

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

**SEPTEMBER 2000**

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

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09/09/2000: Eleftherotypia

***1. Roma visit the President***

For the first time, the Greek president, Kostas Stefanopoulos welcomed to the Presidency Palace the spokesperson Yannis Chalilopoulos and three other members of one Roma Union, the Association of Greek Roma. [*We must add that Mr. Chalilopoulos in fact does not represent the Roma community as such, but only a few Roma families and that he has never expressed himself publicly against many cases of persecution and discrimination of the Roma community in Greece in the last years. He has also criticized the IRU's decision to seek the status of nation without state for the Roma, insisting that he would rather be only Greek than only Rom*].

Mr Stefanopoulos wanted to be informed about the problems of the Roma community in Greece. Mr. Chalilopoulos discussed with him problems regarding Roma settlements, education and most importantly, the appropriate measures that must be taken to confront racism in society against the

Roma. They also discussed how the media could focus upon the problems of the Roma community to inform the public.

Both sides agreed to meet at least once a year to discuss the problems confronting the Roma of Greece. Mr Chalilopulos expressed optimism about these new efforts made by the government to communicate with the Roma community. (Georgia Dhama)

13/09/2000: Eleftherotypia

## ***2. Illiterates with...license***

In the framework of a program realized by the Ministry of Public Work and in collaboration with the Municipality of Pyrgos, important statistics have been collected about the Roma living in the region of Pyrgos and nearby.

These statistics show that Roma men and women usually marry from the age of 18 and 14 years old respectively; that they have an extremely low level of education: 52,4 % of men and 70,2 % of women are illiterate. In addition they show that from 61,8% Roma car owners only 49,1 % have a driver's license.

Most Roma men are laborers, field-workers, street-vendors, basket makers, etc. In their leisure time, they prefer to watch television, listen to music, attend family gatherings and go to the cabarets.

On Thursday, 15 September, at a meeting on 'The Challenge of the Roma's Isolation from the Market Place,' the aforementioned statistics will be presented. The representatives of different Roma organizations and Deputy Minister of Finance, Giannis Zafiropulos, are expected to attend this meeting.

Makis Nodharos

21/09/2000: Eleftherotypia

## ***3. Photograph exhibition about Roma***

On 28 September, in the gallery 'Apogio', an exhibition of photographs from the every day life of the Roma of Galikos Potamos, area of Thessaloniki, will be inaugurated. The photographer of these black-and-white photos is Magdha Pantzara, a member of the DROM Network [*an NGO working on Roma issues in the area of Thessaloniki*].

The problems of the Roma in this area became known to the public when the leader of the Greek Party of the Coalition of the Left baptized a Roma child and when the catastrophic effect from last year's floods were shown on TV.

The Roma of this area will be relocated soon in the new settlement of the Gonou's camp in Diavata, Thessaloniki. The Prime Minister will inaugurate this new model Roma settlement.

6/9/2000/ Eleftherotypia

#### **4. Family traffics drugs**

Four Gypsies [*Roma*] were arrested, on 4 September, in their illegally constructed house in Menidi, by the anti-drug police unit. The police forces arrested them while they were trying to sell drugs to Vasilis Liapis, 21 years old. According to the police they had set up a family business for selling drugs. The persons arrested are: Spiros Katsaris, 48 years old, his wife Marianthi, 49 years old, their son Konstandinos, 25 years old and their sister-in-law Christina Basilari, 24 years old. In their possession were found and confiscated various quantities of heroin, cocaine, hashish and other drugs related paraphernalia.

06/09/200: Eleftherotypia

#### **5. A Roma dictionary from a pensioner in Ilia**

A pensioner, with a rare sensibility for the Roma people, successfully compiled the vocabulary and the grammar of the Romani language.

Mr Dionysis Maniatis, pensioner from Pyrgos, Ilias, initiated 7 years ago his recording of the Romani language. His first step was having contact with the gypsy [*Roma*] people of the region of Ilia. He contacted first the Roma of Gastuni, then Kavasilo, Neohori, and Amaliadha, and also, other Roma who lived temporarily in the area. These people became for Mr Maniatis the first source and the principal base for the compilation of the dictionary which contains more than 7.000 words.

He said yesterday that: «The vocabulary and the grammar are written in the Romani language, in Greek and English and are already finished except of some small details». He also claimed that a number of American publishing houses have shown interest in his work.

M. Nodharos

18/09/2000: Paratiritis

#### **6. Ifestos.....something must be done**

The Ifestos settlement (in Komotini) ...across the street...the characteristic smells of garbage.... garbage, which has been accumulated there to remind us of what, I wonder? Indolence... debasement... in an area which, in perspective, looks as if it could be developed...

I wonder why it is so difficult for this place to be cleaned? To be used as a playground or, at least, let it be a tidy area. The people who live in front of this area suffer. The smell, microbes, and the heat...the view is terrible. No one can be contented looking at this. However, an effortless solution is in the 'hands' of the Municipality. The photos demonstrate the reality of the situation. A reality which actually offends. This place immediately must be cleaned and used for the good of the community.

Stamatis Sakellion

05/09/2000: Avghi

### ***7. Roma under pogrom***

Not so long ago, the nomadic Roma, living in the margins of society, were able to find free land (public land) to pitch their tent. This way of living became characteristic of their race. It seemed romantic and sometimes it inspired songs about a 'beautiful gypsy girl, lived there in the countryside' ....

Then 'development' came and tourism became the most beneficial field of the economy. However, for Roma things became worse. Neither landlords nor villagers wanted the Roma present in their recently developed villages. The romantic attitude was transformed into racism.

Racist mayors forbade the Roma to enter in 'their' cities and threw them out from the administrative borders of their municipalities, cutting off water and electricity, even demolishing their tent-homes. The Municipalities of Aspropyrgos, Nea Alikarnasu, Iraklio Kritis and, the most publicized case of Nea Kios, are some recent examples of this discriminatory policy.

It should not be forgotten that these mayors represent their 'people', that is, their voters. Paraphrasing Marx, racism has a 'material base' and when the ideology has a material base it becomes an instrument to control. The state with the three distinct authorities is the culprit: the first authority is the legislative authority that refuses to work on the project to establish self-administrated settlements for Roma that the Party of the Coalition of the Left and non-governmental organizations have recommended. The second authority is the judiciary authority that looks at the Roma defendants with suspicion. The third authority is the executive one that violently invades Roma homes.

In this nightmarish atmosphere children are raised far away from school and stillborn to become beggars. The majority of them are infected by HVB. It will be a surprise if these children will not end up in the margins of society, full of hate because of this treatment.

The International Union of Roma, in order to secure the fundamental rights in proportion with those of national minorities, officially demanded that the Roma be recognized as 'nation without a state'. Some Greek Roma representatives disagreed with this idea because they believe they are first Greek. They also argued that American imperialism is behind the International Roma Union's

decision to threaten the identity of European nations. The Roma, which expressed the above opinions, may be among the privileged ones, but the ordinary Roma who live in tents have a different opinion.

Greek Helsinki Monitor, on 15 August at the meeting of the 'Commission for The Elimination of Racial Discrimination' denounced the prevailing situation in Greece. The exposure of the fact that Attica is being cleansed from Roma in order to have available places for construction for the Olympic games of 2004, has caused sensation. True or pretext? Nobody in charge answered to this question.

Dionysis Gousetis

10/08/2000: Paratiritis

### **8. Programs for the rehabilitation of Roma**

The mayor of Komotini, G. Papadriellis, told 'Paratiritis' [*a daily newspaper of Komotini, Western Thrace*] that the contract that was previously signed between the Ministry of Environment and Public Works and the Municipality of Komotini about the process of transferring the Roma settlement of 'Alan Koyu' to another place was being reactivated. This reactivation foresees some Municipalities' obligations as to find the right place where the settlement will be transferred by method of expropriation. The Municipality is obliged to expropriate the area through the court due to the high cost of land.

Mr. Papadriellis has committed 400 million drachmas from the Ministry to be used for the construction of an infrastructure for the new Roma settlement. He also added that the Municipality is trying to secure additional money for the construction of houses in the area through other European Programs.

The mayor also stressed an interest shown by the Ministry of Interior and especially the Minister V. Papandreou for the rehabilitation of the Roma settlements Alan Koyu and Ifestos. As a result the Municipality will be performing an assessment report concerning the problems of these population groups in the region.

Giannis Gianginis

30/10/2000: Ta Nea

### **9. The rehabilitation of Roma**

The case of the five hundred thousand Roma who were victims of the genocide by the Nazis was kept in the dark because of the Jewish pogrom. Finally, in 1982 Germany officially recognized the crimes of the Nazis against the Roma community. 'The case of the Roma was held up because after the Second World War, the Alliance was mainly interested in recognizing the

Jewish victims of the Holocaust,' stated Romani Roze, the director of the Cultural Center for Documentation of the Rom Community, inaugurated in 1997 in Heidelberg. The Cultural Center has organized a striking exhibition displaying personal documents pertaining to the Roma's pogrom since 1930.

The visitor can learn how the Rom were forced to have different identification cards with 'Z,' how they were used for biological experiments, and how they were sent to the frontline in Africa, as a shield for the German army. All of these terrible actions were done for the sake of the purity of the German blood. Presently, Chancellor Schroeder supports the construction of a monument to honor the sacrifice of the Roma.

25/08/2000, Gekonota (Patras)

### ***10. In Parliament the case of the Roma***

In the framework of parliamentary control, the deputy of the party of New Democracy, Nikos Nikolopoulos, raised a very important issue in the Greek Parliament. The deputy urged the Ministers in charge to find immediately a solution for the miserable living conditions of the Roma settlement in the Municipality of Ahaia. Mr. Nikolopoulos, stressing a statement made by Greek Helsinki Monitor, confirmed that the Municipality of Ahaia is notorious for violating Roma rights.

26/09/2000: Kathimerini

### ***12. The good of education and the foreigners***

(D. K Chalkiotis is the Secretary of Education for Greeks Abroad and Intercultural Education of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs).

Overwhelming changes have influenced Greek society to become a multicultural reality. In this new social atmosphere education plays a very important role for the prevention and elimination of stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and xenophobia, which all threaten social tolerance within a multicultural society.

Through the funding from the Third Support Program of EC for the period 2000-2006, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has realized three programs among which is dealing with the "Education of Roma children." Mr. Chalkiotis claims the results of the program are spectacular.