the insertion classes of the Halastra School, presently its director argued that dispersion leads to leakage from schools. He explained that it is essential to create a public school within the settlement because this will enhance interest in a vulnerable social group, which when it is faced with distance it tends to abandon. Experience has shown, he argued, that the closer schools and teachers are to the Roma the more successful they are in their performance. Daily contact of the Roma society with the school encourages

confidence towards the educational process. He also explained that the parents did not close the school to send away the Roma children, but rather to enforce the school with an infrastructure and special teachers capable of handling the needs created by the registration of new Roma children.

Maroula Plika

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“With solidarity against discrimination and paternalism; About the education of Gypsy children in the settlement of “Aghia Sofia-Ghonos” 25/11/2000: Avghi

*In a debate which has developed since the inauguration of the settlement over the education of Roma children living in Ghonos, **George Tsiakalos**, professor and dean of the Pedagogical School of the University of Thessaloniki, in the past receptor of funds distributed by the government to do research on discrimination and education for the Roma, describes as follows his positions.*

He ironically criticizes the position of the Thessaloniki Prefecture that professor Tsiakalos believes runs against the rights entitled to every Greek and European citizen according to the Greek constitution and the decisions of the Council of Europe. The Prefecture decided that a school should not be created within the ‘Aghia Sofia’ settlement to avoid the ghettoization of the Roma. For the same reason it decided that they should not go to schools of the local municipality, that they should not be taught their mother tongue nor be provided with insertion classes that prepare them. Further he argues that the Prefecture decided to leave most children of the settlement outside schools and to transport only 136 of them to schools far away from the local municipality arguing that they were implemented the American ‘busing’ system. However professor Tsiakalos argues that they not only do not implement the busing system, but that in fact their intention is different. They move children away from the local municipality schools to ones where there are minority children “to maintain other schools ‘immiscibly white’, that is hermetically closed to Roma children.”

Eventually according to professor Tsiakalos these tactics not only run against the rights of the Roma as Greek citizens, the right of every child in Greece to go to school, and the rights of minorities to receive education in their language, but it also will lead the Roma further away from schools enhancing racist preconceptions that they do not care for education. Not creating a school in the settlement was the cheapest solution for the Prefecture and that was the issue according to professor Tsiakalos. All the other arguments are meant to fool people with paternalistic attitudes towards minorities. [*Here he is attacking the position taken by DROM Network against the creation of a school within the settlement*] “These people whom one would expect to be on the side of human rights, not nationalism, cultural racism and restrictions on education have sided against the respect of “difference”, which implies, with an autonomous capacity to exist, providing them with your solidarity, rather than considering them as “deficient beings” whose existence depends strictly upon your paternalistic behaviour.”

According to Professor Tsiakalos, a decision must be made as to which municipality belongs ‘Aghia Sofia’ so that the schooling region it belongs to can be determined. If children should be sent to neighbouring regions, their parents should know which is

the school to which they have a right to send their children. This is a right of every Greek citizen and should not be transferred to modern gaulaiter, who take over from the Roma this unprecedented competence of arbitrarily transporting, dispersing and placing their of children to schools. Finally he concludes that it is essential that insertion sections are available, something accorded by law.

The debate over the education of the Roma children from the 'Aghia Sofia' settlement certainly has not ended and within the Greek context it concerns all the Roma and all minorities and immigrants living in Greece. However arguments like those provided by professor Tsiakalos are far from promoting dialogue. The argument that NGOs are gaulaiters who use paternalistic methods because they consider minorities inferior people to hide ones ideology of cultural relativism is far from providing a basis for exchange that could have positive effects.

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Education: an unknown word of the ROM, "Tolmi" [Audacity] no 2, November 2000
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"Illiteracy, child work, insufficient registration in the official educational programs are the critical characteristics of Gypsy children in Greece... Phobia, or reservation for the 'different' continues to exist and it creates the impression that education for these children appears to be a utopian objective...

The percentage of illiteracy over the total Gypsy population is 90%. According to the Department of Primary Education of the Ministry of Education, Gypsy students throughout Greece were 2.422 during the year 1993-94, while the young Gypsies not attending school numbered over 30.000...

From the foundation of the Greek state till 1978, the Gypsies were deprived of the Greek citizenship. They were not naturalized in any registrar, thus they had no political or social rights, and therefore they had no right to education. At the same time the racist confrontation of the Gypsies through pogroms from the villages or towns where they settled.

The early participation of children at work leaves little room for their education. However, one of the main reasons for the educational embargo of the Gypsies," the author explains, "is that the needs and the aims of the Gypsies are not compatible with the way the Greek system of education functions. The official position of the Ministry of Education lacked the particular adjustments for the Gypsies. Since 1985 the Ministry has composed working groups to examine the necessary educational policy for 'vulnerable groups'...In fact for the responsibility for the education of young Gypsies is assigned Ministry to the Church, Welfare Centres and private institutions.

In addition in 1994 the Ministry of Education applies specialized educational programs and establishes preparatory classes for the incorporation of the young Gypsies into the educational system. According to the Ministry of Education ...in the year 1999-20008.500 young Gypsies were registered in the primary schools.

The question is...whether these measures are sufficient and whether they are in the right direction, so that social discrimination is not reproduced.

According to the President of the Union of Greek Gypsies, Ioannis Chalilopoulos, who had recently a meeting with the Archbishop Christodoulos, he hopes that with the state's and churches help conditions of life and education for the Gypsies may improve. He said: "Greece is the country of Democracy and Orthodoxy. Having this in mind we try to improve the conditions of life and education of the Greek Gypsies, knowing that we have the support of the Church of Greece, of the President of the Republic and the love of most Greeks. This is the new page that the Union of Greek Gypsies in the 21st century commences for the substantial support of the Greek Gypsies by the state. ...He considers that education is a decisive factor for the progress of a people, and he expresses fears that, possibly, some aim at placing the Gypsies in the margins, from the moment that in the modern schools there is no talk about the language, the culture, the history and the civilization of the Gypsies."

This is a sincere overview of the various facets of the Greek governments' attitude towards the education of the Roma. However the author forgets completely to evaluate all these stages and she does not tell us at all what were the results of all the programs that the government funded on the education of such vulnerable groups. Also we are not told here why is it that in spite of so many such programs and funds invested therein the percentage of illiteracy amongst the Roma population in Greece, remains significantly high, the highest in any European state. Amongst the tent-dwelling Roma this percentage is even more than 90%.

4. Problems in Roma settlements throughout Greece:

"Hepatitis" Eleftherotypia, 23/11/2000

A large percentage of Gypsies living in the settlement of Sageika of Achaia, are carriers of hepatitis B. According the results of tests carried by the hospital in the Patras area 6,7% out of 90 Gypsies living in that settlement are carriers. The hospital recommended that the Municipal Authorities must undertake the vaccination of all inhabitants in that settlement.

5. Roma visit the Politicians:

"The President of the Athiganoi [Roma] visits Rigillis" 16/11/2000: To Vima

The Union of Greek Athiganoi [*one of the many Greek Roma associations representing mainly established Roma*] represented by its president Ianis Chalilopoulos, visited the leader of the oppositions, Kostas Karamanlis, at his offices. Mr. Karamanlis, we are told, wanted to be informed about their problems and their efforts to be "assimilated in contemporary Greek society." Mr. Chalilopoulos declared after the meeting that Mr. Karamanlis appeared to be willing to help in that direction.

The representatives of the Athiganoi pointed out that "they do not wish to stay in a ghetto, and that they seek to be integrated in the Greek society of the 21st century, maintaining their particularity and culture."

Apparently the two presidents spoke of two different things: assimilation vs. integration.

6. Activities of and about the Greek Roma:

“An evening with the Gypsies” 23/11/200: Eleftherotypia

“Efxinos Pontos” is the name of the “Center for Information and Support of the Gypsies” founded in 1995 by the municipalities of Ano Liosia and Aharnes. Its objective is providing information, support and promoting employment for socially discriminated groups in society like repatriated, refugees, immigrants, Gypsies, former prisoners, juvenile delinquents. It is an NGO organized with the support of the Greek state; its projects, as we are told are supported by funds from the Council of Europe Projects and the European Union Programs. It organized an event on November 25 with a discussion on the problems facing Roma street peddlers and the need to legalize them to strengthen the Greek economy as the title indicated. Amongst the discussants were representatives of ministries, municipalities and “Greek Rom.” A film prepared by G. Lambrou, “Tzav Anto Gav” (I go to work), a state funded production, was presented. A folkloric festival of “Gypsy music, dancing, and traditional Gypsy food” followed the discussion.

7. Examples of Greek media’s stereotypes and hate speech against the Roma:

“State within a state; the untrodden of the Gypsy settlement” 18/11/2000: Ta Nea

The journalist’s attitude is profoundly racist in her presentation of a Roma settlement. Her understanding of the Roma is one that sums up in one sentence: who are those strange creatures that will not assimilate and accept our rules. She visits the settlement of Amarousio, one of the suburbs of Greater Athens. Marousi (in short) is a developing area where the largest Olympic stadium in Athens is situated. Naturally this is an area constantly developing and preparing itself for the Olympics. Just across the Olympic stadium in some acres of abandoned land, is the settlement of some Roma families which that there over 40 years.

The author explains: On one side of the Stadium one sees the “balamo” [gadjo] world that is constantly developing, preparing for the Olympics, on the other the Gypsy settlement that is stagnant for over 40 years now. The Gypsy settlement is a ghetto, which an outsider can enter with great difficulty. It is a closed society, which examines whoever approaches and resists persistently to whatever tries to change its rhythms. Having determined its own rules it refuses to incorporate itself to the “whole”. They characteristically say: “We were born Giftoi (pejorative for Gypsies) and we will die Giftoi.” Their social being, the author explains, is determined entirely and exclusively by their president, who has power over the whole settlement, and his reputation goes far beyond Amarousio. The attachment of all inhabitants upon this person goes as far as the control of their interactions. There is a pathetic obedience towards him, she tells us. A balamo visitor has to go through a holy inquisition. After

a few minutes talk with him, the athiganos (another pejorative term for Roma commonly used by the Greek media) begins to describe their problems. That is the neglect and indifference, which according to them the state has towards them. She continues describing the complaints of an old woman living in a torn up shanty, who worries about the next storm. All of a sudden the author realizes she is surrounded by what she call “people of the same race” (omofiloi) whom she describes as people who ask her for 5000 drachmas, telling her that they have children to feed. She feels that they are inspecting with their eyes the articles she is carrying, like her purse, camera, clothes, glasses, etc. Young barefoot children are running around her, while adolescents across her are smoking one cigarette after the other. *It is obvious that she is both terrorized and shocked by what she sees and experiences.* Suddenly, she tells us, a mobile rings and everyone disappears. The President approaches, with hackles up he speaks to them in their language, turning to the balamo “What do you want here? Go away!” Any effort to calm him fails. “Go away I don’t want to discuss with you. You will have troubles.”

*A strongly negative article that makes no effort to reach the “other.” It is full of stereotypes but also hate speech. The author sees her object from above, considering the Roma as beings both different and incapable of becoming part of the “whole”. The author, **Lina Papadaki**, writes for a mainstream newspaper in Greece and the message she passes to her readers is that Roma are responsible for their destiny.*

8. Examples of favorable media coverage of Roma issues:

“Local Self-Government and Racism” 18/11/2000: Avghi

Dionyssis Goussetis, tries to describe the work of some NGOs (DROM, GHM, MRG-G, Doctors of the World) and the Coalition of the Left Party in their efforts to act against the racism usually expressed by local authorities against the Roma. He describes how many times this actors had to bring charges against the local authorities who resisted against any positive action towards the Roma living in their area. Quite often this led to action that violated the law and constitutional rights of the Roma themselves. He reminds us of the revolutionary statement made by the leader of the Coalition Party, in a conference organized by the Doctors of the World, that the Roma are a minority, interrogating both state ideology but also the ideology admitted by some Roma of Greece. The work of these NGOs and of the Coalition Party, runs against all the assimilationist projects that both the government but also higher institutions of Greece, along with some Roma, practice. They are first to support in Greece the idea of a self-managed settlement by the Roma. They are the first to question the racism that comes out of the local authorities who unanimously try to get rid one way or another from the Roma settlements. Without concern about where the Roma can live, they justify their arguments against them by condemning whole communities in the name of transgression of some individuals. They encourage police rages and they do not hesitate to tare down their self-made shanties, using racist epithets against them to justify their acts. There are dozens of such actions by local authorities all over Greece. Nea Kios, Nea Tirinthos, Nea Alikarnassos and many-many more. The author however does not forget to name some exceptions, where the local authorities have made some efforts to provide the conditions for the integration of the Roma in their community. Sofades, Karditsa, Gastouni and a few more.