

FOCUS: ROMA IN GREECE

EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTER



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Cover photo: **Romani boy in the Aspropyrgos settlement on the outskirts of Athens.**

PHOTO: GREEK HELSINKI MONITOR

Whispers of abuse

Claude Cahn

ROMA fever burst on Greece in early 1998, as a result of a hit television series called “Whispers of the Heart”, centering on the story of a love affair between a non-Romani man and a Romani woman. Legends of proud, hot-tempered, unpredictable, free-spirited Roma were reinvigorated for mass consumption and became a renovated part of the collective knowledge base. Greece’s discovery of Roma in 1998 was much akin to Western Europe’s discovery of Greece in the 1960s, as a result of such films as *Never on a Sunday* and *Zorba the Greek*; the subject, dressed up for the viewing, was rinsed clean of those elements which might unsettle the public or foster self-scrutiny.

The *ERRC* knows a different Greece. *ERRC* field research and regular monitoring have revealed that the living conditions of a great part of Greece’s 150,000-300,000 Roma are deplorable; that Roma in Greece suffer discrimination in nearly every sphere of public life, as well as expulsion from the places where they live; and that violent abuses, including shooting deaths of Roma by police officers, are frequently reported. Not a single organisation, individual or government official with whom the *ERRC* has spoken since opening offices could report a single instance in which a police officer had been convicted of a crime perpetrated against a Rom.

In its “Second Report on Greece”, adopted on December 10, 1999, the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) drew similar conclusions:

Roma/Gypsies living in camps often face extremely harsh conditions. In recent years, including 1999, some municipal authorities have expelled communities of Roma/Gypsies from camps in which they have lived for many years, in certain cases without providing alternative accommodation. This has sometimes resulted in Roma/Gypsies being repeatedly expelled from each new place they attempted to settle. These expulsions were sometimes accompanied, apparently unhindered by the police, by the destruction and arson of houses, and by threats and humiliating treatment by local authorities and municipal employees. [...]

Roma/Gypsies are reported to be excluded from many normal citizenship rights and benefits. The integration of Roma/Gypsies in the social security system is low. [...]

Roma/Gypsies are also reported to experience discrimination in various areas of public life. They face discrimination when attempting to rent accommodation. They are sometimes denied access to public places such as discotheques, cafes, bars, etc. They also frequently experience discriminatory treatment and sometimes violence and abuse on the part of the police.

The modest collection presented here of *ERRC* news and articles pertaining to Roma in Greece is the product of four years of monitoring and reporting on the most extreme abuses which have come to light. It is timed to coincide with review of Greece by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The compilation does not aim to present a comprehensive view of the situation of Roma in Greece, nor to address the Greece’s complex relationship with minorities and immigrants. The material presented here also does not engage significantly with the legacy of the Greek ideology, a legacy which, according to ECRI, may have left members of the local and national administration, as well as significant parts of the public, with the tendency “to see recognition of multiculturalism as a threat to national identity.”

While Romani and non-Romani civil society remains trapped in the amber of Greek nationalism, the rights of Roma too have remained suspended in a seemingly timeless dynamic. A Romani man travelling on an open road must now — as ever — expect to be stopped by police on suspicion of having stolen the automobile he is driving. A Romani woman in a traditional skirt attracts attention because it is widely held that she must be concealing hashish under it. Municipal authorities regard the presence of Roma in the locality as a nuisance to be expelled; Romani dwellings seem to be magnets for bulldozers. The lives of Roma throughout Greece careen from one police control to another, counting time before the next local official comes with a notice to move on or a machine for knocking house and home to the ground. Roma are kept more or less in a state of pariah circulation. It is hoped that strong action by the CERD will be important in breaking this cycle.

FOCUS: ROMA IN GREECE

Spring 1997

● Police excesses against Roma in Greece

At approximately 6:00 AM on October 27, 1996, police officers stormed the Roma camp in Ano Liosia, Attica, on the pretext of arresting a 21-year-old Rom suspected of selling hashish. The suspect was not there at the time, so the police took his mother and sister into custody, probably in the hope that the suspect would turn himself in. The mother and sister were later released without being charged. As the police were leaving, a verbal exchange allegedly took place between individual Roma and policemen.

According to some sources at the time of the first raid, stones were thrown at the police. This formed the justification for a more serious raid of the camp later that morning, which resulted in the destruction of property and threats and intimidation of the camp's residents. Still on the same day, October 27, Minister of Public Order and former Vice-President of the European Parliament G. Romaïos stated publicly that, "the police carried out its job very well in this case" and added, in reply to claims of police abuse of Roma,

"We should all be sceptical about what Gypsies say."

In another incident of police excesses involving Roma in Greece, police officers shot and killed a Romani man at a police roadblock near Livadia, Boetia. The shooting took place after police set up a roadblock on November 19, 1996 in an attempt to catch a Romani man named Ioannis Christakis, who was suspected of murder. Around midday, the police pulled over five agricultural vehicles and forced approximately 35 Roma to lie face down in the road. Police officer Dimitris Trimis shot and killed 45-year-old Anastasios Mouratis, father of six and the driver of the first car, when Mouratis, lying face down and unarmed, "made a threatening gesture". Witnesses later claimed that this "threatening gesture" had been to raise his head and look in the direction of his two under-age children, who were also lying face-down in the road. Officer Mouratis was suspended from duty pending the result of an inquiry into the circumstances of the incident. (*Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

Spring 1997

Summer 1997

● **Greek authorities resettle Roma of Ano Liosia in restrictive camp**

According to information received by the *ERRC*, following the publication of several articles in the Greek press portraying Roma as drug dealers, in mid-April municipal authorities forcibly liquidated the Roma settlement of Ano Liosia and moved the Roma living there to a new area.

The transfer of the Roma families was reportedly accomplished with threats. Local officials gave the Ano Liosia Roma community as a whole an ultimatum to evacuate the area within several hours. Roma allege that they were told that they would be removed violently if they did not abandon the settlement immediately. This threat derived potency from its associative connotations, since the Roma settlement at Ano Liosia has previously been subjected to police raids, the most recent of which took place on October 27, 1996. The October raids were characterised by the destruction of personal property and the illegal detention of at least two residents of the area (See "Roma rights news", Spring 1997, p.5).

During the mid-April events, Roma in possession of local residence permits were promised better conditions in the new location offered by the authorities. However, the majority of the group did not possess residence permits, and these were simply ordered to leave. Indeed, shortly thereafter, bulldozers razed the entire settlement, allegedly destroying personal property in the process.

Roma in possession of valid local residence permits — approximately 124 individuals from 25 of the original 100 families were evidently resettled in an area adjacent to a municipal parking lot. Despite official assurances, the facilities were sub-standard: the plumbing in the "temporary" housing provided no running water; there were four public toilets for

all 124 persons; the electrical facilities experienced frequent power failures. A delegation of municipal authorities which visited the new settlement promised speedy action to correct the problems, but as of July 23, 1997, none of these promises had been fulfilled.

The *European Roma Rights Center* was disturbed to learn that, several days after the forced relocation, municipal authorities surrounded the new settlement with a wire fence and placed armed guards at the only opening. These guards allegedly have been searching residents' automobiles, demanding to see the identification papers of anyone entering, and questioning inhabitants about personal matters. Visitors have reportedly been forbidden from entering the settlement after 9 PM. One Romani man in the new settlement told the *Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)*, "The guards did not let our relatives come inside and visit us, although they showed their identity cards."

Roma camps surrounded by wire fences and armed guards recall the worst atrocities this century has witnessed. The *ERRC* and the *GHM* have issued separate appeals to Greek Prime Minister Simitis to eliminate the ghetto-like conditions of the camp without delay. Since the *ERRC* issued protest, however, there have been further developments: a further ten dwellings in Ano Liosia were reportedly torn down on May 26 under the pretext that they had been "illegally constructed". The *GHM* states that all ten dwellings had been built on land which the Roma in question own. The *GHM* has also documented recent abuses including expulsions and the denial of sanitary facilities in the municipalities of Evosmos, Kalamata, Nea Alikarnassos, Phinikas, Pyrgos and Trikala. (*ERRC, Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

● Community expulsions in Greece

Reports from Greece indicate widespread attempts by municipal authorities to expel Roma from settlements, or else to make conditions unbearable enough that Roma are forced to leave.

On July 27, the Greek daily *Epohi* reported that the Prefecture ordered the destruction of many of the Roma dwellings in the Pefkakia area of Agia Paraskevi. The municipal council of the area was reportedly unanimous in its support of the decision. The municipal authorities attempted to justify the decision by claiming that the land belonged to thirteen non-Roma families. The decision to destroy the settlement was evidently not immediately carried out, due to the refusal of municipal employees to acquiesce to the wishes of the mayor.

According to a *Greek Helsinki Monitor* report of August 3, however, bulldozers did eventually destroy the homes of twenty Roma families.

Forced expulsion is not the only means used by local authorities in Greece to expel Roma, however. At the end of May 1997, the municipal authorities of Nea Alikarnassos in Kriti allegedly stopped collecting the refuse in the Roma settlement there. The ensuing unsanitary conditions have resulted in widespread disease among Roma. According to a report in *Exoussia* on July 22, due to the non-collection of refuse from the settlement and the resulting unhygienic conditions, half of all the Roma there suffer from hepatitis A and B. Mr Kalamiotis, Mayor of Nea Alikarnassos, has been urging the government to improve the settlement infrastructure, possibly due to the fact that he himself is being sued for allowing the situation to deteriorate to such an extent. Mr Leonidas Drandakis, a lawyer of Iraklion of Kriti and a member of *Amnesty International* sued him for "violation of duty" and "ill treatment" of the Roma, reported *Greek Helsinki Monitor* on August 3. The case had not yet been brought to court at the time of writing. The district attorney has also taken legal action against the mayor for "the

creation of danger to the public health", which constitutes a criminal offence. Following this legal action, the mayor was forced to take some positive steps such as ordering disinfection and supplying large rubbish bins, etc. Conditions in Nea Alikarnassos for the moment, however, remain grim. Alleged "official" attempts are being made to relocate the Roma from the area, but this in itself is proving to be an impossible task as no other municipality is willing to accept them.

Similar community expulsions and attempted community expulsions have taken place all over Greece. Kathimerini reported on July 18 that in the Roma settlement in Patras, failure by the authorities to provide any kind of infrastructure for the Roma has resulted in unsanitary conditions. This in turn has led to at least ten cases of meningitis among children living there. The *ERRC* has also learned that the municipal authorities of Trikala have destroyed the homes of twenty families of Roma in the areas of Agroviz and Pyrgos, and have expelled the Roma living there. Further, according to information received by the *ERRC*, on June 10, 1997, the tribunal of Thessaloniki ordered the expulsion of Roma from the area of Evosmos. The mayor of Evosmos and some owners had previously submitted a petition of temporary measures against 91 families of Roma on the grounds that the neighbourhood where they live is designated for recreational purposes. According to the court decision, the Roma of Evosmos will be imprisoned and fined 500,000 Drachma each if they refuse to leave the area.

On September 3, the *ERRC* wrote to Greek Prime Minister Simitis, appealing to his office to undertake immediate measures to stop the efforts of municipal authorities from expelling Roma from settlements. The *ERRC* also expressed frustration that despite appeals by numerous non-governmental organisations including the *ERRC*, a restrictive camp established by Greek authorities in Ano Liosia remain. (*ERRC, Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

Autumn 1997

Winter/1998

● **Greek Roma settlements:
police raids, inhuman conditions**

On November 1, 1997, the Greek daily *Exoussia* reported a raid by police on the Roma settlement in Zephyri, a suburb of Athens. The officers were apparently looking for large quantities of hashish, which they subsequently failed to find.

According to the report, the police opened fire during the raid. The authorities allegedly claimed that the raid was justified since drug users had identified the camp as a place from which they were supplied. On November 30, the *Greek Helsinki Monitor* wrote a letter to Prime Minister Simitis, condemning such practices by police, claiming that they merely serve to enforce racist attitudes.

On October 2, 1997, *Exoussia* reported that *Amnesty International* representative Mr Drandakis had criticised the authorities for allowing conditions in the Romani settlement at Nea Alikarnassos to deteriorate badly and he denounced the state as racist. His comments were prompted by the arrest of a Romani woman, which left her four young children alone while the youngest child needed urgent medical attention. According to *Exoussia*, the infant received this only after the intervention of Mr Drandakis and the woman's lawyer. The article also reported a claim by a representative of a local Romani organisation that half of the children in the settlement

at Nea Alikarnassos suffer from hepatitis. The state authorities allegedly refuse to vaccinate the children on grounds of cost.

The Greek press was especially pre-occupied with sanitary conditions in Roma settlements during the period. The Greek daily *Adesmeftos Typos* reported on December 11, 1997, that the non-governmental organisation *Médecins du Monde* has expressed deep concern over the high mortality rate among Roma, particularly among Romani children. The report states that sixty out of every thousand Romani children in Greece die before their first birthday. Among those between two and five years of age, twenty out of every thousand children presently die. The report goes on to claim that between 30% and 35% of the Romani children there die of illnesses directly related to the unsanitary conditions in which they are forced to live, with a further 10% suffering accidental deaths. Similarly, on September 9, 1997, *Adesmeftos Typos* reported that twenty-eight Romani children living in the settlement of Kato Ahaia have been bitten by rats and that none of the children has been vaccinated. Municipal authorities are also allegedly negligent in the collection of refuse and, according to the newspaper, have refused to issue a permit for the construction of a sewer system. (*Adesmeftos Typos*, *ERRC*, *Exoussia*, *Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

● **Popular TV show brings Romani issues to the majority in Greece**

According to the Greek newspaper *Nea*, the Greek TV serial, *Whispers of the Heart*, has broken all ratings records. Apparently the whole country has been avidly following the love story between the central character, a Romani woman, and a non-Romani man, and the dilemma of the former over whether or not she should marry a Rom. Filming takes place in a Romani settlement in Athens and *Nea* reports that while the Roma were wary of the cameras at first and suspicious of the motives behind the serial, they now say that they thoroughly enjoy the experience.

Not all of the feedback has been positive, however. On February 22, the newspaper *Vima* reported that some Roma are angry at the portrayal of their lives in the serial, claiming that it presents them as inferior people who are lacking in culture and civility. It should be noted, however, that whichever way the serial is viewed, it has succeeded in bringing the Roma to the attention of the majority in Greece for reasons other than those negative ones normally cited by the media. (*Nea, Vima*)

● **Roma face housing rights' violations in Greece**

The *Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)* reported that the mayor of the Ano Liosia district of Athens refused to allow a Rom to build a house on a piece of land which he legally owned. The Rom, Mr Loukas Christakis, bought the land three years ago and applied for planning permission to build a house. The surveyor, the town planner, and the head topographer all agreed that the building could proceed. Mr Christakis, however, needed a document affirming ownership from the town council. The latter, however, refused to grant Mr Christakis this document. Mr Christakis then referred the matter to his lawyer, who made a deposition with the District Attorney of the First Court in Athens. The latter then gave a written order to the mayor and the head of municipal technical services of the Ano Liosia council, ordering them to issue the ownership certificate at once. This order was evidently ignored. The *Greek Helsinki Monitor* presented the above facts to the deputy of

Synaspismos, Ms Nitsa Loule, who tabled the question in Parliament on February 16, addressing the Minister of the Interior, Public Justice, and Decentralisation.

Another case presented to Ms Loule by the *GHM* was that of Mr A. Tsakiris, also from Ano Liosia. On December 31, 1992, Mr Tsakiris applied for planning permission for a house on land which he owned. He was not granted the permission. On September 21, 1993, the Ano Liosia Council decided to expropriate both the land and the house, and in October 1993, the Council Board of Ano Liosia did so. Ownership of the land was subsequently transferred to a local monastery, on the grounds that it was regarded as an extension of the surrounding area of a chapel, and was therefore for public use. Mr Tsakiris was promised another piece of land as compensation, but he has not yet been provided with this. He currently lives, with his eight children, in a nylon shack in the Agio Georgiou area of Ano Liosia. Mr Tsakiris has had to be hospitalised for a cardiac operation. His relatives assert that his condition has been aggravated by his situation. (*Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

● **Roma forbidden access to the rubbish dump in Aspropyrgos, Greece**

The *Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)* reported on January 18 that the Roma in the settlement at Aspropyrgos, a town on the northwestern outskirts of Athens, have been forbidden access to the rubbish dump there. This has had serious implications for the Roma in the settlement, as they rely on collecting recyclable items at the dump for their livelihood. According to the *GHM*, the Roma from the most central of the three settlements in Aspropyrgos have moved to alternative sites in the province seeking other employment, such as fruit picking. Several of the Roma have gone to areas of the province in which they had relatives living and there are therefore two new settlements in Aspropyrgos, each comprising approximately twenty families. The *GHM* asserts that these settlements have neither electricity nor running water, and hygiene is therefore practically non-existent. The organisation now aims to register the Roma living in both settlements and carry out vaccinations there. (*Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

Summer/1998

A family of Greek Orthodox Roma in Evosmos, Thessaloniki. About 500 out of the 3,000 inhabitants of this rat-ridden urban ghetto, lacking water and electricity, did not have any form of ID in May 1998 at the time of the ERRC visit. In addition to adults, babies born outside hospital also remain undocumented, due to bureaucratic hurdles.

● Police killing and abuses in Greece

During a field mission conducted by the ERRC with the assistance of the *Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)* in May 1998, numerous recent instances of police abuse against Roma in Greece were documented. In one such incident, on May 8, 1998, 17-year-old Lazaros Bekos and 18-year-old Lefteris Kotropoulos were arrested by police in Mesolonghi, western Greece, for attempting to break into an ice-cream kiosk. Bekos alleges that a plainclothes officer struck him on the back of the head with a gun at the time of the arrest. Both youths were then taken to the police station where additional abuse is alleged to have taken place.

According to Bekos, officers struck him on the head, stomach and all over his body with a truncheon. An officer then took an iron bar and held it to his throat saying that he would asphyxiate him if he did not tell the truth. Bekos

said that he pushed the officer back and was then struck on the back with the iron bar and kicked on the neck. Both young men were kept in custody overnight. The youths allege that police further abused them next morning. During the entire period of their detention neither of the two youths were allowed to telephone their relatives.

Bekos stated that next morning the interrogations began again. First, he was interrogated by the station's deputy commissioner. Bekos stated that the deputy commissioner repeatedly tried to force him to tell him the whereabouts of a drug dealer. Later he was interrogated by two plainclothes officers. He said, "One after the other, they beat me, slapped me, and hit me with truncheons on the legs, neck and shoulders." Bekos stated that when the station commander arrived, he told the officers to stop the beatings but that they continued until he returned and told them to stop a second time. Mr Kotropoulos confirmed



Mr Bekos's allegations and stated that he was similarly treated.

On the following day a medical doctor examined the youths. The doctor certified the presence of injuries consistent with the allegations. The medical certificate reports that the injuries were "inflicted with a 'blunt instrument'" about 24 hours before the victim's examination. The two youths have filed a complaint against the police with the help of the *Greek Helsinki Monitor*.

Police abuse cases were reported in the Raxa area of Trikala, central Greece. Roma testified to the *ERRC* that local police had conducted a night invasion of the Gypsy settlement there. Residents told the *ERRC* that the police invaded the homes, waking up small children and holding guns to people's heads. The justification for this invasion was to search for drugs. Searches in Romani settlements such as Trikala take place very often under the pretext of searching for drugs, for persons with unpaid fines or working without a permit. The police raid in question was performed with a district attorney present. The *ERRC* field research established that raids of this type are common. In some cases, male police officers have performed body search on women in early morning hours, when women are not yet dressed.

The Trikala settlement faces a range of typical problems other than police abuse. On May 8, 1998, the date of the *ERRC* and *GHM* visit to Trikala, residents said that they had been without water and electricity for twenty days and that no one had shown up to fix the problem. One week prior to the *ERRC* and *GHM* visit, a group of locals had reportedly shown up on tractors and tried to tear down the Gypsies' shanties but were prevented and turned away by local Roma.

The *ERRC* further documented instances of police abuse against the Roma in Tyrnavos, central Greece. Roma in Tyrnavos said that they are beaten up in police stations because police believe that since they are Gypsies, they are inclined to crime. *Eleftherotypia* reported on June 11 that an 11-year-old Romani boy had been beaten in the central market in Mytilini, Lesvos Island of the northern Aegean region. Roma all around Greece report that they are targets of violent police abuse. (*ERRC*, *GHM*)

● **Orthodox priest in Greece refuses to baptize Romani children**

On May 18, 1998, the Greek daily *Eleftherotypia* reported that the vicar of



St. Nicolas's church in Mytilini refused to baptize two Romani children. The vicar claimed that he could not baptize anyone who did not have a birth certificate. Many Roma in Greece do not have such documents. The children's godfather-to-be said that the process of obtaining the necessary papers is difficult for all Greek citizens but is especially so for Roma, due to high rates of illiteracy. For example, in order to obtain registration papers, an applicant must have papers certifying their parents' marriage. Many Roma have traditional marriages and therefore have not obtained official marriage documents. The same priests reportedly have baptised illegal non-Orthodox immigrants who also do not have birth certificates. *Eleftherotypia* reported on May 23, 1998, that a local priest had been willing to disregard the rules of the region's metropolitan bishop and take it upon himself to baptise the two children. All this priest asked for was a declaration from the parents that the children had not been baptised before. (*Eleftherotypia*)

Lazaros Bekos (left) and Lefteris Kotropoulos (centre) together with a friend, on May 9, 1998, the day following a night of suffering and pain in police custody in Mesolonghi, western Greece. They are saying goodbye to the *ERRC* representative, pledging that nothing will intimidate them in the months to come during the lawsuit they are bringing against the police.

PHOTO: *ERRC*

1/1999

● Abuse of Roma by police and municipal authorities in Greece

Observers of the *ERRC* and the *Greek Helsinki Monitor* reported that on February 16, employees of the municipal authorities and police officers destroyed and burned five Romani barracks in the Nea Zoi settlement at Aspropyrgos, a town approximately thirty kilometres from Athens. The settlement comprised twelve barracks altogether, with around one hundred inhabitants.

Six employees of the local municipality with a water tanker, two bulldozers, a jeep, and three police cars with ten to twelve police officers arrived at the Aspropyrgos settlement during the daytime on February 16. The Roma were not given enough time to remove their possessions. Some of the Romani residents were not present at the time of the operation. The employees of the municipality destroyed five barracks with the two bulldozers and set the rubble on fire. The operation was allegedly led by Mr Constantinos Tsiggos, Deputy Mayor of Aspropyrgos, and a senior officer of the local police department.

Municipal authorities have also recently threatened Roma from the Messinai Region in southern Greece with eviction. However, the *Epohi* newspaper reported on December 20, 1998, that the Kalamata Committee for Human Rights and against Racism had succeeded in convincing the local authorities not to evict the Roma who had settled in the industrial region of Sperxogeia in the municipality of Messini. The municipalities of Kalamata, Messini and Melegalas agreed to create four settlements for the approximately 2000 Roma in the region. Twenty-five Romani children from the settlement are already registered at school. On the other hand, the strong objections of the non-Romani local population have, according to officials, prevented the authorities from installing running water.

The *Greek Helsinki Monitor* has also alleged abuse by municipal authorities of the Roma living by the Gallikos river, Thessaloniki, northern Greece. The river has overflowed its banks five times between November 1998 and January 1999 and it is very likely that it will overflow again at the first rainstorm. These floods destroyed some barracks and other belongings of Roma. The living conditions are extremely poor in the area. The wa-

ter supply is not sufficient for the nearly 1500 Roma living there. There are fourteen containers on the site which, if filled on a daily basis, would provide enough water for all the people living there. However, only two or three of them are filled with water two or three times a week. There is no rubbish collection or sanitary drainage. In a press statement, the Greek non-governmental organisations *DROM Network for Social Rights of Roma*, *Greek Helsinki Monitor* and *Minority Rights Group-Greece* claim that the Prefecture of Thessaloniki did not fulfil obligations when it refused to move the Roma away from the river. The organisations ask for the immediate temporary resettlement of the Roma at a place adjacent to the former military barracks of Gonou, six kilometres from the current settlement. The barracks are being prepared for the permanent settlement of the Roma, but the infrastructure is not yet in place. The Prefect has not accepted the solution of temporary resettlement and announced that renovation work on the barracks would be completed by May 15, 1999. (*ERRC, Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

● Greece: charges brought against policemen for abuse of Roma in detention

The *Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)* reported that the Deputy Prosecutor of the region of Mesolonghi, Greece, Ms Efstathia Salma, had brought charges on December 18, 1998 against three policemen, A.T., H.K., and V.S. They are charged with the ill treatment of two teenage Roma, Lazaros Bekos and Eleutherios Koutropoulos, during detention at the Mesolonghi Police Station on May 7-9, 1998 (See "Roma rights news", Summer 1998, pp. 10-11).

The three policemen are accused of violating article 137(A)(3)(1) of the Greek criminal code on "torture and other offences against human dignity", "recurrent [repeated instances of] bodily harm caused by a person whose duties are the investigation of possible criminal acts, with the intent to extort from another person under his authority a confession, a deposition or a piece of information". The minimum sentence, if convicted for violation of Article 137(A)(3), is three years, which will be raised if the crime was repeated. The policemen are also charged under Arti-



cle 94(1) of the Penal Code on crimes which are repeated.

The Ministry of Public Order reportedly undertook an internal investigation after *GHM* raised the matter with the Ministry on May 11, 1998. Within the framework of this investigation, Ministry officials took signed testimony from the two Romani youths. The investigation had not

been completed at the end of 1998. The three indicted policemen were still in Mesolonghi during the investigation. They have allegedly exerted pressure on the Romani youngsters to retract their testimony, among other things by mentioning outstanding investigations into allegations against family members. (*Greek Helsinki Monitor, ERRC*)

Angelos Dzelatis, 28, was shot dead by police in the village of Halkidona, near the city of Thessaloniki on April 1, 1998, when he drove, together with two friends, by a police ambush. His mother-in-law and his wife will have to raise his one-year-old son without him. The *ERRC* mission conducted in Greece in May 1998 found that police violence against Roma and use of excessive force are widespread and routine.

PHOTO: *ERRC*

2/1999

2/1999

● **Municipal authorities in Greece expel Roma**

The Group for Initiative against Racism and Xenophobia of Heraklion reported that on March 13, the municipality of Alikarnassos on the island of Crete had issued 102 Romani families with a protocol of administrative eviction on the basis of a two-year-old decision of the municipal council (no. 329/97) to evict all "tent-dwellers", a euphemism for Roma. Some 500 Roma have lived for about fifteen years on a site between a main road and the industrial zone in Alikarnassos, without access to water, electricity, the sewage system or rubbish collection. Now the municipality allegedly wants to turn the area into a sports centre and recreational site. According to the non-governmental organisation, the local municipality refuses to register Roma as residents, although some 200 children were born on the site, and, until a separate school was set up in Heraklion for the Roma four years ago, none of the children were able to attend school as the camp was not within the administrative area of any school. The Mayor of Alikarnassos has reportedly denigrated Roma in public on numerous occasions in the past, referring to the community as a whole as dirty, quarrelsome, drug dealers and criminals. The mayor also reportedly argued at a meeting of the Municipal Council for the expulsion on the grounds that the Romani settlement spoils the sight of the region – the settlement is adjacent to the national road which connects the town with the airport – and that the hotel owners have complained that the site is an eyesore. The mayor compared the Roma living in the town with "problems" of the town such as the existence of the airport, a prison and a refuse dump. On April 16, a coalition of local non-governmental organisations including the *Greek Helsinki Monitor* and the *Drom Network for Roma Social Rights* issued a statement warning the municipality against evicting the families. Local Roma have challenged the ruling and an initial hearing in the case was set to be held on May 10. This was, however, postponed until September.

In other news, the municipality of Halandri, a suburb of Athens, tried in absentia thirteen Romani families, who had been living in a settlement for up to twenty years, for trespass on private land,

and ordered them to leave the site by April 20. The Roma negotiated a delay of ten days with the Mayor and the Public Prosecutor in order to allow the municipality time to find a viable alternative place for the Roma to live. On April 21, a round table was held at which the municipality agreed to ask the owners of the field where the current settlement was located to rent the field to the Roma for six months until a permanent solution could be found. Mr Freddy Stamos, the secretary of the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life, committed financial support from the Government for rental of the field and help in finding a permanent solution to the problem. However, at a second round-table on April 29, the municipality informed participants that the owner of the field had refused to rent it out. The municipality instead offered the Romani families money to rent a house or a field if they could find one elsewhere. The Roma accepted this offer as the only viable solution, and filed an appeal against the original court decision as it was made in absentia. In March 1999, following a series of incidents involving forceful eviction of Roma from camps in Greece, and continuous reports of the appalling conditions in these camps, the *Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)*, the *Drom Network for Roma Social Rights* and *Doctors of the World* put forward a proposal for a draft law creating self-managed camps, in collaboration with Coalition of the Democratic Left MP Ms Stella Alfieri.

The proposal describes the inhuman conditions of current camps. The proposal then suggests that each prefecture where there are Roma camps be obliged to create a plan for a self-managed camp, and to set up a special surveillance office for each camp, including members of the camp population, to oversee the development of the dwelling area. The proposal goes on to list thirteen criteria which would ensure that the new camps would not become official ghettos. These include the provision of water and electricity, waste disposal, public transport and access to education and professional training as well as the setting up of a management council elected from the residents of the camp. According to *GHM*, the camp under construction at a former military barracks for the Roma of the Gallikos river in the Thessaloniki

area (see “Snapshots from around Europe”, Roma Rights, 1/99) adheres to the conditions of the proposal. In one of a series of incidents which preceded the proposal, following the destruction of Roma shacks allegedly by municipal authorities in the Nea Zoi settlement near Aspropyrgos in February (see “Roma rights news 1/99”, p.12), *GHM* reported in March that the Roma had rebuilt their barracks and continued to live on the site. On March 1, 1999, the *ERRC* sent a

letter to the Chief Prosecutor of Greece, expressing concern about the raid. As of June 14, the Prosecutor had reportedly taken no action. *GHM* reported that the Deputy Minister of Public Affairs had twice declared to the Greek Parliament that the raid was carried out according to the law. Although the Roma were relieved to be able to remain on their site, they told *GHM* that they were afraid that the violent operation would be repeated. (*ERRC, GHM*)

2/1999 – 3/1999

3/1999

● Police attempt to evict families from settlement in Greece

The Athens-based non-governmental organisation *Greek Helsinki Monitor* reported that on June 21, 1999, the Public Prosecutor of Athens, together with policemen and bulldozers, visited the Romani settlement in the Pefkakia region of the municipality of Agia Paraskevi approximately 10 km north of Athens. They went to execute an eviction order against two Roma who had been charged *in absentia* of trespassing on private land in 1997. Without first identifying the Roma, police asked two Romani families living on the private plots in question to take their personal belongings out of their shacks and leave the area so the bulldozers could pull the shacks to the ground. The Roma argued that they needed time to remove their belongings. Lengthy negotiations followed and the Roma signed a declaration that they would vacate the area in ten days. However, the Roma in question were illiterate and could not read the eviction order. After they consulted a lawyer it was discovered that the two Romani women against whom the court decision had been taken did not live at the site. A lawyer for the families will try to block the order.

This is not the only court decision against Roma living at the Pefkakia set-

tlement, which is on both private and municipally-owned land. Two other Roma living nearby were also found guilty of trespassing on private land in 1997. The Roma were reportedly not present at the hearings. Ten Romani families living on the municipally-owned plots were served with an eviction notice at the same settlement in July 1997. The municipality destroyed the shacks built in a nearby field, owned by the municipality, on the grounds that the place was to become a sports and culture park. A new location was proposed to the Roma, but it was in the adjacent municipality of Koropi. The Roma rejected this location as it was far from their work and they feared they would be forced to live in isolation. Eventually the Roma were allowed to stay in Pefkakia, but have not been told they can permanently settle there, as the plans for building a park have not yet been abandoned.

The settlement of Pefkakia consists of twelve Romani families with approximately sixty members, who have been living there for between ten and thirty years. A municipal body called the Service for Town Planning has declared their homes illegal several times in the past, and the Roma living there have been fined. There is no water supply, electricity or sewage system in the settlement. (*Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

4/2000

● **Mayor of Greek city makes racist comments about Roma; more evictions of Roma in Greece**

On September 12, 1999, the Greek daily *Avgi* reported that Mr Apostolos Zervas, the mayor of the Zefyri municipality on the periphery of Athens, had made racist statements about Roma following the massive earthquake on September 7, 1999. According to *Avgi*, while commenting on the action taken by the municipality after the quake, Mayor Zervas stated, "We only faced problems with the Gypsies. They looted tents, made business by selling them, engaged into fights with the citizens or the municipality, attacked municipal employees and created problems with the aid distribution. We were forced to bring in the Special Police Forces to help us do our job." On September 14, Mayor Zervas made similar anti-Romani comments during a press conference when, according to the Greek daily *Eleftherotypia*, he stated, "Gypsy stories. Do not bother me with the Gypsies. Because of them, the aid mechanism is inefficient. They have been robbing the whole world." According to the Athens-based non-governmental organisation *Greek Helsinki Monitor*, the mayor's statements were reflective of the general sentiment of the public towards Roma following the earthquake. There were several news reports in the Greek press that alleged that Roma were stealing tents and food supplies intended for victims of the earthquake. The mayor later retracted his statement in *Eleftherotypia*, stating that he had been misquoted. The issue was brought before the September 22 meeting of the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)* in Vienna. In response, the Greek delegate again stated that Mr Zervas had been misquoted.

More evictions of Roma have been reported recently in Greece. On August 16, 1999, police evicted thirty-five Romani families from a camp in the town of Ioannina, in the Epirus region of Greece. According to the August 18 edition of the Greek daily *Vradini*, the Roma had been living on the site for four years and had been paying monthly rent to the owner. The eviction reportedly took place without the presence of the District Attorney and without the presentation of any eviction order. According to *Vradini*, after authorities had expelled all of the Roma from the site, a bulldozer entered the camp and razed all standing structures to the ground.

Mr Emmanouilides, the mayor of Anatoli, the municipality which governs Paralimni, declared that Roma were not welcome in the region, that they were troublemakers and were not keeping the settlement clean. The camp had been participating in a pilot project of the Greek government for the education of Roma. There had been a previous attempt to expel the Roma from the camp in Ioannina in May 1999, but following the intervention of human rights groups, authorities backed off and promised not to proceed with the expulsion, unless there was another viable site to which the Roma could be transferred. At the time of the eviction, such a site had not been provided. Evictions of Roma and the destruction of Romani property by municipal authorities is frequently reported in Greece.

Other evictions of Roma have been ordered by the Municipal Council of Rio, near the town of Patras in southern Greece. The Council took a decision to evict Roma from three settlements in the area on October 6, 1999, according to a report in the weekly paper, *Week in Rio*. The Council reportedly took the decision following protests of local residents and rumors regarding the involvement of Roma in criminal acts. As of November 30, the evictions had not yet been carried out, and there has been no public discussion of where they should resettle should the eviction take place. (*Avgi*, *Eleftherotypia*, *ERRC*, *Greek Helsinki Monitor*, *Week in Rio*, *Vradini*)

● **Police brutality against Roma in Greece**

Recent instances of police brutality have been reported in Greece. According to the Athens-based non-governmental organisation *Greek Helsinki Monitor*, one incident took place on September 12, 1999, in the Kalogreza settlement in Athens during the celebration of a baptism. Police reportedly arrived at approximately 2 AM and requested that the music be turned down. The residents did not comply with this request. A group of approximately fifteen police officers returned a half an hour later and reportedly began swearing at the Roma. When several Romani individuals tried to negotiate with the police, some officers beat and kicked them. Officers allegedly slapped two Romani women in the face. Four of the Roma were reportedly taken to the po-

lice station for identity checks, and one of them was detained in connection with an outstanding charge. The other three were released about two hours later. Under Greek law, the offense of disturbing the peace is punishable only by fine. When the *Greek Helsinki Monitor* investigated the allegations, the police officers denied beating the Roma.

A further case of police brutality in Greece also occurred on September 12, 1999. According to the *Greek Helsinki Monitor*, police physically and verbally abused a 23-year-old Romani man named Nikos Katsaris from the Chalandri camp near Nafplio in the Peloponnesus region of Greece, as well as three members of his family during a search. Mr Katsaris was with his father, his underage brother and his cousin and the men were traveling around the countryside to various car markets. According to the *Greek Helsinki*

Monitor, the police stopped them as they were leaving a car market just outside Nafplio and searched them at gunpoint. The victims reported that one of the officers swore at them, kicked and beat them. The police allegedly accused them of coming to the car market to steal. All four of the men were taken to the police station and detained in a cell with approximately ten other people. They were not abused while they were in custody. The police released the two young boys that same day and Nikos and his father were released on bail the following day. They were not charged with any crime, but the two older men were fined for working without a license and driving illegally. The *Greek Helsinki Monitor* has filed a complaint on behalf of Nikos Katsaris and his family. As of November 30, the *GHM* had received no response to the complaint. (*Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

4/1999

Aliens of Gypsy descent: Romani images in the Greek press

Christina Rougheri*

THIS paper presents and analyses images of Roma in the Greek press. I used as sources a wide range of Greek mainstream newspapers from January to August 1998. During this period, one of the most popular commercial television stations in the country, *MEGA Channel*, broadcast a serial called "Whispers of the Heart" that featured Romani themes. The series quickly became a big success, breaking all previous television rating records. For the first time in the history of Greek television, a true Romani settlement became the main stage for a mainstream series, and Roma acted in a series alongside non-Romani protagonists. The story line centred primarily on the passionate love of a Romani woman for a non-Romani man, in an "against all odds" love story. The series dealt with Romani traditions and beliefs as well as everyday problems.¹ In light of this series, this article analyses Roma rights issues in the Greek media, as well as the presence of Roma in the Greek press.

Roma in Greece constitute the largest minority in the country. Independent sources have estimated the number of Greek Roma to be as high as 350,000 out of a total population of approximately 10,000,000.² Half of these seem to be relatively well integrated into Greek society. However, the rest of the Romani population is, as *Minority Rights Group-Greece* put it, "the most marginalised social group in Greece, subject to discrimination in education, employment and housing and to police abuse. (...) They live in at least thirty slums throughout the country with some of the worst living conditions in Europe."³ According to the meagre sources available, the presence of Roma in the country dates back possibly as far as the 11th century. However, with the exception of the Muslim Roma in Western Thrace, who acquired Greek citizenship in the 1930s,⁴ the rest of the Greek Roma became citizens only in the mid 1970's. Until then, Roma had been seen and treated as "aliens of Gypsy decent".⁵ They had special identification documents which needed to be renewed every two years.⁶ This belated recognition, despite the 1954 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which calls upon states to naturalize stateless persons, impeded their integration into the Greek society and determined their future marginal position in the social, political and economic sphere.⁷

Until 1975, Roma had little involvement in political parties, cultural associations, trade unions and they were drastically underrepresented in the education system and the media. Today, many Roma continue to live without modern conveniences such as electricity, running water and telephones, and Roma have extremely limited access to education, work and health insurance. This exclusion is particularly evident in the media. Roma, like most minorities in Greece, are underrepresented in public broadcasting and commercial electronic media. Although there are exceptions, the most notable being "Whispers of the Heart", Roma are rarely ever included in mainstream programming. Greece also lacks legal and financial provision for minority electronic media, making it almost impossible for Roma to acquire their own voice in the media. In the press, articles on Roma appear regularly. Local and national, right-wing and left-wing, conservative and progressive, opposition and pro-governmental, mainstream newspapers frequently devote time and space to the Roma. However, this attention has not aided the Roma rights cause to any significant degree.

Criminals and parasites

Highlighting the ethnicity of alleged criminals is an ingrained habit of the Greek press. Stressing ethnicity, in the title or the introductory phrases of an article, is common, especially where alleged perpetrators are Albanian or Romani: "Drug Dealing between *Tsigani*⁸ and Underage People" (*Ta Nea*, 13.2.98), "An Italian Tsiganos Father Barbecued his 5-year-old Daughter and Ate her Together with his Other Two Children" (*Ethnos*, 5.3.98), "Guns and Hashish in Tsiganika Shelters"

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(*Eleftheros Typos*, 10.4.98), “Tsigana Woman Stabs Pensioner” (*Ta Nea*, 15.5.98), “Tsigani Attack Three Policemen” (*Eleftherotypia*, 20.6.98), “Underage Tsiganiki Gang Falls into Police’s Hands” (*Ta Nea*, 4.7.98), “Fishermen Attacked by Armed Tsigani” (*Eleftheros Typos*, 8.8.98). Stressing the ethnicity of lawbreakers and criminals serves no practical purpose other than to stigmatise certain groups.⁹ Additionally, it is unethical to stress the ethnicity of suspects who have not been found guilty by a court.

Frequently, when perpetrators are unknown, speculations by the police and the press include ethnicity. One example of this practice is an article in *Ta Nea* on June 16, 1998: while trying to stop a “suspicious-looking” white car, police officers were shot at by the driver and the passengers in the car. Policemen shot back at the people in the car and one of them was mortally wounded. The others fled on foot, leaving the victim behind. Although the victim had not been identified, the paper reported that “it is highly likely that the victim is Tsiganos.” The following day, it was reported that the victim was not Romani but an ethnic Albanian illegal immigrant from Albania. Speculation about the identity of suspects in the press heightens anti-Romani sentiment in Greece. The June 16 article in *Ta Nea* in particular not only neglected to cross-check the policemen’s version of the way the incident had taken place, it also endorsed police procedure, leaving unchallenged the fact that in the course of arrest, one suspect died and the others escaped.¹⁰ The tone of the article led the reader to the conclusion that the death penalty spontaneously imposed by the police was fully deserved. The article is far from unique in its unquestioning endorsement of whatever actions the police have undertaken.

Many articles perpetuate the idea that drug-dealing is something typically “Romani”. For example, an article in *Ta Nea* dated February 13, 1998, entitled “Drug Dealing between Tsigani and Underage People”, stated that the area of Zefyri — on the perimeter of Athens — was a drug market run by Roma and targeting primarily underage people. However, the article featured numerous examples of non-Romani hashish dealers. On March 4, 1998, the same paper ran another story on the Zefyri camp, claiming it was a place rife with the sale of drugs, and Roma were reported as the dealers.

Another distorting point in the coverage of (Romani) drug trafficking is the identification of Roma as hard drug dealers. In general, Roma involved in drug business tend to sell soft drugs, for example, hashish. According to police sources rarely quoted in the mainstream press, the heroin, cocaine and crack business is primarily in the hands of non-Romani dealers. Roma are not often among the suspects arrested for hard drug trafficking. Newspapers, however, rarely make the distinction. As a rule, they report on Romani hashish traffickers in the same way as dealers in hard drugs, implying the same level of threat to society. The Greek press also does not distinguish Romani petty thieves from hardened criminals. In these ways, articles present a very general and distorted picture of Roma, reinforcing the stereotypes of genetically and culturally defined criminality.

Frequently, in press reports, Roma are pictured as trouble-makers. An article in *Eleftheros Typos* on May 31, 1998, referred to the problematic coexistence of the residents of a mixed, provincial town in Greece called Yannouli. Non-Romani interviewees described robberies, blackmail and fights as an integral part of their everyday life. It was alleged in the article that one of the most affluent Greek Romani families sells drugs and guns. The report presented only one side of the story: the non-Romani version. The paper did not make any single comment on the way issues of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts should be addressed. The story conveyed the message that Roma and non-Roma cannot live together and that Roma are to be blamed for problems between the two groups. No Roma were quoted in the article.

In other articles, Roma are depicted as social parasites, people who despise work and exploit their children. An article in *Ethnos* on March 5, 1998, on Romani

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GUIDE TO THE MAJOR GREEK NEWSPAPERS*

Eleftheros Typos	– evening, conservative, right-wing daily; average circulation of 65,000 copies.
Ephi	– Sunday paper, left-wing and rather progressive; average circulation of 3000 copies.
Ethnos	– evening daily, centre-left; average circulation of 60,000 copies.
Eleftherotypia	– evening daily, centre-left; average circulation of 85,000 copies.
Exousia	– evening daily, centre-left; average circulation of 50,000 copies.
Paratiritis	– evening daily, local newspaper in Thrace (Western Greece); average circulation of 12,000 copies.
Kathimerini	– morning daily, centre-right; average circulation of 43,000 copies.
Ta Nea	– evening, centrist daily; average circulation of 100,000 copies.

* All data are approximate and valid for the period 1997-1998.

drug trafficking, is one example of this practice. According to the article, people from all walks of life and age groups can be spotted in the wider area of the Zefyri Romani camp coming to buy drugs. Reportedly, 14-year-old Romani children sell Albanian hashish. Roma were collectively portrayed as unprincipled, lazy people who lead an unlawful existence and do not hesitate to introduce their own children into this kind of life.

The Greek press often portrays Roma as defending even those Roma involved in serious criminal activity. On January 10, 1998, *Eleftheros Typos* reported that the branch of the National Bank of Greece in Evosmos in Thessaloniki was attacked by Romani robbers. According to the newspaper, Roma entered the bank posing as beggars and then robbed the bank. The robbers were chased by the police but managed to get away with all the cash. At some point, they entered the Roma camp of Evosmos and vanished among the shelters. The same bank had been robbed the previous year and, according to the police, the robbers were "Tsigani" who had also used the camp to escape. Leaving aside the speculations on the ethnic identity of the thieves, the implicit message conveyed by such a report was that the thieves acted as if they had the whole Romani community of Evosmos on their side. The Roma of the region were presented as accomplices to both robberies.

Reports referring to criminality frequently associate Roma with the so-called "Albanian Mafia". The Greek press presents Albanians in a negative light, and there is an interplay between negative images of Albanians and negative images of Roma.¹¹ The correlation between Albanians and Roma succeeds in propagating and reinforcing already existing negative stereotypes and connotations about the latter. Roma are often depicted, for example, as dealers of hashish from Albania (see, for example, *Eleftheros Typos*, 4.3.98). *Ta Nea*, in an article published on May 9, 1998, made extensive reference to relations between Albanian and Romani criminals.

In addition, the Greek press often publicises the names of underage Romani suspects. One example is an article published in *Eleftherotypia* on August 8, 1998: two underage Roma were caught by policemen after attempting to rob a taxi driver. In the police station, they reportedly confessed that they had committed six robberies and taken around 150,000 drachmas (approximately 455 euros). *Eleftherotypia* published their names, an ethically questionable act since minors are supposed to be a category deserving protection from harmful public exposure.

Often, when Roma are victims and not perpetrators, newspapers either underreport the event or do not report the abuse at all. Where police abuse is reported, it tends to be without reference to ethnicity. There have been only a few exceptions to this rule in the recent past. The ill-treatment of two Romani minors by police officers in a police station of the city of Mesolongi, was reported by *Eleftherotypia* (12&13.5.98). This was the only one out of all eight monitored newspapers which dealt with the case. The same paper was the only one again, on June 10, 1998, to report that a police officer had attacked a 14-year-old Romani boy in the central market on the island of Mytilini. Reportedly, it was not the first time that such an act of police brutality had taken place on the island. In most cases, newspapers refer to Roma law-breakers and criminal suspects without making any attempt to contextualise criminality within social marginalisation and poverty. In most articles concerning Roma there is an absence of any analysis on the reasons that push Roma into criminality. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination, social exclusion are completely disregarded by journalists as contributing factors to anti-social and criminal behaviour. The lack of any explanatory framework propagates and reinforces the stereotypes of genetically or culturally determined criminality.

Romantic images

The success of the TV series "Whispers of the Heart" resulted in an increase in the number of reports on Roma in Greece. The series also succeeded in stimulating public interest in Romani customs and traditions. The media became interested in exploring how far a "Romani way of life", as depicted on television, differed from reality. Media devoted space and time to find out more about the "true" Roma. Who are they? How do they think and behave? Are they really impulsive, passionate and proud? "Whispers of the Heart" generated, first of all, a series of interviews with the director, the script-writers and the actors of the serial. Non-Romani celebrities praised Romani culture and pointed out some of the difficulties of Romani life. They explicitly referred to the contribution of Roma

to the success of the series, condemned the racist and xenophobic behaviour of many Greeks towards the Roma, and spoke out against stereotypes. They also reportedly participated in real Romani events such as marriages, engagements and anti-racist campaigns, and spent much of their time with their Romani co-stars. An article in *Eleftheros Typos* on March 28, 1998, reported that the director of the series had celebrated the National Day – March 25th – with the Roma. The extent to which all these events were part of a promotion strategy for the series does not diminish their impact and the importance of the messages conveyed to the public. Numerous non-Romani Greek intellectuals also added their support for Roma and their opposition to racism. The publication of books on Romani history, language and culture was also an occasion for several articles (*Ethnos*, 17.1.98; *Epohi*, 8.2.98; *Eleftherotypia*, 17.1.98, 8.3.98 and 16.4.98; *Ta Nea* 11.2.98).

As the main theme of “Whispers of the Heart” was a love affair, references to Romani impulsiveness, passion and temperament became a prominent part of news reporting. Also, real love affairs among Roma came to be deemed newsworthy. For example, *Ethnos* (13&14.3.98) ran an article called “Whispers of the Heart in Evosmos” which concerned a love affair between Erietta, a 12-year-old Romani girl from a wealthy family, and a poor Romani boy. According to the article, Erietta’s father refused to give his blessing to the marriage and the lovers ended up in court. The Romani boy, desperately in love, decided to kidnap his beloved from her father in order to marry her in secret. Erietta’s father chased them and soon discovered the young couple’s hideaway. He took his daughter away, forced her to marry another rich Rom and pressed charges against the kidnapper. In another article, *Ethnos* (14.4.98) made a direct parallel between the show and real life when it reported on the love of a non-Romani man for a Romani woman which had resulted in his kidnapping her and their subsequent marriage.

In the majority of articles making reference to the serial, Roma were also pictured as hot-tempered, unpredictable, free-spirited (*Ta Nea*, 3.3.98) and independent (*Ethnos*, 18.3.98). They have pride, morality and family values (*Exousia*, 27.1.98). Roma live for the present and not for the future; have a liberated perception of time and place; and live without the burden of private property (*Ta Nea*, 11.2.98). The women are beautiful. They wear long, colourful skirts, golden jewels and dance to oriental and exotic rhythms. Men are macho, tender, sensitive and, at the same time, fearless. Roma are talented musicians and above all poetic souls. They master the clarinet and the guitar. The good life for Roma means travelling, entertainment, music, and celebrations.

Compared to the image of Roma as criminals, the folkloric ones are more positive. However, they also present a distorted picture of Roma. On the whole, media reports focused on Roma living in Romani settlements and ignored the existence of integrated Roma. Further, while focusing on the most marginalised Roma, the Greek media has tended to report on their lifestyle as if it were freely chosen. One of the most prevalent stereotypes conveyed in many of these reports is that Roma live in camps and shanties because they enjoy travelling. Often, Roma travel in search of work.¹² Those who are not street vendors work in the provinces as farm and factory workers. The competition with illegal immigrants working in the black labour market and ethnic Greeks from former Soviet Union whose wages were, for a large period, subsidised by the Greek state, left many of them without other means than itinerant seasonal and often underpaid jobs. Some of the reports created the impression that Roma are indifferent to their future and do not wish to change their living conditions.

Compassionate images

Some images provide more depth to coverage of Romani issues and promoted compassion. Such compassionate articles shift the focus: Roma are not “social problems”, they have problems. These compassionate presentations often include the Romani perspective. Some articles put the marginalisation of Roma in historical, ethnic, social and political perspective, focusing on the debilitating effects of racist stereotypes. For example, *Ta Nea* wrote, on February 2, 1998: “We speak about 300,000 people who have been living on Greek territory since the 14th century and who are completely ignored by the official Greek state (Greece refused to grant them citizenship for more than 120 years) and by the history and sociology books. To us, the Tsigani represent colourful skirts, clarinets, caricatures and not normal people, with flesh, blood and needs. Still, they live together with us, everywhere and nowhere. ... The Tsigani have always been the most ignored of all minorities only because they

lack people with access to the system and a voice which can be heard. That explains to a certain extent why the police are so cool when they intrude the Tsiganika houses in search of suspects, without any warrants or second thoughts". Similarly, *Eleftherotypia* wrote on April 16, 1998, "From 1810 to 1978, Tsigani in Greece were deprived of Greek citizenship. They had no human, political, social and economic rights. Consequently, they were also deprived of the right to education."

Generally, compassionate images have positive nuances. Their effect on the public becomes even bigger when they are also conveyed by a third source, in particular individuals and organisations with sensitivity to human and minority rights issues. In this way, more objectivity and credibility is attributed to any sympathetic report, statement and denunciation about the harsh life of Roma. In an open letter published in *Eleftherotypia* on February 23, 1998, one of the readers expressed her grief at the death of a two-year-old Romani boy, burned in his shelter one month previously while sleeping. The letter criticised the Greek state for not doing enough to protect human and children's rights. Similarly, an open letter was written by the pupils of a primary school, printed in *Ta Nea*, on March 6, 1998. The letter dealt with the unbearable living and housing conditions of the Roma of Aspropyrgos. The pupils quoted the parts of the Greek Constitution pertaining to human rights. This was coupled with a presentation of the everyday reality of the Roma: "All these people live in poor shelters made of wood and tin cans. So many people live in one shelter. Rubbish and mud are everywhere. There is no running water, electricity or toilets. They do not like this kind of life. Some of the children are sick. They are without shoes and clothes. Only two of them go to school..." The demonstration of a (non-Romani) school-teacher, protesting against the squalid living conditions of the Roma of his provincial town, attracted the interest of the national press (*Ta Nea*, 7.7.98, *Eleftherotypia* and *Eleftheros Typos*, 13.7.98). The teacher bound himself in chains in protest at the state's inertia and as a way of alerting both media and public opinion.

The positive messages conveyed by compassionate reports and images risk being overwhelmed by a spirit of "over-victimisation". Perpetuated images of misery and constant references to Romani victims risk accustoming both Roma and non-Roma to this picture, ending up conveying an atmosphere of hopelessness. As the non-governmental organisation *Project on Ethnic Relations* has noted, images of "victim-status may be effective in getting something out of the dominant society and eliciting resources from the state through manipulation of guilt and social responsibility. Yet, there is a real danger that the disadvantaged group may come to believe in them, to internalise victim status as an unchanging reality of life. Historically, it may be true that one has been a victim of state policies. However, insisting on victim status in order to continue to elicit state resources, after the state has made a genuine attempt to change its policies and to enlist the former victim as a partner, may reinforce a victim mentality."¹³

In this light, examples in the press of Roma succeeding in life despite the difficulties are valuable, as they refute prejudices and stereotypes and set examples for imitation by both Roma and non-Roma. There are not many such articles. For the monitored period, only two reports of this kind were found in the press. *Ethnos* (10.5.98) referred to a Romani mother who "worked here and there, so that her children would get a better life and education." Her son at that time was a second-year medical student, one of the five Romani children in Greece who managed to pass the university exams. Her daughter was in her second year of college. "I wanted to prove that if Tsigani want to, they can escape from misery," said her son, who attributed the high percentages of Romani illiteracy to "Tsiganiki mentality", as well as to the racist attitude of the majority society towards Roma.

The second such report dealt with the life and career of a dead Roma musician. The article, "Belated Honour", was published in *Ta Nea* on April 14, 1998. According to the article, from the beginning of his career in the mid-1950s until his death in 1998, the Romani singer M. Angelopoulos faced the racist behaviour of some Greek media and artists. Many of them demeaned his identity by calling him "Gypsy". He endured such humiliation with remarkable patience and dignity. He was lucky enough to see that ordinary people adored him and counted him among their favourite singers. However, according to the article the fact of his success was not enough to eliminate the racist feelings which some people expressed for him.

Some of the most sympathetic images of Roma in the Greek media have shown Roma as law-breakers but as a result of extenuating circumstances. In some cases, they appear to be more sinned against than sinners. Articles in *Ethnos*, *Eleftherotypia*, *Ta Nea* and *Eleftheros Typos*, all of them appearing on August 1, 1998, constitute

illustrative examples: a 33-year-old Roma woman gave birth to a boy in the extraordinary circumstances of being in a police station at the time. The woman had been arrested two days previously for selling hashish. She was caught with twelve grams and was taken to the police station of Drapetsona, Pireaus. When she felt the first pains, she called a policeman and informed him of her situation. The latter called an ambulance but it was too late. The woman gave birth with the help of the policemen who, needless to say, had no experience in delivering babies. One of them called a gynaecologist and, following his instructions, managed to carry out the whole operation. A few minutes later, when the ambulance arrived, both mother and son were transferred to the nearest hospital. The articles reported that based on her own estimate, the woman had given birth a month prematurely; she had not been at all examined by a doctor in the course of her pregnancy, so she did not know precisely how advanced her pregnancy had been at the time she gave birth. When asked about why she sold hashish, she reportedly told journalists that she had no other means to support her family — she already had five children. The press reported that she was all alone in life, without any support from her husband, who was in jail. The portrait of the protagonist was less of a drug dealer than of a woman and mother to whom life had not been generous.

Conclusion

A careful look shows that it is rather impossible to talk about a single prevalent image of the Roma in the Greek print media. Images of Roma seem to be quite contradictory, and yet rather complementary at the same time. These images, no matter how conflicting, coexist rather harmoniously in the Greek press. Sanctioned by time, stereotypes and ignorance of Roma, these images in essence remain unchanging. What seems to change periodically is their relationship. In terms of numbers, frequency, intensity and impact, one or two of these types might have a lead for a time over others. These changes depend on certain “social and media variables”. For instance, in periods where the issue of domestic criminality is on the public agenda (for example on the occasion of the publication of annual statistics by the Ministry of Public Order), the criminal stereotype of Roma seems to prevail over the others. There are certain periods however, where this image yields to another alarming image: that of the foreign immigrants. Since 1992, the time of a major recent influx to Greece of immigrants — in particular Albanian immigrants — the criminal stereotype of Roma has been less prominent. Nevertheless, the fact that Roma are frequently depicted by the Greek press as the domestic liaison of the Albanian Mafia makes the impact of any such report larger and more negative. During summer holidays, when Greeks go to the seaside and the countryside for holidays, and both the number of newsworthy events and the number of journalists at work declines, reports on “Gypsy crime” surge. Reports on Albanians, Romanians and Roma emptying the houses of holiday-makers, succeed in having a large, negative impact on the Greek public.

The success of “Whispers of the Heart” had a remarkable effect upon both the image of Roma in the press as well and the press itself. In the period of its broadcast, October 1997 — May 1998, Greek newspapers dedicated pages and pages to the actors of the serial, the director and the script-writers, as well as to the Roma themselves. From the moment “Whispers of the Heart” reached high ratings until its end, Roma received much more favourable coverage in the Greek press. “Whispers of the Heart” brought Roma, for the first time in the history of Greek television, from the camps into the public eye. In this light and despite its superficiality, the serial overall had a positive effect. Yet there is still a lot to be done. As the *Project on Ethnic Relations* put it, “because of their fundamental importance in shaping public opinion and attitudes, those who work in the mass media should be made more aware of their responsibilities in reporting on Romani-related issues. Romani participation in reporting for the mass media should be increased and fora should be created for dialogue between Romani and non-Romani journalists.”¹⁴ This process has only just begun in Greece.

ENDNOTES

- 1 On “Whispers of the Heart”, see also Rougheri, Christina, “The Apotheosis of Roma in a Record-Breaking Greek TV Series”, Athens: Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group–Greece, Alternative Information Network, 8.4.1998, available at the Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group–Greece web site: <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>.
- 2 Greek censuses do not require any reference to ethnic affiliation, language and religion. The last census in Greece to include questions on religion and language took place in 1951. Information

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of this kind has not been required by any of the censuses which followed. Taking this fact into account, together with the "hidden identity" phenomenon — mainly witnessed in Western Thrace where Roma are often identified as Turks — the exact number of Roma in Greece can only be estimated. According to the General Secretariat for Adult Education — a government agency — the Romani population was estimated to be between 150,000 and 200,000 in 1997. In 1996, the same source had put the figure at 300,000. Findings of independent sources show that 300,000 is closer to reality. *Minority Rights Group–Greece* claims that the number of Roma in the country possibly exceeds the 300,000 reaching even 350,000 (Minority Rights Group — Greece, "Report on Greece to the 1998 OSCE Implementation Meeting, 29 October 1998", available at <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>).

- 3 Minority Rights Group–Greece, "Report on Greece to the 1998 OSCE Implementation Meeting, 29 October 1998, *Op.cit.*
- 4 The Muslim Roma of Western Thrace were under the protection of the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923 between Greece and Turkey, which regulated the exchange of populations as well as the status of the remaining minority populations in both countries (see Zeginis Efstratios, *I Musulmani Atsigani tis Thrakis*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1994, pp.20–21).
- 5 See Dousas Dimitris, "Rom ke Filetikies Diakrasis" in *Stin Istoria, tin Kinonia, tin Kultura, tin Ekpedevsi ke ta Anthropina Dikeomata*, Athens: Gutenberg 1997, p.62.
- 6 See Zegenis Efstratios, *Op.cit.*, pp.20–21.
- 7 Greece ratified the Convention in 1975.
- 8 In all articles quoted here, the only term which is used to describe the Roma is "Tsiganos", which means "Gypsy" in Greek. In Greek, there is another term deriving from the word Gypsy, which is "Gyftos". The term "Roma" is not familiar to a wide segment of the public. "Tsigani", "Tsigana" "Tsiganikos", "Tsiganiki" and "Tsiganika" are all forms of the word "Tsiganos".
- 9 See Project on Ethnic Relations, "Prevention of Violence and Discrimination against the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe", Princeton: Project on Ethnic Relations, 1997, p.7.
- 10 In fact, anti-Romani sentiment is widespread among police officers in Greece, as is the impulsive use of the firearm. Roma are often killed or wounded by police officers and police officers are rarely punished for abuses against Roma. For example, on April 1, 1998, police killed A. Jelal, a 29-year-old Romani man, on the outskirts of the city of Thessaloniki while he was reportedly trying to avoid a police check. Eleftherotypia reported more than four months later, on August 22, 1998, that as of that date the Ministry of Public Order had not yet ordered investigation or even a forensic report.
- 11 See Lenkova, Mariana, "'Hate Speech' in the Balkans", Athens: International Helsinki Federation/ ETEPE, 1998, pp.43–45; and Greek Helsinki Monitor, "Positive and Negative Stereotypes of Internal Minorities and Neighbouring Peoples in The Greek Press", monthly and biannual reports from October 1996 till September 1998, available on the Internet at <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>.
- 12 See Liegeois, Jean-Pierre and Nicolae Gheorghe, *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority*, p.17.
- 13 Project on Ethnic Relations, "The Romanies in Central and Eastern Europe: Illusions and Reality", Princeton: Project on Ethnic Relations, 1992, p.20.
- 14 Project on Ethnic Relations, "Prevention of Violence and Discrimination Against the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe", *Op.cit.*, p.10.

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Clothes hanging to dry on the wire fence surrounding the Romani ghetto in Ano Liosia, just outside Athens, December 1999. Several days after this photograph was taken, municipal authorities ordered all of the approximately 120 Roma in the fenced-in camp to leave. Those with residence permits in Ano Liosia — approximately half of the Roma — were resettled in temporary housing for victims of the 1999 Athens earthquake. Those without residence permits in the municipality were effectively evicted, and as of April 14, 2000, some were living next to a garbage dump in the municipality of Aspropyrgos, on the border with Ano Liosia.

PHOTO: LAMBROS PAPANIKOLATOS

Roma rights news

1/2000

● **Greek authorities still have not completed promised accommodation for Roma**

In September 1998, the Prefect of Thessaloniki, in northern Greece, promised a group of local Roma that new accommodation for them in the former military barracks in Gonou, approximately six kilometres away, would be finished by May 15, 1999. As of March 16, 2000, however, the new camp was still not finished. These 250 Romani families, around 2000 people, were first evicted from the suburb of Evosmos in September 1998, and settled in the drained bed of the Galikos river in Thessaloniki. They have lived there since, in extremely poor conditions, without adequate water supplies or garbage collection. In the first five months after

their arrival at the site, the settlement was flooded five times (see "Roma rights news 1/99", pp.12-13).

The work on the barracks, planned to become a model self-managed camp, is reportedly behind schedule due to funding problems. The work performed so far has cost more than twice the amount initially envisaged, and the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the sponsor of the project, was late in paying the difference in the amount to the construction company. As of March 16, 2000, the Ministry had paid part of the money and promised to pay the rest. In January 2000, the *Greek Helsinki Monitor* witnessed that only the surrounding walls and the foundation for the multipurpose centre had been built in Gonou. (*Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

FOCUS: ROMA IN GREECE

2/2000

● **Greek court acquits police officer in killing case**

On February 23, 2000, the Council of Judges of the Magistrates Court of Thessaloniki ruled that charges against officers involved in the 1998 killing of a Romani man named Angelos Celal be dropped. Mr Celal, a Romani inhabitant of Halkidona, was killed on April 1, 1998, when a number of shots were fired in the rural area of Partheni, Thessaloniki, as officers ambushed a group of Roma suspected of involvement in a car theft. Mr Celal was shot in the back as he drove away from the scene of the ambush. According to police investigation, seventeen spent cartridges originating from firearms used by the police were found at the scene of the shooting, while an additional one spent cartridge possibly originating from a non-police weapon was recovered. In connection with the killing, on May 22, 1998, investigators brought charges against Officer Seraphim Papadopoulos, police lieutenant and inhabitant of Thessaloniki, for intentional murder, intentionally and repeatedly committing attempted murder in a group, and deliberate damage to private property. Lesser charges were also brought against two other police officers: Mr Eleftherios Giakoumakis, inhabitant of Thessaloniki, for intentionally and repeatedly committing attempted murder in a group, and deliberate damage to private property; and Mr Stavros Hadzidimitriou, inhabitant of Thessaloniki, for intentionally and repeatedly committing attempted murder in a group, and deliberate damage to private property. Criminal charges were also brought by the Prosecutor of the Magistrate's Court of Thessaloniki against two Romani men: Mr Theocharis Frangoulis, an inhabitant of Halkidona, for conspiracy to commit larceny, resisting arrest, intentionally and repeatedly committing attempted murder in a group, illegal weapons possession, use of weapons, and intentionally and repeatedly attempting to cause grievous bodily harm in a group; and Mr Vasileios Rasimoglou, inhabitant of Halkidona, for conspiracy to commit larceny.

On February 23, 2000, the Council of Judges of the Magistrates Court of Thessaloniki ruled that charges against Officers Papadopoulos, Giakoumakis and Hadzidimitriou be dropped on the grounds that they had acted in legitimate self-defence. The court evidently disregarded

forensic evidence indicating that Mr Celal had been killed by a gunshot wound in the back. The court recommended that the Romani men, Mssrs Frangoulis and Rasimoglou, be prosecuted as charged. The court additionally ordered that the two men be remanded into custody. A request to the Office of the Prosecutor of the Appeals Court of Thessaloniki to challenge the court's ruling, lodged on April 24, 2000, by the Athens-based non-governmental organisations *Greek Helsinki Monitor* and *Minority Rights Group/Greece*, has been disregarded and the deadline for the Appeals Court to act has now lapsed. *ERRC* field research conducted in May 1998 revealed that police officers in Greece are rarely if ever disciplined for abusing the human rights of Roma, even in extreme instances.

On May 19, 2000, the *ERRC* sent a letter to Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis to express concern over the court decision to drop charges against the officers. The *ERRC* letter urges Prime Minister Simitis to undertake all measures available within the limits of law to see that officers who have abused their powers in the case of Angelos Celal are brought to justice. As of August 1, the *ERRC* had received no response to its letter. (*ERRC*)

● **Greek municipalities evict Roma**

On May 20, 2000, following a dispute over an illegally parked vehicle owned by a local Romani man, the municipal council of Nea Kios, in the Peloponnese region of southern Greece, adopted a resolution to evict all Roma from the land they own and live on in the region. The municipality also condemned those residents of Nea Kios who had sold land to the Roma, and asked the police to assist in implementing their decision to evict Roma within 48 hours. The municipality further established "surveillance groups" and organised a series of demonstrations by local residents against Romani presence in the village. Roma were reportedly prevented from entering the village, shopkeepers were instructed not to sell anything to Roma, and Romani children were afraid to go to school. The non-governmental organisation *Greek Helsinki Monitor* has written to Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis and Minister of Justice Michalis Stathopoulos, protesting the decision. On May 31, 2000, following the declaration in Nea Kios, the neighbouring municipality of Nea Tirynta

issued a similar ban on Romani presence, requiring that Roma leave the region by August 30, 2000.

These municipal decisions have sparked off a series of violent incidents in the region of Nea Kios. On June 9, 2000, in Nea Kios, a shack owned by a Romani man named Panayote Demetropoulos was burned to the ground during the night by unknown perpetrators. On June 15, a seventeen-year-old Romani youth, Christos Demetropoulos, was shot and wounded by two non-Romani youth in Nea Kios. The two unknown attackers lay in wait for the Romani youth, verbally abused him, and shot him in the arm. Mr Demetropoulos was taken to the hospital in nearby Argos, where he was admitted in stable

condition. During the week of June 12-16, the Greek Ombudsman's Office issued a report on the events in Nea Kios which calls the municipal council's action "illegal". On June 16, 2000, Minister of Justice Stathopoulos requested that the public prosecutor of the misdemeanours court of Návplion open investigation into the case. As of July 21, 2000, no legal action had been taken by the prosecutor's office. On June 30, 15 advocates and politicians submitted a signed complaint to the public prosecutor's office in Návplion. Evictions of Roma in Greece are the subject of an article in the "Notebook" section of this issue of *Roma Rights*. (*Greek Helsinki Monitor, Agence France-Press, Associated Press*)

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Expel first: housing policy for Roma in Greece

Christina Rougheri*

2/2000

ON various occasions throughout its history, Greece has undertaken large-scale housing initiatives. Following the 1922 military disaster in Asia Minor and the subsequent exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, the Greek state found itself faced with a major task: to incorporate one million ethnic Greeks from Turkey into the social, political and economic life of the country, and to do so with empty coffers. Yet public dissatisfaction within the country about the army's defeat in Asia Minor, as well as anticipation of the devastated newcomers' votes in the future, prompted immediate action. Efforts began first with housing; low interest loans, rent subsidies and allocations of land and houses were all part of a large-scale national policy for immigrant resettlement. Following World War II and the Greek civil war, similar action was undertaken by the Greek state to provide housing for internally displaced persons. The state-run Organisation for Workers' Housing engaged in massive construction projects to build apartments for workers' families. The same institution was put in charge of recent similar governmental initiatives for ethnic Greeks fleeing the former Soviet Union. To date, however, the Greek state has never engaged to provide adequate housing for Roma, Greece's largest minority. In fact, up until 1975, many Roma did not receive Greek citizenship, let alone a house.¹

Paragraph 4 of Article 21 of the Greek Constitution provides for the right to housing, stipulating the state's obligation to secure accommodation for everybody. Greece's Constitution guarantees an acceptable standard of living for all individuals and their families, and this guarantee includes housing. The Greek Constitution is therefore in accord with Article 11(1) of the United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).² In addition, the ICESCR obliges states to show improvement over time of individuals' living conditions.

Even after 1996, the year of the announcement of the government's Policy Framework for Greek Roma, tent-dwellers (approximately half of Greece's Romani population, overall estimated at approximately 350,000) did not experience any significant changes in their desperate situation.³ Implementation of most housing and infrastructure schemes has been left up to the municipal and prefect authorities. Since these are often hostile to Roma, governmental orders to integrate Roma are often effectively ignored.⁴ Despite this, the government's implementation procedure for the Policy Framework has to date not changed, and the government's most recent initiative to provide 940 Romani families with favourable loans for the purchase of houses is administered by municipalities.⁵

Since 1996, all attempts made as part of the socialist government's Policy Framework for Roma to improve the standards of living in destitute camps have been abandoned in progress. According to a lengthy "Review for the Years 1996-1999",⁶ provided in February 2000 by the Ministry of the Interior to a Progressive Left Coalition MP in answer to the latter's parliamentary question, the only part of the project that was completed over the first three years of the Policy Framework was a survey of the housing needs of the Roma.

Where works are progressing, they are taking a very long time to complete. The planned first self-managed Romani settlement in Greece — a project being developed outside the rubric of the 1996 government Policy Framework for Roma — is slated for the former military barrack of Gonou. The infrastructure for the settlement, planned to accommodate over 2500 Romani tent-dwellers evicted from Evosmos in August 1998, has not yet been completed. The government had announced that the army would clean the barracks by November 1998, and the infrastructure would be completed within three months after that, i.e., by February 1999. Today, almost one and a half years later, work is still in progress. For almost two years, the Roma of Evosmos have been living in the bed of the river Gallikos, in makeshift homes made of wood and plastic, under permanent threat of floods.

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Where housing is concerned, Roma in Athens have been abandoned completely. Athens has the largest Romani population in Greece outside Thessaloniki. In the Minister of the Interior's 1996-1999 Review, no housing projects are mentioned for Romani residents living in the capital. The Athens municipality is intent on hosting the 2004 Olympic Games and undertaking all of the massive construction efforts necessary for that event, but to date has not provided adequate housing for the approximately 3000 Romani tent-dwellers of the Aspropyrgos and Ano Liosia suburbs of Athens.

The bureaucracy's discriminatory treatment of Roma is especially evident when seen in light of the state's immediate mobilisation for victims of the Athens earthquakes in September 1999. Free spaces were found at once on which to locate temporary housing for earthquake victims, and an abundance of land for earthquake victims appeared in municipalities where the scarcity of land has been the primary excuse for not accepting Roma. Infrastructure works were completed almost overnight and pre-fabricated houses were allocated to all of the victims. Aspropyrgos and Ano Liosia belong to the municipalities most effected by the major earthquakes. With the exception, however, of ten Romani families – official residents of Ano Liosia – the Romani tent-dwelling population of these two municipalities did not receive any of the prefabricated housing allocated for earthquake victims. Instead, the mayor of Ano Liosia seized the opportunity to expel local tent-dwelling Roma who were not registered municipal citizens. Many of these now live on a waste disposal site on the Ano Liosia-Aspropyrgos border. Roma in Ano Liosia and Aspropyrgos face hostility from local residents as well as from local officials. Keeping them in misery and despair appears to be a strategy by local authorities to make them leave. Opposing the idea of a self-managed settlement in West Athens, particularly within the borders of the Liosia municipality, Mayor Papadimas, in a letter addressed to the *Doctors of the World-Greece*, stated in 1999 that the Romani population in Ano Liosia was about to exceed the "8% upper limit" of minority presence. Beyond this percentage, according to him, ghettoisation would increase and integration would fail.

FORCED EVICTIONS

Forced evictions are incompatible with the right to housing under the ICESCR. As stated in the recent *Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area*, the United Nations Committee "in interpreting Article 11(1) regarding the right to housing has emphasized in particular that 'instances of forced eviction are *prima facie* incompatible with the requirements of the Covenant and can only be justified in the most exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with the relevant principles of international law.'⁷ While not all evictions are in violation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, they are generally incompatible with the right to adequate housing when individuals are removed against their will from the homes they occupy "without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection."⁸ The Committee has also stated that evictions "should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights. Where those affected are unable to provide for themselves, the State Party must take all appropriate measures, to the maximum of its available resources, to ensure that adequate alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land, as the case may be, is available."⁹

Disregarding these obligations, Greek authorities regularly conduct forced evictions of Roma. Local authorities reportedly expelled fifty families in Trikala in 1990. In August 1996, 116 Roma living in Menemeni, near Thessaloniki, were transferred by local authorities to a second area, without the provision of any kind of infrastructure in the new location. At the end of May 1997, municipal authorities of Trikala destroyed the homes of twenty-five Romani families in the areas of Agroviz and Pyrgos, and expelled the Roma living there. On June 10, 1997, the tribunal of Thessaloniki ordered the expulsion of Roma from the area of Evosmos. The mayor of Evosmos and some local property owners had previously submitted a petition of temporary measures against 91 families of Roma on the grounds that the neighbourhood in which they lived was designated for recreational purposes. In August 1998, authorities carried out the order and expelled approximately 3000 Roma from Evosmos, without providing them with alternate accommodation. After demolishing the huts of ten Romani tent-dwell-

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A makeshift home for Romani tent-dwellers living in the wider area of the garbage dump of the municipality of Aspropyrgos, on the perimeter of Athens, January 2000.

PHOTO: GREEK HELSINKI MONITOR

ing families in Agia Paraskevi, on July 23, 1997, bulldozers sent by the municipal and prefect authorities entered the camp intending to finish the operation. Following hostile reaction by local Roma and, according to some sources, a refusal by the workers involved to implement the decision, the eviction was cancelled. Two years later, however, on June 21, 1999, the Public Prosecutor of Athens, together with policemen and bulldozers, visited the same settlement to execute an eviction order against two Roma who had been charged in absentia of trespassing on private land in 1997. Without first identifying the Roma, police asked two Romani families living on the private plots in question to take their personal belongings out of their shacks and leave the area so the bulldozers could knock the shacks to the ground. The Roma argued that they needed time to remove their belongings. Lengthy negotiations followed and the Roma signed a declaration that they would vacate the area in ten days. However, the Roma in question were illiterate and could not read the eviction order. After they consulted a lawyer it was discovered that the two Romani women against whom the court decision had been rendered did not live at the site.

On February 16, 1999, authorities in Aspropyrgos, Attica, entered the Romani camp of Nea Zoe and destroyed dwellings and property. The camp had around one hundred inhabitants. According to reports, six employees of the Aspropyrgos municipality, approximately twelve local police officers, as well as Deputy Mayor Mr Constantinos Tsiggos took part in the operation. Upon entering the settlement, the officials told the Roma that five of the barracks had to be evacuated so that they could be destroyed. The barracks were then crushed by bulldozers and the remaining debris set on fire, while the Roma protested. The Roma were reportedly not shown any document authorising the action. According to reports, the inhabitants of the destroyed barracks were not given enough time to remove all of their belongings from their homes. The inhabitants of some of the barracks were not in the



camp at the time. One woman who was present while her dwelling was destroyed was critically ill. The police watched the proceedings but did not intervene. The Romani inhabitants of the settlement present at the time of the raid were allegedly told by authorities that they would be evicted from the entire region.

In August 1999, 35 Romani families — including ten Romani families from Albania — were evicted from private land in the Paralimni area of Ioannina, which they had been renting for 10,000 drachmas each (approximately 30 euro) per month. Most of them had been living in the region for almost four years without basic infrastructure. Without producing an eviction order, police asked Roma to pack and leave. Then bulldozers entered the site and razed everything to the ground. The eviction took place despite municipal promises — witnessed by human rights activists and faculty members of the local university — for alternate solutions. Roma from Paralimni were afterwards seen scattered in all directions, moving towards neighbouring camps. The very same Roma had, at the time of the eviction, been part of an education program for Roma run by the University of Ioannina under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.¹⁰

Sometimes, when alternatives are offered, they are only for some of the tent-dwelling Roma and are inadequate. One common practice by authorities is to disarm opposition to group evictions of Roma by promising to house those Roma already in possession of municipal citizenship. The municipality of Ano Liosia has made use of this practice at least twice. The mayor of Ano Liosia, Mr Papadimas, taking advantage of differences between local and non-local Roma, easily split the group of tent-dwellers in two. Promising relocation and humane living conditions to those Roma already in possession of local residence permits, the mayor proceeded to evict the rest with the consent of the first group. The first time this occurred, in 1997, the mayor did not keep his promises. Following the eviction, Romani municipal residents, who constituted twenty-five out of one hundred families, were transferred to a remote camp, surrounded by a fence. The rest of Roma were simply expelled from the municipality. Some of them joined the camp near the garbage dump, in the neighbouring municipality of Aspropyrgos. In December 1999, using the same tactics, the mayor proceeded to conduct a second eviction. Municipal residents — ten out of twenty families — were transferred from the fenced camp to nearby settlements intended for earthquake victims. The others were simply expelled. In November 1997, authorities undertook similar action with respect to Roma living in the “Makriyani” area of Patras (Peloponese). Roma who were municipal residents were allowed to stay in the camp, in supposedly better conditions, while the rest were evicted.

Romani tent-dwellers in Nea Alikarnasos (Crete) have to date narrowly escaped eviction. In November 1999, the Heraklion County Court cancelled an eviction protocol against them, issued by the mayor in 1997. The court acknowledged that in principle, the municipality, as proprietor of the land in question, had the right to issue a protocol of eviction. However, taking into account a number of facts, the court ruled that the eviction order was abusive. In the first place, the land was public, not private. Romani tent-dwellers had settled fifteen years ago on the land with the prior consent of the authorities. They had built shacks and made plans based on the authorities’ promises for better living conditions. Roma had been asked to leave the area without being provided with alternate housing. They then appealed their case in court. The resulting decision is a very important precedent.¹¹

INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

Greece’s embarrassment in international fora over discriminatory practices against Roma seems now to be having some impact. Until very recently, evictions against Roma were seen by local authorities as one way to gain public support. In 1998, when candidates for mayor in the municipality of Spata (Athens) promised to deal with the “problem of Gypsies”, they were almost certainly not implying improvements in housing, infrastructure and standards of living for the Roma. Today, the mayor of Spata seems to be making efforts to provide seventeen Romani tent-dwelling families with the minimum for a decent life: prefabricated houses (originally used by the earthquake victims), water supply, electricity and a sewage system. The very same families were threatened with eviction in 1997. Recently the municipality agreed to provide land for the Roma in Spata. Unfortunately, these positive developments have come about not so

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much because public aversion towards Roma has decreased or because state sensitivity has increased. Unfortunately, both the public and Greek officials continue to harbour strong anti-Romani sentiments. What seems rather to have changed is the importance the government attributes to its image outside the country, affecting attitudes and policies internally.

ENDNOTES

- 1 With the exception of those Roma covered by the 1923 Lausanne Treaty between Greece and Turkey, the rest had to wait until the mid-1970s to become full citizens of Greece. The Muslim Roma of Western Thrace were under the protection of the Lausanne Treaty, which regulated the exchange of populations as well as the status of the remaining minority populations in both countries. Most Roma acquired Greek citizenship only in the mid-1970s. Until then, Roma were treated as "aliens of Gypsy descent", having special identification documents which authorities required them to renew every two years.
- 2 Greece acceded to the ICESCR on May 16, 1985.
- 3 The 1996 Policy Framework has never been adopted into law; NGOs working in Greece have never been provided with the 1996 Policy Framework; and all efforts to acquire an official paper version of the Policy Framework have been unsuccessful to date. The Policy Framework was presented to the public by former Minister of Health Kotsonis, following negative publicity concerning the Romani settlement in Ano Liosia. The announced measures, reported in the press, were vague, affecting areas such as housing, education, training/employment, health and culture. With respect to housing in particular, infrastructure works such as integration into main electrical grids, garbage collection and construction of public toilets with showers were announced as short-term interventions in Romani settlements. Allocation of land and houses as well as favourable loans formed part of the government's long-term strategy for Roma. Since the announcement of the Policy Framework, government funds have been allocated within it, and the government often makes reference to the Policy Framework when representing Greece at international events.
- 4 Municipal authorities have recently made explicitly anti-Romani statements. For example, on September 12, 1999, the Greek daily *Avgi* reported that Mr Apostolos Zervas, the mayor of the Zefyri municipality on the periphery of Athens, had made racist statements about Roma following the massive earthquake on September 7, 1999. According to *Avgi*, while commenting on the action taken by the municipality after the quake, Mayor Zervas stated, "We only faced problems with the Gypsies. They looted tents, made business by selling them, engaged in fights with the citizens or the municipality, attacked municipal employees and created problems with the aid distribution." On September 14, Mayor Zervas made similar anti-Romani comments during a press conference when, according to the Greek daily *Eleftherotypia*, he stated, "Gypsy stories. Do not bother me with the Gypsies... They have been robbing the whole world." The widespread negative predisposition of local authorities towards Roma was publicly acknowledged by the Greek delegation to the 1999 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Review Meeting in Vienna.
- 5 The loan scheme is not, of itself, bad. By [pre-election] ministerial decision — also promulgated in the State Gazette — 80% of the interest rate on 940 loans would be subsidised by the Greek state, which is also the official guarantor of the loans, through the National Bank of Greece. The maximum amount allocated per family would be 15 million drachmas (approximately 50,000 euro) or 120,000 drachmas (approximately 400 euro) per square meter. Romani families without real estate, living permanently in municipalities throughout Greece, would be eligible for the loans. Municipal authorities would be responsible for selecting and announcing the beneficiaries. At present, the number of loans implies the scheme's pilot character and is by no means adequate to address the housing problem of Romani tent-dwellers in Greece.
- 6 Deputy Minister of the Interior G. Florides, February 24, 2000, in answer to parliamentary question no. 5295/2-2-2000, raised by Progressive Left Coalition MP M. Damanaki.
- 7 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), High Commissioner on National Minorities, *Report On The Situation Of Roma And Sinti In The OSCE Area*, April 2000, pp.114-115.
- 8 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "General Comment No. 7: The right to adequate housing (Article 11.1 of the Covenant): forced evictions", 1997, paragraph 4.
- 9 *Ibid.*, at paragraph 17.
- 10 For more detail on forced evictions of Roma in Greece, 1990-present, see <http://errc.org/publications/indices/greece.shtml>.
- 11 Heraklion (Crete) County Court, Decision no. 975/1999 of 12.11.1999, cancelling the 17.12.1999 eviction protocol issued by the mayor of Nea Alikarnasos against local Roma.

3/2000**● Greek authorities evict Roma**

The *ERRC*, in cooperation with the Athens-based non-governmental organisation *Greek Helsinki Monitor* has documented that Roma are being evicted from settlements near Athens to clear ground for sports facilities for the 2004 Olympics. The Greek capital will host the Olympic Games and has undertaken massive construction efforts to that end; however, no adequate housing has been provided for the approximately 3000 Romani tent-dwellers of Aspropyrgos and Ano Liosia in the suburbs of Athens. These people live without any infrastructure, close to garbage dumps. In July 2000, authorities of these two municipalities started what they called "cleaning operations", as a result of which Roma were evicted and their shacks leveled. They were reportedly not shown proper legal authorisations prior to the forced evictions.

On July 14, 2000, a municipal bulldozer entered the settlement of Romani tent-dwellers in Aspropyrgos, fifteen kilometers west of Athens, and demolished most of the huts, in the presence of the Mayor of Aspropyrgos and the police. The huts belonged to Greek and Albanian Roma and contained their personal belongings. Seven or eight Greek Romani families with sick members, unable to move, were given the ultimatum to leave the site by July 17. No eviction protocols were presented to the Romani families. Furthermore, the operation was carried out without the authorisation or presence of a public prosecutor, as is required under Greek law in cases of violation of home privacy. According to the police, this was a municipal "cleaning operation" to empty the site of vacant shacks belonging to "Albanian Gypsies". Local Roma filed a complaint with the Greek Ombudsman's Office and on July 25 the latter wrote to the Mayor and the City Council of Aspropyrgos, inquiring whether the July 14 operation had been preceded by a city council decision and whether the Romani inhabitants had been presented with the protocols of administrative eviction. The letter noted that if this procedure had not been observed, the operation would be in breach of Article 241 (violation of security of home) and Article 331 (taking the law into one's own hands) of the Greek Criminal Code. Local authorities allegedly responded that they had "cleaned" the area for the benefit of the Roma living there. As of October 10, the *Greek Helsinki Monitor* intended to

present further evidence in the form of pictures of destroyed shacks, and will press the Ombudsman's Office to pursue the case.

A few days prior to the operation, the Mayor of Ano Liosia, another western suburb of Athens, allegedly paid each family of local Romani tent dwellers 100,000 drachmas (approximately 300 euros) to leave the area, and then leveled their huts. Roma have lived on the site for a number of years. The municipality promised the Roma water supply and garbage collection in 1996. These promises were not kept: the settlement continues to be plagued by inadequate refuse removal and rats.

Further forced evictions of Roma may result from a new resolution adopted by the Municipal Council of Midea, in the Peloponnese region of southern Greece in July 2000. The resolution claims that Roma pose a threat to people passing through the busy crossroads around which they reside. It further states that Roma are responsible for extremely high crime rates in the area. The resolution recommends that local Roma owning land should be allowed to remain in the region, but should be moved to property in another area. For those Roma without property, the resolution suggests establishing a "suitable place" for their accommodation, with appropriate infrastructure. In light of repeated forced evictions of Roma in Greece, the *ERRC* fears municipal authorities may attempt to expel Roma from Midea in the near future.

The Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) released a report examining racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism and related intolerance in Greece on June 27, 2000. The report expresses concern that although recently the Greek government has initiated programs aimed at improving living conditions for Roma, "the implementation of the action plan often encounters resistance at the local level. Local communities are sometimes unwilling to welcome the members of this minority group." The report expresses concern specifically, that "Roma/Gypsies living in camps often face extremely harsh living conditions. In recent years, including 1999, some municipal authorities have expelled communities of Roma/Gypsies from the camps in which they had lived for many years, in certain cases without providing alternative accommodation. This has sometimes

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resulted in Roma/Gypsies being repeatedly expelled from each new place they attempted to settle. These expulsions were sometimes accompanied, apparently unhindered by the police, by the destruction and arson of houses, and by threats and humiliating treatment by local authorities and municipal employees." According to ECRI, Roma are furthermore excluded from many normal citizenship rights and benefits such as public social security and health care. They experience discrimination in various areas of public life, for example, when attempting to rent accommodation or to enter public spaces such as restaurants. Educational opportunities may be inadequate, resulting in low levels of literacy among Roma living in camps. The report concludes that "these problems are connected to the generally low level of recognition within Greek society of its multicultural reality" and recommends to the Greek authorities that further action be taken to combat racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance in a number of areas. For further information on forced evictions of Roma in Greece, see "Notebook", *Roma Rights 2/2000*. (CERD, ECRI, ERRC, Greek Helsinki Monitor)

● **Abusive police raids on Romani communities in Greece**

On July 6, 2000, at about 6:00 AM, a special unit of the Thessaloniki General Security raided the Romani settlement by the Gallikos river in Thessaloniki, searching for drugs, weapons, and suspects. About one hundred Roma were taken into police custody. It was later ascertained that a few of the detainees had prior offences for unpaid trading taxes or driving without a license. No weapons or drugs were reportedly found during the operation and no one was charged with any crimes. On July 7, the Prefectorial Authority of Thessaloniki issued a statement denounc-

ing the absence of a public prosecutor during the July 6 raid and defining it as an "unmitigated violation of the sanctuary of the family." In a letter to the Thessaloniki police on August 11, the Greek Ombudsman's Office called the raid "a possible indication of the stereotypical view that links Romani people to serious criminal offences." The Gallikos Romani Association *Aghia Sofia*, with the assistance of the ERRC and the *Greek Helsinki Monitor*, submitted a complaint to the Greek Ombudsman's Office. As of October 10, there had reportedly been no disciplinary action or criminal proceedings against any of the police officers who took part in the raid.

On June 27, 2000, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) released a report on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism and related intolerance in Greece. Among other Roma-related concerns, ECRI mentioned the frequent reports that Roma are victims of police misbehaviour in Greece. "In particular, Roma/Gypsies are often reported to be victims of excessive use of force — in some cases resulting in death — ill-treatment and verbal abuse on the part of the police. Discriminatory checks involving members of these groups are widespread. In most cases there is reported to be little investigation of these cases, and little transparency on the results of these investigations. Although most of these incidents do not generally result in a complaint being filed by the victim, when charges have been pressed the victims have reportedly in some cases been subjected to pressure to drop such charges." ECRI stresses the urgent need to improve the response to complaints by members of minority groups of police misbehaviour in Greece. ECRI also suggests that Greek authorities increase human rights and anti-discrimination training for police. (ECRI, ERRC, Greek Helsinki Monitor)

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● Threatened evictions of Roma in Greece

The ERRC, in cooperation with the Athens-based non-governmental organization *Greek Helsinki Monitor*, has documented further attempts at eviction of Roma in Greece. On November 7, the Greek Romani cultural association *Elpida*, of Halandri, Greater Athens, publicly rejected an offer by the Ministry of the Interior to move the 46 Romani families living between Iridos and Sarantaporou streets in Halandri to another area. The organisation claimed that this move would lead to the creation of a new ghetto and stated that they would refuse any offer which did not involve the purchase of one home per family. The Roma reportedly demanded dispersal throughout the town, rather than continued segregation. The community has lived in Halandri for more than 30 years, and are currently housed in makeshift shanties lacking electricity and water services, isolated from the mainstream of Greek society. Since April 1999, eviction orders have been pending against

the community, but have not been implemented due to the reaction of local non-governmental organisations.

On August 10, 2000, 102 Roma in Nea Alikarnasos, on the island of Crete, were served municipal orders to leave the land on which they had been living for fifteen years. On August 23, with the assistance of the *Greek Helsinki Monitor*, the *Elpida Cultural Association of Roma* of the Heraklion Prefecture filed an appeal to the Ombudsman's Office. On September 5, the Ombudsman, in a letter to the Mayor of Nea Alikarnasos, pointed out that a year ago a similar municipal action had been overturned by the Peace Court of Heraklion (Crete) as abusive, and that the municipality could not use a procedure which had previously been overturned by the court. As a result, the eviction was stopped. For more information on Roma and housing issues, see "Notebook", *Roma Rights 2/2000*, on the Internet at <http://errc.org/publications/indices/greece.shtml>. (*Athens News, ERRC, Greek Helsinki Monitor*)

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European Roma Rights Center

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ERRC letter to the Prime Minister of Greece Simitis Megaro Maximou

May 23, 1997

Honorable Prime Minister,

It has come to the attention of the *European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)* that the Roma of Ano Liosia have, in recent weeks, been subjected to certain abuses of their legal rights by officials of your government.

According to information received by the *ERRC*, following the publication of several articles in the Greek press, in mid-April municipal authorities forcibly liquidated the Roma settlement of Ano Liosia and moved the Roma living there to a new area. The transfer of the Roma families was reportedly accomplished with threats. Local officials gave the Ano Liosia Roma community as a whole an ultimatum to evacuate the area within several hours. Roma allege that they were threatened with violence if they did not abandon the settlement immediately. Roma in possession of local residence permits were promised better conditions in the new location offered by the authorities. However, the majority of the group however did not possess residence permits, and these were simply ordered to leave. Indeed, shortly thereafter, bulldozers razed the entire settlement, allegedly destroying personal property in the process.

According to our information, Roma in possession of valid local residence permits—approximately 124 individuals from 25 of the original 100 families—were resettled in an area adjacent to a municipal parking lot. Despite official assurances, the facilities were substandard: the plumbing provided in the plastic "temporary" housing provided no running water; there were four public toilets for all 124 persons; the electrical facilities experience frequent power failures. A delegation of municipal authorities which visited the new settlement promised speedy action to correct the problems, but as of May 7, 1997, none of these promises had been fulfilled. We kindly request updated information about the living conditions in the settlement from your government.

The *European Roma Rights Center* was disturbed to learn that, several days after the forced relocation, municipal authorities surrounded the settlement with a wire fence and placed armed guards at the only opening. These guards allegedly have been searching residents' automobiles, demanding to see the identification papers of anyone entering, and questioning inhabitants about personal matters. Visitors have reportedly been forbidden from entering the settlement after 9:00 PM. Even though we presume good faith on behalf of the Greek authorities, we must observe that Roma camps surrounded by fences of wire and armed guards recall the worst atrocities this century has witnessed.

Mr. Prime Minister, the *European Roma Rights Center* is concerned that by creating an encampment which is regulated by restrictive measures, the Greek authorities have transgressed certain provisions of international law. We call your attention to the fact that restrictions on the freedom of movement of individuals are in violation of Protocol 4 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR). The violations of private and family life to which the Roma of Ano Liosia have been subjected are, furthermore, in violation of Article 8 of the ECHR. Finally, the degrading and discriminatory treatment to which the Roma of Ano Liosia have been treated constitutes gross violations of Article 3 and Article 14 of the ECHR.

The highest European institutions have repeatedly stated their commitment to banish and reverse the century long degradation of Roma in Europe. Throughout the continent, Roma and non-Roma are presently uniting in their determination to see that the injustices of the past are rectified and that the continuing exclusion of Roma from European society is overcome. We therefore view the recent developments in Ano Liosia, so at odds with Greece's international commitments, with the utmost gravity.

The *European Roma Rights Center* appeals to your office to immediately remedy the situation of the Roma in Ano Liosia by removing the wire fence surrounding their settlement, ending the permanent stationing of armed guards at the entrance, and halting all unauthorised searches and related violations of individual rights. The *ERRC* asks that you undertake, without delay and in co-ordination with

representatives of the Roma community, all steps which are necessary to overcome the existing elements of unequal treatment of Roma by the Greek authorities. Such endeavors demand time, energy and resources, as well as good will. We are convinced, however, that they produce goods which camps surrounded by wire fences and armed guards cannot. We trust that your office is up to the task.

Respectfully,

Dimitrina Petrova
Executive Director

ERRC letter to the Prime Minister of Greece Simitis Megaro Maximou

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September 5, 1997

Honorable Prime Minister Simitis,

Appendices

On May 23, 1997, the *ERRC* sent a letter to your office, expressing concern over the creation of a new Roma settlement in Ano Liosia. In that letter, we called your attention to abuses including the violation of home and privacy, the destruction of property, forced resettlement, and the creation of an encampment regulated by restrictive measures. We note that we have not yet received any response to our letter. We also note that, according to our information, no Romani individuals from Ano Liosia have yet received compensation for damages sustained, and the group as a whole remains subject to unacceptable limitations on their personal freedom. Additionally, since our original letter, information has emerged which suggests a pattern of widespread harassment of Roma by municipal authorities, from the denial of refuse removal services to community expulsion and the destruction of property.

At the end of May 1997, the mayor and the prefectorial administration of the municipality of Kriti (Nea Alikarnassos, near Iraklion) allegedly ceased collecting the garbage in the Roma neighbourhood in the town. Unsanitary conditions have thus far led to at least one serious disease. Romani and non-Romani citizens living in the area contend that the withdrawal of trash-collection services is part of a wider strategy intended to force the 500 Roma of Kriti to leave the municipality.

The *ERRC* has also learned that the municipal authorities of Trikala have destroyed the homes of 20 families of Roma in the areas of Agroviz and Pyrgos, and have expelled the Roma living there.

Further, according to information received by the *ERRC*, on June 10, 1997, the tribunal of Thessaloniki ordered the expulsion of Roma from the area of Evosmos. The mayor of Evosmos and some owners had previously submitted a petition of temporary measures against 91 families of Roma on the grounds that the neighbourhood where they live is designated for recreational purposes. According to the court decision, the Roma of Evosmos will be imprisoned and fined 500,000 Drachma each if they refuse to leave the area.

The *ERRC* has further been informed that on July 23, 1997, the municipality of Agia Paraskevi sent bulldozers to demolish shacks in which twenty families of Roma live. Following hostile reaction by local Roma and, according to some sources, a refusal by the workers concerned to implement the decision, the operation was canceled. However, one week later, the bulldozers of the prefecture allegedly returned and destroyed all twenty huts. Roma living in the huts were expelled.

Forced migration of Roma in Greece is evidently not a new phenomenon. Local authorities reportedly expelled fifty families in the community of Trikala, mentioned above, in 1990. Also, in August 1996, 116 Roma living in Menemeni, near Thessaloniki, were transferred by local authorities in August 1996 to a second area, without the prior provision of any kind of infrastructure in the new location. Authorities had allegedly earlier promised the Roma a series of housing measures in order to secure their consent to the transfer. The situation in the new settlement is currently miserable. It has been reported that no sanitary facilities were provided. Holes in the ground dug to serve as toilets allegedly stand open, constituting a threat to the health of the residents. Additionally, the new settlement is situated dangerously close to local gas, ammonia, oil filter and brick factories.

Mr Prime Minister, we note that not only do these measures constitute violations of international law, they also contradict the stated aims of the Greek government to devote its attention to improving the situation of Roma in Greece.

The *European Roma Rights Center* therefore appeals to your office to undertake immediate measures to stop the efforts of municipal authorities from expelling Roma from settlements, as well as to attend to improving the miserable situation of Roma nationwide. We thank you in advance for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

Claude Cahn
Research Coordinator

ERRC letter to the Chief Prosecutor of Greece concerning the destruction of Romani dwellings

On March 1, 1999, the ERRC sent a letter to Chief Prosecutor of Greece Mr Panayotis Dimopoulos expressing concern over the destruction of barracks inhabited by Roma in the town of Aspropyrgos in the Attica region of Greece. The text of the ERRC letter is as follows:

The *European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)*, an international public interest law organisation which monitors the rights of Roma and provides legal defence in cases of abuse, is concerned by reports of a serious new case of destruction of barracks in a Roma camp in Greece.

On February 16, 1999, authorities in Aspropyrgos, Attica, entered the Romani camp of Nea Zoi and destroyed dwellings and property. The camp has about 100 inmates; basics such as water supply or sewer system do not exist. According to reports, six employees of the Aspropyrgos municipality, approximately twelve local police officers, as well as Deputy Mayor Mr Constantinos Tsiggos took part in the raid. Upon entering the settlement, the officials told the Roma that five of the barracks must be evacuated so that they could be destroyed. The barracks were then crushed by bulldozers and the remaining debris set on fire, while the Roma protested. The Roma were not shown any document authorising the action. The inhabitants of the destroyed barracks were reportedly not given enough time to remove all of their belongings from their homes. The inhabitants of some of the barracks were not in the camp at that moment. One woman who was present while her dwelling was destroyed was critically ill. The police watched the proceedings but did not interfere. The Romani inhabitants of the settlement present at the time of the raid were allegedly told by raiders that they would be evicted from the entire region.

The Roma of the Nea Zoi camp have previously been promised water supply, a sewer system, a water heater etc; nothing has materialised. In 1996 the Greek government announced a plan for the creation of decent settlements for Roma living in similar conditions. Last year the local authorities reportedly urged them to move to the adjacent municipality of Ano Liosia, in a camp next to a dump. At that time, the Roma refused on grounds that the conditions in the camp to which they were supposed to move were worse than in their present location. In addition, they argued that their children would be too far from the school which they are now attending.

Instead of having their conditions improved, the Roma of the Nea Zoi settlement are now threatened with eviction in winter and some have already been rendered homeless. Property belonging to them has been destroyed by public servants.

We urge you, Mr Chief Prosecutor, to undertake a prompt, thorough and effective investigation into the above-described events and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

We would appreciate receiving information about any action taken by your office concerning this matter.

Chief Prosecutor of Greece Mr Panayotis Dimopoulos can be contacted at the fax number (301) 64 11 523. The Roma of Aspropyrgos and many similar camps in Greece would benefit from any additional letters of concern from the public at large.

Open letter to the Prime Minister of Greece

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**Doctors of the World
Drom Network for Roma Social Rights
European Roma Rights Center
Greek Helsinki Monitor
Minority Rights Group–Greece**

**Mr Costas Simitis
Prime Minister of Greece
Athens, 20 September 1999**

TOPIC: ROMA (GYPSIES) ARE GREEK CITIZENS TOO...

Appendices

Dear Mr Prime Minister,

The co-operating non-governmental organizations *Doctors of the World*, *Drom Network for Roma Social Rights*, *European Roma Rights Center*, *Greek Helsinki Monitor* and *Minority Rights Group-Greece* were pleased to hear the following statement you made concerning the housing of the quake-stricken people:

“This is a temporary arrangement that will last a few weeks. Then there will come a second phase, with more permanent constructions, which, however, we are also going to limit as much as possible, because we do not want to create a class of citizens that lives next to and outside society. In no way indeed does the government wish to let the matter of the quake-stricken people, people facing hardship and worse luck than the rest of us, lie over” (*“Eleftherotypia”* 11/9/1999, p.4).

The statement of Minister of the Interior Vaso Papandreou was also welcome:

“It is the intention of the Ministry of the Interior to have the quake-stricken people settled in tents for the next three weeks; afterwards we are going to adopt the temporary solution of prefab settlements in areas that each municipality will indicate. For this to happen, roads will have to be cut and power/water supplies must be connected so as to ensure proper living conditions for the dwellers. However, these settlements too will be of a temporary nature, as it is planned to have the quake-stricken people back in their homes within a period of three months” (*“Eleftherotypia”* 14/9/1999, p.50).

Equally welcome was the government's promise that:

“Apart from the tents, the settlements will have chemical toilets, drinking water, electricity either through the public power supply or through army generators, as well as medical staff and army ambulances” (*“Avgi”* 10/9/1999, p.7).

We believe that these correct views, which are being implemented at a quick pace today, despite the difficulties that arise because of the usual inefficiency of the public administration, led you three years ago to announce a similar plan for the improvement of the situation of the Roma tent-dwellers in Greece.

Unfortunately, as it is evident today, only few kilometers away from the earthquake camps of Ano Liosia (just like in numerous other settlements throughout the rest of the country), Roma tent-dwellers live “next to and outside society” and continue “to face hardship and worse luck” to quote the above statement. They are “society-stricken” fellow citizens, obviously victims of extensive racism against them, which you yourself denounced in public two years ago. It is possible that you have not been informed that certain municipalities which immediately found sites for their quake-stricken citizens, only a month ago denied that there were such sites available for the socially outcast Roma.

Today the state declares and shows its ability to implement Article 21.4 of the Constitution for the housing of the homeless at a quick pace. This reinforces the impression throughout the world that the pending Roma settlement problem stems

from lack of political will to fulfil your declarations in conjunction with strong racism on the part of some local authorities. Racism is unfortunately evident these days also in the attitude of certain people towards quake-stricken, until now settled, Roma that has been reported by media all over the world.

We would like to point out that, in March 1999, our organizations along with the Progressive Left Coalition political party, submitted to the Prime Minister's Office for the Quality of Life a draft law-product of their long experience with settlements-for the creation of self-managed Roma settlements with every requirement for the improvement of their living conditions and their smooth integration into society. This proposal is already being implemented, even with considerable delay and after a lot of pressure, in the settlement of Agia Sofia Gonou (Thessaloniki). Unfortunately, the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for tabling such a bill in Parliament, has not looked into the matter and has arbitrarily cancelled even the formation of a Committee for the Problems of Roma Tent-Dwellers which was decided by government officials, non-governmental organizations and Roma organizations, after a meeting in the Ministry of the Interior, in mid-June 1999.

In view of the above, we hope that you will personally make sure that society-stricken Roma are treated on an equal basis as our recently quake-stricken fellow citizens and that there is no discrimination between them. Thus, in three, or even six or nine months, all these Greek citizens can have homes and the impression that the Greek state and society are indifferent, if not accessory to the marginalization of thousands of Roma will be dispelled.

We hope, therefore, that on Wednesday 22/9/1999, when the matter is again discussed at the OSCE Review Conference 1999 in Vienna, the government will give convincing and strictly binding answers to this request.

Yours sincerely,

The representatives of the organizations:

Doctors of the World (Yannis Boukovinas)

Drom Network for the Roma Social Rights (Thanassis Triarides)

European Roma Rights Center (Dimitrina Petrova)

Greek Helsinki Monitor (Panayote Dimitras)

Minority Rights Group-Greece (Nafsika Papanikolatos)

May 19, 2000

On May 19, 2000, the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), an international public interest law organisation which monitors the rights of Roma and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse, sent a letter to Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis to express concern at the recent decision by the Council of Magistrates Court of Thessaloniki to drop charges against officers involved in the 1998 killing of a Romani man named Angelos Celal. Mr Celal was shot in the back as he drove away from the scene of a police ambush. ERRC field research conducted in May 1998 revealed that police officers in Greece are rarely if ever disciplined for abusing the human rights of Roma, even in extreme instances, such as instances in which officers kill Roma in the course of duty. The ERRC letter urges Prime Minister Simitis to undertake all measures available within the limits of law to see to it that officers who have abused their powers in the case of Angelos Celal are brought to justice. The text of the ERRC letter follows:

Honourable Prime Minister Simitis,

The *European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)*, an international public interest law organisation which monitors the rights of Roma and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse, is concerned at the recent decision by the Council of Magistrates' Court of Thessaloniki to drop charges against officers involved in the 1998 killing of a Romani man named Angelos Celal.

After officers ambushed a group of Roma suspected of involvement in a car theft on April 1, 1998, a number of shots were fired in the rural area of Partheni, Thessaloniki, as a result of which a Romani man named Angelos Celal, an inhabitant of Halkidona, was killed. According to police investigation, seventeen spent cartridges originating from firearms used by the police were found at the scene of the shooting, while an additional one spent cartridge possibly originating from a non-police weapon was recovered. In connection with the killing, on May 22, 1998, investigators brought charges against Officer Seraphim Papadopoulos, police lieutenant, inhabitant of Thessaloniki, for a) intentional murder, b) intentionally and repeatedly committing attempted murder in a group and c) deliberate damage to private property. Lesser charges were also brought against two other police officers:

- Mr Eleftherios Giakoumakis, inhabitant of Thessaloniki, for a) intentionally and repeatedly committing attempted murder in a group and b) deliberate damage to private property;
- Mr Stavros Hadzidimitriou, inhabitant of Thessaloniki, for a) intentionally and repeatedly committing attempted murder in a group and b) deliberate damage to private property.

Criminal charges were also brought by the Prosecutor of the Magistrate's Court of Thessaloniki against two Romani men:

- Mr Theocharis Frangoulis, an inhabitant of Halkidona, for a) conspiracy to commit larceny b) resisting arrest c) intentionally and repeatedly committing attempted murder in a group d) illegal weapons possession e) use of weapons f) intentionally and repeatedly attempting to cause grievous bodily harm in a group;
- Mr Vasileios Rasimoglou, inhabitant of Halkidona, for conspiracy to commit larceny.

On February 23, 2000, the Council of Judges of the Magistrates Court of Thessaloniki ruled that charges be dropped against Officers Papadopoulos, Giakoumakis and Hadzidimitriou on grounds that they had acted in legitimate self-defence. The Court evidently disregarded forensic evidence indicating that Mr Celal had been killed by a gunshot wound in the back. The Court recommended that the Romani men, Mssrs Frangoulis and Rasimoglou, be prosecuted as charged. The Court additionally ordered that the two men be remanded into custody. A request to the Office of the Prosecutor of the Appeals Court of Thessaloniki to challenge the Court's ruling, lodged on April 24, 2000, by the Athens-based non-governmental organisations Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group/

Appendices

Greece, has been disregarded and the deadline for the Appeals Court to act has now lapsed.

Honourable Prime Minister Simitis, numerous instances of police abuse of Roma, including killings of Roma by police officers, have been reported in Greece in recent years. *ERRC* field research conducted in May 1998 revealed that police officers are rarely if ever disciplined for abusing the human rights of Roma, even in extreme instances, such as instances in which officers kill Roma in the course of duty. We urge you to undertake all measures available within the limits of law to see to it that officers who have abused their powers in the case of Angelos Celal are brought to justice.

Sincerely,

Dimitrina Petrova
Executive Director

Persons wishing to express similar concerns are urged to contact:

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RACIAL SEGREGATION OF ROMA IN ITALY

Most Roma in Italy live in a state of separation from mainstream Italian society. For over half of Italy's Roma, this separation is physical: Roma live segregated from non-Romani Italians. In some areas, Roma are excluded and ignored, living in filthy and squalid conditions, without basic infrastructure. These Roma "squat" abandoned buildings or set up camps along the road or in open spaces. Their settlements are often called "illegal" or "unauthorised". They can be evicted at any moment, and frequently are. A racist society pushes these Roma to the margins and hinders their integration. Where Italian authorities have expended energy and resources on Roma, these efforts have in most cases not been aimed at integrating Roma into Italian society. Quite the opposite: as the third millennium dawns, Italy is the only country in Europe to boast a systematic, publicly organised and sponsored network of ghettos aimed at depriving Roma of full participation in, or even contact or interaction with, Italian life. These Roma, in Italian parlance, live in "camps" or ghettos that are "authorised".



Anti-foreigner sentiment and intense hostility towards Roma, accreting to the focal points of ghettoised Romani camps throughout Italy, has in recent years found expression in abusive raids conducted by police and other authorities. Police misconduct in Italy ranges from verbal abuse to serious ill treatment and shootings. During field missions in 1997 and 1999, and in the course of regular monitoring beginning in 1998 and continuing to the present, the ERRC has documented numerous cases of police abuse. Instances of abuse include:

- Abusive raids, evictions and arbitrary destruction of property
- Abusive use of firearms
- Torture and physical abuse
- Discriminatory targeting of Roma by police
- Theft by authorities
- Confiscation of identification papers
- Sexually abusive searches of women
- Failure to provide proper interpretation to immigrant Roma accused of criminal acts
- Failure to provide information concerning detained Roma
- Threats and violations of the right of assembly
- Inadequate sanction for officers who abuse their authority

In addition, anti-Romani hostility in Italy finds expression in discriminatory treatment by judicial authorities; violence against Roma by non-state actors; discriminatory treatment of Roma in the provision of public services; the denial of the rights of Roma to education; and abuses of the right to employment. Finally, Italian authorities now appear intent on capitalising on anti-Romani sentiment in Italy by abusively expelling Roma from the country.

THE ROMA (Gypsies) remain to date the most deprived ethnic group of Europe. Almost everywhere, their fundamental rights are threatened. Disturbing cases of racist violence targeting Roma have occurred in recent years. Discrimination against Roma in employment, education, health care, administrative and other services is common in many societies. Hate speech against Roma deepens the negative stereotypes which pervade European public opinion.

The European Roma Rights Center is an international public interest law organisation which monitors the human rights situation of Roma and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse. The ERRC is governed by an international board of directors. Romani organisations and Romani individuals throughout Europe contribute time, money and expertise to the ERRC. The ERRC is a cooperating member of the *International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights* and has consultative status with the Council of Europe.

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