

REPORT ON THE COVERAGE OF THE ROMA IN THE GREEK PRESS

OCTOBER 2000

(Comments in italics are made by the GHM)

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01/10/2000: *Eleftherotypia*

1. “European legislation”

Invitation for suggestions regarding the program “Social integration of disadvantaged juvenile, emphasizing the Roma minority” Phare HU-99.04-01- SCR-E/111451/D/G/HU- (C 267, 19 September 2000).

1/10/2000: *Kyriakatiki Avgi*

2. “The first organized Roma settlement becomes true”

Prime Minister, K. Simitis, on 15 October, will inaugurate the first self-administrated Romani settlement ‘Agia Sophia’, located in Goni’s Camp, Municipality of Echedorou. The ‘Agia Sofia’ (as Roma named it) is comprised by 248 cottages of 25-30 square meters each, a community centre which includes the Social Care Centre with two infirmaries, nursery school and a centre for the adult training. Also there is a stadium, market place and playground as well as public transportation.

The construction of the Roma settlement was undertaken and implemented by Prefecture of Thessaloniki through a Supervision Office comprised by the representatives of DROM network, the Doctors of the World Greece, the Roma community and Local Administration (Municipality of Echedorou). In addition the Supervision Office has become the temporary Administration Council of this settlement and is responsible for the transition under the Roma administration.

The ‘Aghia Sophia’ becomes a challenge, first of all for Roma and then for the whole society, in order to remain a healthy place and avoid ghettoization. The 300 Roma families, heeding

their bad experience in the past, feel very content and optimistic, pointing out that the Roma children will have better future than the old generation. They will attend school, have more knowledge, find jobs and finally live in normal houses.

From the part of the state the procedure to achieve the target was very difficult. It was expensive (1,5 billion drachma) and required patience to avoid racism, stereotypes and intolerance of the Greek society. As Mrs. Mazaraki (member of Supervision Office) said, "Nobody wants next to his house the Roma, just as the scrap heaps." The vice-mayor, Abraham Kaltaveridhis, stated, "the general perception is that the settlement of A. Sophia is provisional, as the first necessary step for the integration of Roma in our society. The second step consist on their professional training, education in order to have their houses as the others do." [*The journalist "forgot" to list also GHM and MRG-G which worked closely with the NGOs mentioned on this project*].

Maroula Plika

04/10/2000: *Eleftherotipia*

3. "The bombardment of civilians in Limnos"

The explosion of an un-detonated bomb located in the military exercise field of Propuli of Municipality of Atsikis, Limnos, caused serious injury to Roma, Irini Omer, 32 years old and six months pregnant. This event happened when Roma were collecting empty brass cartridges from the field and selling them as metal. Irini Omer was transported urgently to an Athens hospital where she underwent surgery. Despite the efforts of the doctors, she remained blind and is in danger of remaining deaf.

A second serious event, making matters worse, was the Military Commandership of Limnos Island implementation of military exercises in the same area without a prior announcement. Through a letter sent to Minister of Defence and other people in charge, the inhabitants and the mayor of the region, Mr. G. Archontidis, denounced this unacceptable act of the Military Commandership and requested immediate relocation of the military field. On 30 March 2000, this problem was discussed in Parliament, through a question made to vice-Minister of Defeat from the deputy of Communist Party, S. Skopelitis.

11/10/2000: *Eletherotipia*

4. "Pirgos: Affection for Roma"

The mayor of Pirgo, Gravrilis Liatsis, on 10 October, inaugurated the Center of Creative Vocation for the Roma children of the 'Baltziki' settlement near the Alfios River. This Center will operate at first with two sections: one of enforced instruction to develop the reading and writing skills of Roma children, and another of creative vocation through the different activities they will spend their time in a creative way. Giorgios Panagoulis, a retired teacher, will provide his services as a volunteer.

At the ceremony were present parents of Roma children, the proclaimed leader of Roma, K. Chalilopoulos, and the pediatrician T. Papadopoulos.

At the same time, the results of medical research carried out in the nearby Arkadia prefecture on 7 permanent settlements of 44 Roma families (total population of 255 of which 161 are children) living around Tripoli by the Pneumonological Department of the Panarkadian Hospital, caused sensation at a recent medical conference. The research, was part of a program involving the supervision and prevention of tuberculosis in Greece. One of the objectives was to vaccinate Roma children under the age of 18 around Tripoli. The results of the research showed that only 67.66% out of the 133 examined children had medical records, that only 50% had never been vaccinated, that 15-22% of them were partially vaccinated and not one child under 5 years old had ever received any of the basic vaccinations.

17/10/2000: *Eleftherotypia*

5. “An exhibition regarding the culture of Roma”

The Olympic KEK organized, on 20-24 October, in Amaliada, an exhibition regarding the traditional culture of Roma. The exhibition included special tastes of Roma cuisine, an exhibition of photographs and the traditional Roma dances and songs.

On 21 October at the Municipality Palace ‘Lazarakios’, a meeting took place on the Roma where several researchers, sociologists, linguist, the local authorities and others participated. Amongst them was the director of Network Rom, M. Radis, and the linguist E. Marselos, the social worker K. Sklavou, the researcher Christina Rougheri, and others. The representative of Municipality of Venice, Italy, was invited to share his experiences on issues of Roma education and training in Italy.

19/10/2000: *Avgi*

6. “‘Decentralization’ from...Roma pupils”

In the recent years, the 2nd Elementary School of Chalastra, has made positive attempts to integrate Roma pupils of the area into the local school environment. These attempts were awarded and financially boost by the president of the Left Party, N. Konstandopoulos. Nevertheless the issue of the education of Roma does not seem to effect the sensibilities of the bureaucrats of Elementary Education.

The Head of the Directory of Primary Education in the area decided to transfer 10 out of 19 Roma pupils to another school claiming that it was overcrowded. It was not even considered that additional teaching staff could be requested. Of course it was not taken in consideration that this way the children may give up school discouraged by the new environment which may be racist and discriminatory towards Roma children.

Maroula Plika