

**Report to the OSCE
Implementation Meeting on
Human Dimension Issues:
Greece (Excerpts on Roma)**

Warsaw, 17-27 October 2000

**by the International Helsinki Federation
for Human Rights (IHF), Greek Helsinki Monitor
(GHM) and Minority Rights Group-Greece (MRG-G)**

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International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF)

Wickenburggasse 14/7
A-1070 Vienna, Austria
Tel. +43-1-408 88 22
Fax: +43-1-408 88 22-50
E-Mail: office@ihf-hr.org
Internet: <http://www.ihf-hr.org>

Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)

P.O. Box 60820
GR-15304 Glyka Nera, Greece
Tel. +30-1-347 22 59
Fax +30-1-601 87 60
E-mail: office@greekhelsinki.gr
Internet:
<http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>

Minority Rights Group-Greece (MRG-G)

P.O. Box 60820
GR-15304 Glyka Nera, Greece
Tel. +30-1-347 22 59
Fax +30-1-601 87 60
E-mail: nafsika@greekhelsinki.gr
Internet:
<http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) is a non-governmental organization, which monitors compliance with the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act and its follow-up documents. In addition to supporting and providing liaison among 39 Helsinki Committees and cooperating organizations, the IHF has direct links with human rights activists where no Helsinki Committee exists. It criticizes human rights abuses regardless of the political system of the state where these abuses occur.

President: Ludmilla Alexeyeva
Executive Director: Aaron Rhodes
Deputy Executive Director: Brigitte Dufour

Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), since 1993, is the Greek member of the International Helsinki Federation. In 1998, GHM became a member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) and in 2000 of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network. GHM monitors, publishes and lobbies on human rights issues in Greece and, occasionally, in the Balkans. It has participated and often coordinated the monitoring of Greek and Balkan media for stereotypes and hate speech. It has co-published 'Hate Speech' in the Balkans (ETEPE, 1998) and Greece Against its Macedonian Minority: the Rainbow Trial (ETEPE, 1998). Since 1997, in cooperation with the European Roma Rights Center, it runs a Roma Office for Greece. In 1998, GHM was one of the initiators of the Center of Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe - Southeast Europe (CEDIME-SE).

Spokesperson: Panayote Dimitras

Minority Rights Group - Greece (MRG-G) was created as the Greek affiliate of Minority Rights Group International in 1992. MRG-G focused mostly on the studies of minorities, in Greece and in the Balkans. It has prepared detailed reports on ethnonational, ethnolinguistic, religious and immigrant communities, in Greece; and on the Greek minorities in Albania and Turkey. In 1998, MRG-G was one of the initiators of the Center of Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe - Southeast Europe (CEDIME-SE) which operates a web site (<http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>) and two web lists covering human rights issues and comprehensive and comparable presentations of all minorities in the region.

Spokesperson: Nafsika Papanikolatos

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Foreword

This report is one in series of reports which the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) has submitted to the Review Conferences, Human Dimension Meetings and the Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Throughout the years the IHF has actively participated in these meetings, it has always valued them as significant fora for both governments and non-governmental organizations to raise human rights concerns in the OSCE participating States.

The IHF believes that the role of the non-governmental organizations in the OSCE meetings – whether in the form of comprehensive country presentations, interventions or informal discussions with government representatives – has significantly encouraged a constructive and open dialogue on current human right problems in the OSCE region.

In the past two years, discussions between the Greek government and Greek Helsinki Monitor (IHF member) at OSCE meetings have resulted in constructive communication on several issues raised in this report. The aim of this document, which will also be submitted to the Greek Ambassador in Vienna, is to encourage and enrich this dialogue and to find solutions to the human rights problems still persisting in Greece.

Aaron Rhodes
Executive Director
International Helsinki
Federation
for Human Rights (IHF)

Panayote Elias Dimitras
Spokesperson
Greek Helsinki Monitor
(GHM)

Nafsika Papanikolatos
Spokesperson
Minority Rights Group-
Greece
(MRG-G)

“Human rights violations by the administration (...) can be codified with the words arbitrariness-indifference-bias-impunity; they take their most acute form when applied on vulnerable social groups [p. 18]. Often the administration arbitrarily uses public interest as an excuse to restrict individual rights or shows illegal idleness when there is a constitutional obligation to protect human rights. These phenomena will not be eliminated as long as existing disciplinary procedures remain idle. (...) The administration, reproducing the most backward reflexes of our society, often shows its worst face when dealing with members of minority groups [p. 70]. The pathology of human rights in our country is mainly a problem of implementing existing constitutional and legal provisions rather than lack thereof [p. 69]. It is common wisdom that in the administration prevails a feeling of impunity, that in some cases favors occasional illegal actions, or in other cases it perpetuates a status of generalized anomy and corruption [p.70].”

Annual Report 1999 of the Greek Ombudsman

Overview

When the government of Prime Minister Costas Simitis came to power, in January 1996, many hopes were raised that Greece will finally engage in a modernist course that will include full respect of human and minority rights. Mr. Simitis was in fact given an opportunity right away, in February 1996, to justify such expectations. A televised live police raid of a destitute Roma settlement in Aspropyrgos, near Athens, with police using excessive violence, made him order heavy sanctions against the instigators and damages to be paid to the victims. In his speech inaugurating the EU's campaign against racism a year later, in February 1997, he mentioned that police action as an example of racism in Greece. In the meantime, upon his instructions, three ministers launched in July 1996 an ambitious "Framework Program" of 3 billion drachmas (USD 7.7 million). through the end of 1997. It included, *inter alia*, the "immediate, within 1996" setting up of five temporary but adequately equipped settlements (in Menemeni, Messini, Thebes, Karditsa, Rhodes) and the resettlement of two other communities in Antirrio and Serres.

Regrettably, the implementation of that policy to fight institutionalized racism and provide decent living conditions to the Roma failed dismally. The government's own *Implementation Review for 1996-2000* mentions that the aforementioned (re)settlements are still in the implementation phase. Moreover, not only no Aspropyrgos Romani family has ever received any funds for the 1996 damages, but the government's "review" does not even mention any plans to provide that community with decent living conditions. So, the local authorities have interpreted that silence as a go ahead for their "divide and cleanse plan" they have been implementing since 1997. The few Roma living in the Aspropyrgos-Ano Liosia settlements who are registered in these municipalities have been offered money or supposed better conditions to move away, while the vast majority of the other Roma, who had migrated from the rest of the country, have been summarily, brutally and illegally evicted. Four such evictions have occurred since 1997. The most recent one was going on in the summer of 2000.

All efforts to prevent these evictions – as well as similar ones in Greater Athens (in Aghia Paraskevi, Halandri, Nea Ionia) - or find alternative sites to house these Roma have failed as local authorities have been claiming they want the land on which Roma are or can be settled to build sports or other facilities for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. A GHM and MRG-G letter sent to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Juan Antonio Samaranch, in August 2000 - asking the IOC not to tolerate a cleansed, Roma-free, Greater Athens as the host of these Games - has reportedly led to a letter of concern by the IOC President to the Greek authorities. It is hoped that it may finally make the latter seriously plan Roma relocation – rather than "cleansing"- in the country's capital, including speeding up still frustratingly slow efforts that have been engaged following pressure by NGOs and the Greek Ombudsman Office (like in Halandri).

The Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Center, Dimitrina Petrova, after her field mission in Greece, stated to the French News Agency (12 May 1998) that:

"Roma are not treated and do not live like humans, they exist outside society, their situation is totally unacceptable."... Education for Greek [Roma], of whom 80 percent are illiterate according to local NGOs, is at the root of many of their problems," Petrova noted."... "In this field, Greece is the worst country in East and Central Europe," she said.

Petrova described as “stupefying” the poverty in which many Roma exist and the level of police violence to which they are subjected. *“In many regions, it seems routine to badly treat and subject arrested [Roma] to brutality,”* Petrova said, adding that these incidents were never taken up by the authorities.

The Vice-President of Doctors of the World-Greece, Yannis Boukovinas, said to state television station ET-3 on 24 October 1998 about the largest Roma settlement near Salonica (near the Gallikos river): *“It is worse than the refugee camps I have visited with our organization in occupied Palestine or war-torn Irak.”*

The government’s “review” does mention that Gallikos Romani community. It claimed (when submitted to parliament, in response to a question by MP Maria Damanaki, in February 2000) that its relocation to a fully-equipped settlement, in Gonou, was being completed. But, in September 1998, answering another parliamentary question by MP Stella Alfieri, the government had already promised that the mine-sweeping of the former barracks of Gonou would have been finished by November 1998, which meant that the infrastructure would have been ready by February 1999. While, when probed by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), in May 1999, the government had promised that the resettlement would be completed by September 1999.¹ Before the April 2000 elections, work was temporarily speeded up for the local politicians – like Minister of Defense Akis Tsohatzopoulos – to be able to boast in front of television cameras that completion was imminent, so as to be able to gather votes. Today, in mid-September 2000, work is still in progress: the government had in the meantime announced a 30 July 2000 deadline² not honored either. On 13 September 2000, homes were allocated to the Romani families, with the promise that they will be settled on time for the Prime Minister to have the opportunity to inaugurate their model settlement. Had it not been for the continuous pressure by the local DROM and other national NGOs (which had even brought charges against the state for negligence in 1997), the Gonou project (not included in the original 1996 Framework Program) would not have existed or would have been abandoned, as implicitly acknowledged even by the OSCE/HCNM. Already, DROM advocate Thanasis Triaridis has counted 11 deadlines set by the state and never respected.³

The Greek government proved beyond any doubt that it lacked the political will to house Europe’s most destitute Roma when it mobilized the administration in September 1999 for the victims of the Athens earthquake. Free space was found instantaneously to locate temporary housing for an earthquake-stricken population larger than the total number of destitute Roma in Greece. Infrastructure works were completed almost overnight and pre-fabricated houses were allocated to all homeless victims. Ironically, there was an abundance of land for earthquake victims in municipalities near Athens, like Ano Liosia and Aspropyrgos, where its scarcity had been the primary excuse for the inability to relocate the Roma living there.

Greece’s disheartening reality was aptly described by the OSCE/HCNM:

“The experience of Roma settlements in Greece highlights a problem that has salience in many countries. The effectiveness of any policy vis-à-vis Roma can turn upon the cooperation of multiple layers of government. But responsibility for inadequate policy implementation cannot be laid solely at the doorstep of local authorities. In some

¹ OSCE HCNM, *Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area*, April 2000, p. 115.

² Macedonian Press Agency, 19 July 2000.

³ See “Unconventional Thoughts on the Plight of Roma in Greece: On the Value of Sleeping Restlessly,” AIM Athens, 29 August 2000, at <http://www.aimpress.org/dyn/trae/archive/data/200008/00829-005-trae-ath.htm>

countries that have undertaken initiatives to develop comprehensive Roma policies, national officials appointed to implement those policies operate without adequate support at the most senior levels of government. In order to be effective, public servants require the support of national leaders and local officials.”⁴

And not only of them, it could be added. Even the Rector of the University of Patras, Professor S. Alahiotes, (in a meeting with GHM, MRG-G and the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life, on 1 December 1999, to discuss ways to help Roma squatting on or near university property) stated, without offering even a shred of evidence when probed, that:

“Gypsies know that they are entitled to certain rights and they play the fool... They constantly rob, there have been people arrested. (...) The University is an international forum. What kind of sensitivity can there exist towards people who are trespassing private property, embarrassing the institution internationally when their goats show up in the amphitheaters? (...) We want to protect the reputation of the University, it is an international forum, a showcase. We cannot tolerate that someone drives by it and a Gypsy throws stones...”

When, after a sustained NGO and – unprecedented for Greece - local media campaign, the mayor of Patras finally acknowledged in July 2000 his responsibility for the welfare of the Romani community of Riganokampos (university property but far away from its campus), and decided to provide it with running water as a first step, the Rector opposed the measure. He argued it may lead to semi-legalizing the Roma’s presence in the area. So the water tabs were put instead alongside the adjacent road. The government’s “review” has no provision for this settlement.

The Greek government has recently been seen to implicitly encourage explicitly racist municipal decisions branding all Roma criminals and asking for their forced eviction, even banning – in one case - their presence within town limits. Such unanimous decisions were taken in May and July 2000 by the municipal councils of Nea Kios, Nea Tyrintha and Midea (all in Argolida): in Nea Tyrintha, in fact, the eviction had been requested also by the Ministry of Justice. They helped create an explosive climate in the area that led, in June 2000, *inter alia*, to the burning of one Romani hut, the shooting of a Romani youth, the harassment of one journalist, and the ban of an anti-racist group from entering Nea Kios. When asked to condemn these openly racist and cleansing actions, the Government Spokesman Minister Dimitris Reppas rejected such suggestions and described these actions as “personal disputes, instances of ‘vendetta’ that often break out in certain areas.”

The Greek Ombudsman’s Office has repeatedly warned of the illegal and sometimes racist character of eviction decisions or actions, and “blanket” police raids of Romani settlements in search of possible crime suspects, usually without the presence of a Public Prosecutor. In its 1 June 2000 letter to the Nea Kios Mayor and Municipal Council, it called parts of the text of the eviction decision as “*characteristic manifestations of hate speech and, especially, incitement of others, and specifically your citizens - to racial discrimination and actions of racial hatred.*” It also reminded these authorities that their decision, including the creation of citizens’ guards, were leading to actions punishable by articles 1, 2 and 3 of the anti-racist law of 927/1979 on incitement to racial discrimination and hatred; on forming groups and organizing propaganda or activities aiming at racial discrimination; and on refusal to serve people on racial criteria.

⁴ OSCE HCNM, p. 116-117.

Moreover, in a letter to the Salonica Police (11 August 2000), it pointed out that Romani huts are covered as homes by article 9 of the constitution; *“contrary opinion would discriminate in an unequivocally racist – and hence unconstitutional - way the dwellings of these groups of Greece’s population on the basis of their nomadic way of life.”* It has also urged them to *“avoid the creation of the stereotype of ‘usual suspects’ at the expense of racial minorities like the Roma”* and called a blanket police raid of the Gallikos Romani community, on 6 July 2000, a possible *“indication of the stereotypical view that links Roma with serious criminal offenses.”* While, in a 25 July 2000 “extremely urgent” letter to the Aspropyrgos Mayor and City Council, it reminded them that evictions from municipal property required “protocols of administrative eviction” issued by municipal authorities after a decision of the city council, which are to be served to the squatters first. It asked for prompt information on whether the late July 2000 “cleaning” – according to police – of the Romani settlements: in reality “cleansing” them including through the leveling of Romani huts. If not, the police and municipal operation was in breach of article 241 (violation of the security of the home) and 331 (self-adjudication) of the Greek penal code.

The Ombudsman will probably be once again ignored. GHC and MRG-G believe that no Public Prosecutor will seriously investigate these cases, even when charges are pressed, if we judge by recent practice. Nor will there be an internal investigation. As the Ombudsman wrote in its *Annual Report 1999*:

“Human rights violations by the administration (...) can be codified with the words arbitrariness-indifference-bias-impunity; they take their most acute form when applied on vulnerable social groups (p. 18). Often the administration arbitrarily uses public interest as an excuse to restrict individual rights or shows illegal idleness when there is a constitutional obligation to protect human rights. These phenomena will not be eliminated as long as existing disciplinary procedures remain idle. (...) The administration, reproducing the most backward reflexes of our society, often shows its worst face when dealing with members of minority groups (p. 70). The pathology of human rights in our country is mainly a problem of implementing existing constitutional and legal provisions rather than lack thereof (p. 69). It is common wisdom that in the administration prevails a feeling of impunity, that in some cases favors occasional illegal actions, or in other cases it perpetuates a status of generalized anomy and corruption (p.70).”

Finally, the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), in its *Second Report on Greece* (released on 27 June 2000) comes to similar conclusions with the OSCE/HCNM and the Greek Ombudsman, and adds:

“There have been consistent reports that Roma/Gypsies, Albanians and other immigrants are frequently victims of misbehaviour on the part of the police 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 for the improvement of the response of the internal and external control mechanisms to the complaints of misbehaviour vis-à-vis members of minority groups on

the part of the police. In this respect, ECRI notes with interest the recent establishment of a body to examine complaints of the most serious cases of misbehaviour on the part of the police and emphasises the importance of its independence and of its accessibility by members of minority groups” (p. 13).

In our detailed report below, there are many examples of such negligence of the judicial and disciplinary authorities. Even in cases where there was conclusive and incriminating forensic and other evidence of torture (Bekos and Kotropoulos case) or murder (Celal case) of Roma at the hands of the police, that had led initially to grave indictments of police officers. The report offers also ample documentation for the failure to implement the ambitious Framework Program mentioned before, as well as short references to the grave health problems of the tent-dwelling Roma and the assimilatory educational program with no respect for Romani language and culture of the Greek government.

As previously argued in a GHM and MRG-G submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD),⁵ whatever measures taken by the Greek government to fight racism are insufficient to ensure the effective implementation of the ICERD, particularly in regard to Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, and with respect to the Roma population.

Article 2: Discrimination and violence against Roma are widespread in Greece. Legal protection against discrimination and racially motivated violence is rather inadequate. However, more acute problem is the failure to ensure the effective implementation of existing laws.

Article 3: As in several other countries in Europe, governmental policies towards Roma, most notably in the fields of housing and education but also in other areas, have proven to this date ineffective to reverse racial segregation. No other segment of the Greek population is subjected to the same conditions of living as the Roma.

Article 4: Some public officials, as well as the police force in Greece have made racist speech or have taken racist decisions targeting Roma, thereby encouraging racism rather than combating it in the society they govern. No one has been sanctioned or punished for such statements.

Article 5: The Greek government has failed to ensure Roma (as well as other minorities or migrant group) equal protection of the law. Roma suffer widespread discrimination in the justice system, and are the victims of violence at the hands of law enforcement authorities. In addition, Roma are commonly discriminated against with respect to a broad range of rights, like employment, housing, health care, education, and access to public goods and services.

Article 6: Widespread breaches of the Convention perpetrated against Roma in Greece, are facilitated by pervasive impunity. Protection of the Roma is lacking or ineffective, and remedies non-existent or inadequate.

Article 7: Promotion of racial tolerance, through educational and media campaigns to familiarize the public with the Convention and its standards, is entirely absent in Greece.

On 23 July 2000, on the occasion of the commemoration of Greece’s 26th anniversary of the restoration of democracy, GHM and MRG-G issued a public statement recalling that:

⁵ See GHM & MRG-G, *Racial Discrimination And Violence Against Roma In Greece*, 31 July 2000, at <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/pdf/CERD-roma-Greece.PDF>

“We wish to point out that the quality of democracy is judged by how it treats the weakest groups of its population. Among Greek citizens, there are more than 100,000 Roma (Gypsies) who live in destitute settlements, ‘enjoying the democratic state of law’ as permanent victims of institutionalized racism by state agencies. Not only do the perpetrators usually go unpunished, but also they are indirectly encouraged by governmental statements that downplay, if not arrogantly negate, the undisputed violations of Roma rights.”

The following is an indicative, but not exhaustive, list of violations of Roma rights, noting that, for those cases referred to the Ombudsman, the latter had confirmed the charges made by the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These events, covering the period 1996-2000, took the form of a “tally” of the supposed implementation of the governmental “Policy Framework on Greek Gypsies,” launched in July 1996.⁶

- Racist Decisions by Municipal Councils Explicitly Referring to Roma Evictions (3):
Localities: Rio (1999), Nea Kios, Argolida (2000) and Nea Tiryntha, Argolida (2000)
- Illegal Evictions with No Resettlement Provisions (7):
Localities: Evosmos, Salonica (1998), Ano Liosia, Attica (1997, 1999), Anatoli, Ioannina (1999), Makryianni, Patras (1997), Phoinikas, Salonica (1997) and Trikala, Pyrgos (1997).
- Attempted Evictions Averted By Protest (10):
Localities: Halandri (1999), Aspropyrgos (Nea Zoi 1999, Homateri 2000), Aghia Paraskevi, Attica (1997), Trikala (Kokkinos Pyrgos, 1998), Larissa (Neapoli, 1998), Nea Alikarnassos, Crete (1999), Spata (1997), Kalamata (1997) and Phoinikas, Salonica (2000).
- Destitute Settlements (15):
Localities: Riganokampos/Kato Souli Patras, Damaris Lamia, Alan Koyu (Andrianoupoleos) Komotini, Halastra Salonica, Nea Zoi and Homateri Aspropyrgos, Nea Tiryntha Argolida, Gallikos River Salonica, District Hospital and Kato Kastritsi Rio Achaia, Sageika Achaia, Aetoliko Aetoloakarnania. Supposed “model organized settlements” (according to the government, “appalling models” according to NGOs) with substandard infrastructure: Menemeni Salonica, Makryianni Patras.
- Police Raids with No Public Prosecutor Present:
Localities: Gallikos River Salonica (2000), Aspropyrgos Attika (2000).
- Police Violence (Verbal to Fatal) Against the Roma:
Death of Individuals: A. Mouratis (Livadia 1996) and A. Celal (Partheni Salonica, 1998).⁷
- Bureaucratic Harassment:
No response to naturalization application made in 1990 by the stateless Sezgin Durgut (Komotini). His application for a stateless identity document has been repeatedly refused since 1998. Since 1999, the Komotini Hospital refuses to provide his wife Songiul Durgut with an official answer as to why her uterus was removed during a miscarriage procedure.

⁶ The detailed report below provides short additional information on these cases, while specific details are available at: <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/roma-in-greece.html>.

⁷ From *Degrading Treatment to Torture of Individuals*: L. Bekos – E. Kotropoulos (Messolonghi 1998), N. Katsaris (Nafplio, 1999), Z. Cemiloglu, Y. Cemiloglu, and Y. Alioglu (Xanthi, 1998).

In September 1999, during the OSCE Implementation Review Meeting in Vienna, the official Greek delegation, responding once again to a related presentation by NGOs, described and explained the Roma situation in Greece with remarkable candor and accuracy:

“Last year, when I spoke on the subject of Roma and Sinti at the Warsaw Human-Dimension Implementation Review Meeting, I made two main points: (a) that the situation of the Roma in Greece is, in the eyes of the Greek Government, unsatisfactory and indeed unacceptable, and (b) that the Greek Government is determined to do everything in its power to remedy the situation.

I wish to assure this forum, and in particular those with more direct interest in the matter, that the determination of the Government of Greece has not changed. As for the first point mentioned above, namely, the real situation of the Roma in Greece, I wish I were in a position to say that it has changed dramatically for the better (...).

As I said earlier, the Government’s efforts proceed at a slower pace than we would have liked and encounter various impediments. I have already mentioned bureaucratic sluggishness as one of the latter. Another important, but not unexpected, reason for the slow progress achieved is the fact that the Government programs must, at all stages, be inclusive of those concerned, i.e., the Roma themselves, and not be carried out in their absence. Consensus is therefore vital; and building it - a time consuming exercise under all circumstances - is particularly arduous when dealing with a social group composed of smaller groups, scattered around the country, which do not easily speak in one voice.

Another serious obstacle to the Government efforts is prejudice toward the Gypsies, which, bred over many long years, is still widespread among large segments of the population and is hard to eradicate. Such prejudice, which finds expression in everyday life, takes on more alarming and dangerous character when it is displayed by police officers or by elected officials at the local administration level. We regret -and condemn- the incidents of racist remarks by elected officials and violent acts by police officers mentioned earlier by the representatives of two Greek NGOs.”⁸

Unfortunately, the above text only reflects the sincere will of a few middle-level staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life. By themselves, they can do little to help solve the problems. The necessary high-level support needed to empower the middle-level officials, a sine qua non for them to be effective as even the OSCE/HCNM pointed out (see above), is missing in Greece, hence the middle-level officials’ declarations have usually little practical consequences. For example, the manager of the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life Mr. Angelides recently stated that *“before the first autumn rainfalls, all Roma tent-dwellers would have been relocated to prefabricated houses. We have already allocated more than 500 of them.”*⁹ Keeping such a promise is highly unlikely when even the first project of relocation in Gonou, near Salonica, (see below) is overdue already by almost 20 months.

The competent ministries, first and foremost among them the Ministry of Interior and Public Administration, continue to give the impression that they lack the necessary will for the implementation of the declared policy as well as of the respect for Roma rights. As the effort of

⁸ Permanent Mission of Greece to the OSCE, Statement made by the Greek Delegation on Roma and Sinti, Vienna, 22 September 1999.

⁹ Daily *Eleftherotypia*, 24 June 2000, p. 17

the Ministry has been so far solely confined to the unscrutinized commissioning of programs and the giving away of subsidies of a total worth of several billion drachmas, it is not surprising that, since 1996, all attempts made as part of the government's Policy Framework for Roma have been abandoned half-way through. According to a lengthy "Implementation Review for 1996-1999" provided by the Ministry of Interior to Progressive Left Coalition MP Maria Damanaki in February 2000, as an answer to the latter's parliamentary question, it seems that the only part of the program that had been completed in the past three years was a survey of the housing needs of the Roma.

In theory "government efforts in housing concentrate on finding permanent solutions, through the construction of houses, the allocation of land, and the granting of housing loans, and on creating settlements of a transitional nature until permanent solutions are found."¹⁰ Yet, up to now there has been no example of a destitute Roma settlement relocated satisfactorily. On the contrary, numerous communities of Roma tent-dwellers were evicted or threatened with eviction, or, worse still, relocated in allegedly "model settlements" which are merely "models of deception of the government" by local authorities in collaboration with other public agencies. In its recent report on Greece, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), makes specific reference to the Roma's housing problems and destitute living conditions:

"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 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. ECRI urges the Greek authorities to devote immediate attention to these problems (...) Roma/Gypsies are also reported to experience discrimination in various areas of public life. They face discrimination when attempting to rent accommodation" (ECRI, pp. 15-16).

What exemplifies the absence of will of competent authorities to deal with the Roma tent-dwellers in question and with the non-governmental organizations promoting solutions to these Roma's problems, is the arbitrary decision of the Ministry of Interior to call off - in an anti-democratic fashion- the formation of a Committee for the Problems of the Roma Tent-Dwellers. The creation of the committee was decided in mid-June 1999 after a meeting, in that very Ministry, with the parties concerned; it would have been made up of government officials, non-governmental organizations and Roma organizations. Instead, in January 2000, an inter-ministerial body was set up by the government so as to better coordinate its action for Roma. This body was put under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior. It included only the state-launched Inter-municipal Network ROM and (assimilationist) Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations (two groups the Greek delegations to the OSCE in 1998 and 1999 had held responsible for Greece's poor achievements regarding Roma's resettlement). However, it ignored Roma associations and human rights NGOs active in promoting the tent-dwellers' rights.

In spring 1999, NGOs in collaboration with the Coalition party submitted to the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life a comprehensive draft bill – the end product of their long experience with settlements – for the creation of self-managed Roma settlements meeting all requirements as to improve the living conditions of the Roma and their smooth integration in society. Providing

¹⁰ Permanent Mission of Greece to the OSCE, *op.cit.*

shelter to homeless Greek citizens is a constitutional mandate (Article 21, § 4): the state ought to have - but for 25 years has not had - introduced laws to ensure the implementation of this article as well as the implementation of Article 11(1) of the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

“The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in interpreting Article 11(1) of the ICESCR 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.’ While not all involuntary evictions violate the ICESCR, they generally are 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 and other protection.’ The Committee has also admonished 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’” (OSCE, op.cit., p. 114-115).

At the same time, abuse of violence on Roma by police officers continues: even in cases when policemen have been indicted for homicide or torture, they have not been suspended or even transferred, let alone disciplined by their department or tried in a court of law. Sworn Administrative Investigations and legal proceedings against them advance at a snail’s pace. All these are consequences of institutionalised racism in the police force. Its presence has been confirmed in a recent letter sent by the Greek Police General Staff (Archigio) to the Human Rights Directorate of the Greek Foreign Ministry, in which the Greek Police tried to refute charges of racism and police apathy made in consecutive reports and releases of GHM and MRG-G related to anti-Roma racist incidents in Nea Kios (Argolida). The letter was never sent to GHM and MRG-G but was published in a local newspaper.¹¹ The beginning of the letter is a “textbook case” of racist stereotypes against Roma:

“It is well known that Athiganoi [a pejorative, if not racist, Greek word for Roma, equivalent to calling African-Americans in the U.S. “blacks”] are a traditionally nomadic people who in recent years have shown a tendency to permanently settle, without, however, overcoming their former living habits. This fact, combined with their illiteracy, moral standards, customs and occupations, creates an obstacle both to their adaptation to the native population and their acceptance by this native population. A consequence of what has been briefly mentioned above is the manifestation of their unlawful behavior in such a way that is usually the expression of daily life. This behavior usually takes the form of illegal driving and other violations of the motor vehicle code, violations of the Codes of Sanitation, Building and Commerce, illicit trade, unlawful weapons possession and, often, unlawful weapons use, theft, possession and trafficking of narcotic substances, etc.”

As far as education is concerned, few Roma of compulsory schooling age (between 6 to 15) attend school owing to indifference, if not racist attitude of state officials (municipal counselors, schoolteachers and directors). Even if the claim of the Greek authorities to the ECRI regarding a recent 30% increase in the number of Roma pupils is true, Romani school attendance is still very

¹¹ *Argoliki Enimerosi*, 31 August 2000.

low, especially when it comes to tent-dwellers. Moreover, the promotion of cultural diversity, despite relevant recommendations by international institutions such as the UN, the Council of Europe and the European Union, is not among the priorities of the Greek educational system, which in essence, remains ethnocentric and assimilationist. The existing Educational Program for Roma, run by the University of Ioannina under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education, seems to be undermining the importance of the Roma's cultural and linguistic identity, and the program's director has repeatedly publicly criticized multiculturalism.¹² In that he is in line with the official Greek rejection of the multicultural character of Greek society in the government's answer to ECRI, appended in the latter's report.

ECRI recommendation:

“ECRI considers, however, that there is a serious need to educate the Greek public to the benefits of a multicultural society. (...) Specific courses focusing on issues of tolerance and respect for differences should be offered and teachers should be trained in this area. In addition, in its general policy recommendation N° 1 on combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance, ECRI recommends member States ‘to ensure that school-curricula, for example in the field of history teaching, are set up in such a way to enhance the appreciation of cultural diversity.’”¹³

Greek government answer:

“The policies of the Greek Government in the fields falling in the purview of the ECRI (...) of course ... do not imply adherence by the Greek Government to the notion of a multicultural character of the Greek society.”¹⁴

Moreover, international and national surveys by the Doctors of the World and the Doctors of the World-Greece show that the health problems of Roma tent-dwellers in Greece are among the worst in Europe. According to the aforementioned organizations, the living conditions in many of the settlements that will be mentioned hereafter are worse than refugee camps in different areas of Asia and Africa where they have visited. ECRI concurs:

“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. The vast majority of Roma/Gypsies living in camps are not insured by the public social security system, since they are unable or unwilling to make the required contributions. Like all Greek citizens, indigent Roma/Gypsies are entitled to free health care. However, it is reported that most Roma/Gypsies are not aware of their rights.”¹⁵

Abandoned or Often Persecuted Destitute Roma Settlements

A. Settlements from where Roma were evicted (5)

- Evosmos (Salonica):

¹² For example, eg. A. Gotovos, “Democracy and Otherness” in *To Vima*, 23 July 2000 Book Review Supplement, pp. 8-9.

¹³ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), *Second Report on Greece*, released on 27 June 2000, p 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.15

By a court decision, after an appeal by the local authorities and the owners of the land, in 1997, 3,500 tent-dwellers were ordered to leave an area with zero infrastructure where they had been living for 30 years. After the intervention of non-governmental organizations, the state undertook to transfer them to a properly arranged area at the former military barracks of Gonou and the eviction was postponed. One year later, construction had not begun, while the adjoining municipalities issued a resolution that they would prevent such relocation even if they had to resort to violence; no authority punished them for this illegal and certainly racist action. At the same time, following action taken by the municipality of Evosmos, Roma were threatened with imprisonment, fines, as well as police violence unless they leave. When neighboring municipalities turned them away, they ended up in the dried-up bed of Gallikos river after a month's wandering, in August 1998.

After continuous pressure by NGOs -pressing charges against competent authorities, publicizing the case in Greek and international media, securing repeated parliamentary questions by Coalition MPs- and after the Roma had found themselves in serious danger because of the river floods, the Prefecture of Salonica in cooperation with competent ministries started the works at the Gonou barracks. Nevertheless, the work has been proceeding at a very slow pace and with considerable delay. By May 2000, the barrack was connected to the electricity and water supply but had no sewage system yet. In March and April 2000, because of the upcoming elections, 69 prefabricated houses -originally used for the earthquake victims in Athens- were transferred to the settlement, while the remaining 190 reportedly were on the way. After the parliamentary elections of April 9th, construction work was halted. The new deadline for the transfer of Roma to the settlement had been set for 30 July 2000, but the authorities did not meet it. Following the allotment of homes to the Roma families on 13 September 2000, a new deadline for the relocation was set for early October 2000. As a reminder, the first deadline for this transfer had been set for February 1999.

This relocation will be the first one ever carried out by a Prefecture in accordance with the draft bill for the creation of self-managed settlements of the NGOs, and is implemented under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life in collaboration with the NGOs.

In the meantime, on July 6, 2000, around 6 a.m., police raided the settlement by the river Gallikos in search of drugs, weapons and suspects. Approximately one hundred people were brought to the police station. Against some of them, police found pending warrants for unpaid fines for trading or driving without license. Neither weapons nor drugs were found during the investigation. In an unprecedented action, the Prefecture of Salonica denounced the absence of a Public Prosecutor and the racist character of the police action. Nevertheless, the state Macedonian Press Agency (MPA) covered the incident (6 July) in a way that stigmatized the Roma: it reported falsely that among those taken into custody there were fugitives and suspects of robberies, frauds and other unlawful acts, as well as illegal immigrants. When GHM asked the authorities to investigate and punish both the irregular police raid and the slandering state agency coverage, MPA attributed the initial "exaggerated" information to the police, but did not apologize (10 July). The local association of Roma tent-dwellers, with the help of GHM, filed a report to the Ombudsman denouncing their racist and improper treatment.

- Ano Liosia (Attica):

In October 1996, under the pretext of a search for drugs, police burst into the Roma camp. Rumors about drug trafficking paved the way for the local authorities to evict the Roma in April 1997. 25 out of 70 families -municipal citizens - were transferred to metal prefabricated houses in a near-by area. The rest of the tent-dwellers were given an ultimatum to leave. The new site

was quite isolated, lacked infrastructure (the houses were never connected with a water supply or a sewage system) and was fenced with barbed wire. The new camp had been one of the deceptive “models” until December 1999 when it ceased to exist. At that time, history repeated itself; the local authorities split the population into two once more, transferring the municipal citizens (10 out of the 20 families) to prefabricated houses for earthquake victims and “velvety” evicting the rest. Most of them found resort at the garbage dump.

- Ioannina (Epiros):

In August 1999 the local authorities evicted 30 Roma families (both Greek and Albanian) from an area lacking infrastructure (Anatoli), which they had been renting for 7 years. Roma were not serviced with protocols of eviction. The first threats of eviction started in May 1999. After an intervention of the researchers of the University of Ioannina Program for Roma, in which the camp had been included, the authorities withdrew and undertook to look into the possibility of relocation. That promise was never kept.

- Phoenikas (Salonica):

In May 2000, there was an attempt to evict three Roma families and demolish their houses. The latter were accused of trespassing private land and building illegally. Protocols of eviction were serviced to them by a legal functionary at the presence of the police and municipal employees. Following the Roma’s strong reactions, the eviction was postponed. The families in question have been living in the constantly developing region for more than 30 years. The attempted eviction took place even though the case from the legal point of view was still pending. Roma families claim to have rights on the land too and their recourses have so far not been examined.

- Trikala - Pyrgos or Agroviz area (Thessaly):

On 29 May 1997 local authorities, in the presence of the police, evicted 20 Roma families from the area of Pyrgos or Agroviz after they had been pressed upon by owners of near-by nightclubs. These Roma had been evicted from another area in Trikala 8 years ago and were being evicted again.

B. Settlements threatened with eviction (12)

- Rio (Patras, border between Continental Greece and the Peloponese):

In October 1999, the municipal council of Rio voted in favor of the eviction of the Roma for their alleged criminal activities, poor hygiene standard, and trespassing of public property. Most of them had settled in the region at least five years ago, in an area belonging to the University of Patras, having moved there from other parts of the county. The local university has showed so far no real interest in finding a solution to the problem. On the contrary, in a meeting with GHM, MRG-G and the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life, on December 1st, 1999, the Rector of the University, Professor S. Alahiotes, made racist anti-Roma comments, and offered absolutely no evidence for his charges when probed:

“Gypsies know that they are entitled to certain rights and they play the fool... They constantly rob, there have been people arrested. (...) The University is an international forum. What kind of sensitivity can there exist towards people who are trespassing private property, embarrassing the institution internationally when their goats show up in the amphitheaters? (...) We want to protect the reputation of the University, it is an international forum, a showcase. We cannot tolerate that someone drives by it and a Gypsy throws stones...”

Other families, living on municipal land in Rio, in autumn 1999 were also threatened with eviction. A traffic policeman had asked them to leave the place but they refused to obey. In December 1999, GHM, MRG-G and the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life visited the settlements and had meetings with representatives from the local and prefecture authorities and the Rector of the University. The result of the visit led to a commitment of the prefecture authorities - but not the municipal authorities nor the university - that they would not allow an eviction to take place unless the Roma were provided with satisfactory alternative housing solutions. On 27 May 2000, a meeting on the local Roma took place at the Prefecture of Achaia with the participation of the municipalities concerned, the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life and the President of the Public Estate Company. The Mayor of Rio did not attend this meeting, demonstrating his lack of interest. The official position of the municipality is that it acknowledges the need for housing initiatives only for three local Roma families who are municipal citizens.

- Halandri (Attica):

Thirteen out of 30 families of the settlement received court-ordered evictions in a case judged in abstentia in an area lacking infrastructure where they have been living for about 20 years. They were charged with trespassing. After strenuous negotiations with the District Attorney and the police that would enforce the decision, they were granted an extension until the end of April 1999. In the meantime, local authorities were claiming that the area of the settlement needed to be cleared to make way for a new highway in the framework of the 2004 Olympic Games. As a result of repeated negotiations of NGOs, the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life and the Coalition with the local authorities, it was agreed that proposals would be made to the owners that the Roma would lease the site for a period of 6-12 months until a permanent site for relocation was found. During a parliamentary debate over the matter initiated by the Coalition, the government promised to subsidize the lease. This idea was never put into practice and the eviction remained pending. In addition, the owners of the site resorted to the Ombudsman to claim their property. The NGOs initiated a housing scheme with the Office for Quality of Life and the Ombudsman's support. Plots of land in the wider area are to be purchased and allocated to the local Roma population. As the scheme is still in its initial phase, the eviction exists as a possibility.

- Aspropyrgos-Nea Zoe (Attica):

In February 1999, local authorities, escorted by the police, set fire to 5 Roma lodgings of the Nea Zoe settlement in Aspropyrgos, where 100 families have been living since 1990. The operation took place in the absence of a District Attorney and without protocols of eviction; it was based only on a discriminatory decision of the Service of Town Planning to pull down Roma shacks because the whole residential area - inhabited by both Roma and non-Roma - lacks town planning. The NGOs and the Coalition M.P. Ms. Stella Alfieri pressed charges against the local authorities, while international organizations protested to the Greek government for violation of international treaties and agreements binding for Greece. This, however, did not prevent the Deputy Minister of Interior Mr. Florides, in an answer to a relevant parliamentary question, from trying to justify the use of violence by the municipality, arguing that the Roma had taken possession of the area illegally. A few days later, there were threats that the operation would be resumed. Pre-election promises of the municipality that living conditions in the settlement would be improved remained empty words. In the meantime, the NGOs and the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life proposed a site for the creation of a self-managed Roma settlement of the whole precinct; it is a forest area within the limits of the adjoining municipality of Ano Liosia. The Mayor of Ano Liosia, Mr. Papademas, rejected this solution while his superior, the elected Prefect Mr. Papapetros, has shown no interest whatsoever. The excuse in this case is the alleged

construction of Olympic sports facilities both in Nea Zoe and in the forest area. The arson of Roma shacks has been the second traumatic experience for the Roma of Aspropyrgos after the violent police raid of 1996 - with machine guns and knives in front of TV cameras which sent out the images of Roma being held at gun-point by policemen. It was these scenes that had triggered the announcement of the *1996 Framework Policy on Roma*. A third traumatic experience came afterwards; in May 2000, local residents started to collect signatures in favor of the expulsion of the Roma from their region. In July 2000, following the eviction of the Roma from the neighboring site of the garbage dump (see immediately below), in the borders of Aspropyrgos with the municipality of Ano Liosia, the Roma residents of Nea Zoe were once more threatened with eviction. By 26 July, half of the shucks in the Nea Zoe settlements were demolished by the municipal bulldozers.

- Aspropyrgos-Ano Liosia / Garbage dump:

On July 14, 2000, a municipal bulldozer, in the presence of the Mayor of Aspropyrgos and the police, entered the settlement and demolished most of the huts. The huts belonged to Greek and Albanian Roma tent-dwellers and were full of family equipment. Around 7-8 (Greek) Roma families, with sick members and without possibility to move, were given an ultimatum to leave the site by 17 July. The operation took place without the necessary prior municipal decisions, nor was eviction protocols being given to the Roma families; no Public Prosecutor was present. According to the police, that was a “cleaning operation” of the municipality which emptied the site from vacant shucks belonging to “Albanian Gypsies.” Greek Helsinki Monitor countered that what happened was in fact a “cleansing operation”, violating the asylum and property rights of the tent-dwellers. Following these developments, local Roma, with the help of GHM, filed a complaint to the Ombudsman. The latter summoned the municipality to immediately justify its action and provide the necessary legal documentation (25 July), but the municipality ignored the request. A few days prior to the operation, the Mayor of Ano Liosia proceeded with a “velvet” eviction of the Roma tent-dwellers in the upper part of the dump by offering 100,000 drachmas (USD 256) per family to leave the area, and then leveling their huts. The site around the garbage dump has been existing for years in a semi-legal way. Following the police raid of 1996 in Aspropyrgos, the municipality allowed Roma tent-dwellers to camp in the region, also making promises for water supply and garbage collection. None of these promises were kept. Roma kept on living among the garbage and the rats, in a remote area with zero infrastructure.

- Agia Paraskevi (Attica):

In July 1997, the municipality of Agia Paraskevi tore down 10 out of 28 shanties belonging to the local Roma who had been living in the area for up to 30 years. The latter were charged with trespassing private property and building without a license. A few days later, the mayor attempted to destroy the rest of the shanties with the presence of the police. However, it failed to do so owing to the intervention of non-governmental organizations. For a long time, the matter had been pending as there were protocols of eviction serviced to the Roma. The municipality persistently claims that there is no available land for relocation, while the adjacent 35 acres of land are intended for the building of sport facilities. In November 1999, the mayor of Agia Paraskevi agreed to provide each Roma family with 3 million drachmas (USD 7,700) for the purchase of land in the greater district of Geraka and Agia Paraskevi. The housing scheme of the municipality, in cooperation with the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life and the NGOs, was underway. It aimed at enabling the local Roma to acquire land and to purchase houses by means of loans. The scheme has not yet been implemented and, in this light, the eviction exists as a possibility.

- Trikala - Kokinos Pyrgos area (Thessaly):

Roma tent-dwellers, who camped near a Rudar (Romanian-speaking people sometimes considered as Roma) settlement on a site lacking infrastructure were threatened with expulsion twice by the local authorities in May 1998. It, however, did not service them with protocols of eviction. The first time, municipal workers accompanied by numerous police officers tore down Roma tents, which were put up again later. Reportedly, Roma were finally evicted from the place some time later by orders of the mayor. Eventually, it was reported that in July 2000, they were transferred to a municipal site in prefabricated houses allocated by the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life. The new site in the area "Kipaki-Agroviz" is close to the main city with reportedly comprehensive infrastructure.

- Larissa - Neapoli area (Thessaly):

In May 1998, Roma (about 50 families) were threatened with eviction by the police in the orders of the mayor. The majority of these Roma were citizens registered in the municipality and had been living in the area for 30 years.

- Tyrnavos (Thessaly):

Four hundred Roma families, owners of the land they live on, dwell in tents because of the authorities' refusal to include the area in the city-planning scheme, in hope to discourage their permanent settlement. There is no water or electricity supply, nor a sewage system. Roma have attempted to build lavatories or rooms in order to improve their living conditions themselves, but in vain. Local authorities pulled them down and imposed high fines on the Roma.

- Tarsina Corinthias (Peloponese):

There had been a similar attempt to coerce the Roma as in Tyrnavos. Even though local Roma were owners of the land, they had been living for years with zero infrastructure. In 1999, local residents bought off Romanies' land in order to make them leave the area.

- Nea Kios (Argolida, Peloponese):

The local authority claimed that the presence of Roma had contributed to the high crime rate in the area although the allegation was groundless, according to police reports. The municipal council issued a racist decision on 20 May 2000 to evict all Roma from the region. Police was asked to take action and implement the decision within 48 hours. The Roma's presence, even in transit, in that municipality was officially characterized as undesirable. On 25 May 2000, police raided the local Romani settlements to find guns and drugs but in vain: it only found suspects for stealing electricity. Even though the municipal authorities received a letter from the Ombudsman, on June 1, pinpointing their possible criminal liability, the prohibitions and abuses went on. A group of leftist party-members, human rights and ecological associations, who visited Nea Kios on June 8 to express solidarity with the local Roma, were denied entrance to the city. "Indignant" citizens had blocked the streets while police stood by idly. Local residents, gathered outside the town hall on the mayor's instructions, abused a delegation attempting to meet with the municipal authorities, including journalist Panos Lambrou of the weekly *Epohi*. The following day, on 9 June, a Romani hut was burned down. Roma attributed the arson to a group of non-Roma citizens who had threatened the residents of the hut prior to the fire.

On 15 June 2000, a 17-year-old Rom, Christos Demetropoulos, was shot at and lightly wounded in the arm. Based on his testimony, the perpetrators were non-Roma citizens of Nea Kios who shot at him without any reason. The police did not investigate his allegations, instead it immediately accused Demetropoulos of perjury and arrested him and his mother. The police had arbitrarily concluded that Demetropoulos was shot by an unknown Rom. Worse, police claimed that they had found drugs near his tent, which was refuted by laboratory evidence the next day.

When faced with NGO charges of lying and framing of the Roma, police claimed that its version of the facts was based on hearsay evidence. An unnamed person had allegedly told the local police chief whatever was convenient for him to substantiate his false charges against the Roma. This “eyewitness” was never asked to testify under oath as required, hence strengthening the impression of framing of the Roma by the local racist police. In a 1 August 2000 letter to GHM, Greek Police General Staff (“Archigio”) regrettably subscribed to that version. However, during arraignment, the Public Prosecutor released the Roma and ordered a preliminary investigation, obviously having considered the supposition of the police rather unsubstantiated.

In the meantime, international reaction to the preceding harassment of the journalist and the arson of the hut led to the Minister of Justice’s 16 June 2000 decision of having a preliminary investigation by the local Public Prosecutor on the NGO’s allegations. On 30 June, a complaint signed by 15 people, including members of political parties and human rights associations, was also filed for the whole series of events.

- Nea Tiryntha (Argolida, Peloponese):

On May 31, 2000, the municipal council of Nea Tiryntha unanimously decided the eviction of local Roma from the area of the former agricultural jail. The Minister of Justice allocated part of this area to the municipality for the widening of the main city street in September 1999, setting one of the prerequisites for the expulsion of the Roma settlement. The Roma were given a three months’ deadline, they have until August 2000 to leave the place. Roma families in Nea Tiryntha had settled down in the region about 20 years ago, following their eviction from another part of the municipality. They have been living without any infrastructure in one of Greece’s most destitute camp. The Mayor had publicly admitted that the municipality never took action to improve the Romanies’ living conditions on the ground that the camp was illegal. The case was referred to the Ombudsman by a local Rom though GHM.

- Midea (Argolida, Peloponese):

With the unanimous racist resolution 165/2000 (published on 7 August 2000 in the local daily *Nea tis Argolidas*), the municipal council of Midea decided to evict all Roma living in a tourist road junction, after accusing them collectively, and without any evidence, of attacks against passers-by. Those who own property there should exchange it with other land elsewhere in Midea, while the others were summoned to move anywhere, outside Midea, the Prefecture would find a suitable place. The municipal decision also implied that immigrants residing in Midea were linked with criminal activity, and had a veiled threat that the non-Romani citizens would react if the decision was not implemented.

C. Settlements Having to Date Narrowly Escaped Eviction (3)

- Nea Alikarnassos (Crete):

In November 1997, a violent police raid had taken place in the settlement after persistent rumors of Roma involving in drug trafficking activities. In March 1999, the municipality initiated the eviction procedure of the Roma by making use of a town council resolution dating from 1997, arguing that the area was going to be reconstructed. Protocols of eviction were serviced to 102 families living for months with the threat of expulsion. In the meantime, older requests for basic infrastructure at the settlement remained unanswered. In addition, Roma relocation was very difficult to proceed as none of the neighboring municipalities wanted tent-dwellers at their precincts. Their transfer to a former military barrack and the creation of a self-managed settlement, according to the proposal of the NGOs with the collaboration of the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life, faced the persistent opposition of the mayor who had declared his

intention to evict the Roma from his town. It was only due to much of NGO pressure that this relocation scheme could go under way. In a precedent-setting ruling (976/12-11-1999), the Heraklion County Court annulled the municipal eviction orders as abusive. This facilitated the progress of the scheme. The latter was put under the responsibility of the Regional Governor of Crete. Suddenly, the municipality abusively issued new eviction orders serviced in mid-summer 2000, although it had never appealed the unfavorable to it court 1999 decision. The Roma appealed to the Ombudsman who warned the municipality that its action was in principle legally unfounded.

- Spata (Attica):

In November 1997, there was an attempt to evict 100 Roma from an area where they had been living since 1992. The reasoning behind the attempt was illegal building and was based on a court verdict *in absentia*. The attempt was carried out in the presence of the police and was supported by the local residents who did not want the settlement to be near a newly built nursery school. Following NGO reactions, the eviction was suspended. The local authorities promised to look into the possibility of relocation in another area. Currently, in cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office, the municipal authorities have initiated a relocation scheme. Land was allocated to Roma by the municipality while the Office for Quality of Life will secure prefabricated houses for all 20 families. Infrastructure works will be conducted by the municipality.

- Kalamata (Peloponense):

In 1997, the municipality filed a suit against 70 Roma families in the industrial quarter of Kalamata where they had been living for about 5 years. The reasoning for the eviction was that the area was going to be reconstructed. Roma won the case only after strenuous pressure from local non-governmental organizations. In the end, a proposal for the purchase of building plots in another area was adopted. Following a public bidding, the land was to be bought by the Prefecture and subsidized by the Ministry of Environment. The dossier of the case was delivered to the Secretary General for the Region and by November 1999 the committee to realize the bidding was formed. The bidding took place but did not yield any results as no landowner offered to sell his/her plots to the Prefecture. The idea to proceed with compulsory expropriations of land has been suggested. Yet, it is likely that compulsory expropriations will raise reactions on behalf of the concerned local residents. After overcoming the problem of land, the scheme, in its second phase, provides for the construction of houses to be taken over by the state-run Organization of Workers' Houses. According to the existing plan, Roma would be temporarily transferred to the public areas of the future settlement - with full infrastructure - till the construction of houses is over. Reportedly, local residents are negatively predisposed towards the Roma, gathering signatures and sending letters to the authorities to evict Roma from the region. For the time Roma live in a destitute camp in the region, lacking basic infrastructure.

D. Destitute Settlements (6)

- Aetoliko (Continental Greece):

600 people live in 3 settlements in the area. Only two of the settlements have water. The prefecture promised a settlement with all necessary infrastructure, but progress has been slow. In spring 2000, prefabricated houses were allocated to local Roma residents, following initiatives of the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life.

- Patras - Kato Souli or Riganocampos area (Peloponense):

Near the rubbish dump, 30 families have been living for more than 20 years without any infrastructure, in an area belonging to the University of Patras. During the last three to four years, around 10 families of Albanian Roma joined the camp. The municipality refused to clean up the area for a fee and supply the camp with water. Right next to it, part of the dump that has been planted with saplings is watered by an automatic irrigation system. Until mid-2000, the municipality had neglected the settlement. Following a persistent campaign by GHM and MRG-G, echoed in an unprecedented series of helpful articles in the local press, things started to change. In its June 2000 proposal to the Prefecture, the municipality had at least vaguely proposed the allocation of prefabricated houses to all families in the camp, although without offering any possible sites for relocation. The finding of sites was left to the University of Patras, which, on various occasions, has made clear that it will not allocate the land to the Roma. In July 2000, the municipality made a first step to improve the Romanies' destitute living conditions by providing them with external water tabs. The initiative was strongly opposed by the University of Patras and its Rector, Professor Alahiotis, who argued that it may lead to semi-legalizing the Romanies' presence in the region. As a result, the municipality reportedly installed the water tabs on the public road outside the settlement, rather than near their huts.

- Lamia - Damaria area (Continental Greece):

At the old quarry of the town, near a stream, about 100 families - 60 members of which are locally registered citizens - live in huts, surrounded by rubbish, with hardly enough water and no other infrastructure.

- Komotini - Alan Koyu (Andrianoupoleos) (Thrace):

350 Muslim Roma families have lived in tin huts for more than 70 years. The scant public lavatories are in bad shape. The decision for their relocation to another area with the help of the Organization of Workers' Houses has been pending for many years. So does the improvement in the Roma's destitute living conditions. In August 2000, their relocation was once again publicly announced.

- Halastra (Salonica):

38 Muslim Roma families have camped on a stretch of land belonging to the municipality since 1989. These Roma have lived in the area for 35 to 40 years. Their living conditions are squalid, as there is no infrastructure except for one water pump.

- Sagaiika (Peloponese):

Roma tent-dwellers have been living in an area neighboring a Roma settlement without any infrastructure for more than 30 years. Since 1998, there has been no improvement to their squalid living conditions despite the fact that their problems were reported to the competent municipal and prefecture authorities.

E. Settlements which are Minimally Supported by the Local Authorities (5)

- Argostoli Kefalonia (Ionian Islands):

After they had been turned away from an area near the sea, 11 families -about 100 people- moved to the slaughterhouse ground, under the initiative of the local authorities. The stink of the slaughterhouse and the sandy soil that absorbed the sun's heat in summer made life in the tin huts unbearable. When the municipality took over the slaughterhouse, the stink was considerably reduced. Meanwhile, minor efforts were made to improve other aspects of their living conditions. There are lavatories, two main water pumps and electricity. Nevertheless, the situation remains unpleasant. The mayor never responded to the NGOs' call for a meeting with

representatives from the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life to discuss possibilities to relocate the Roma. Since 1999, there has been no improvement to the Roma's living conditions.

- Sofades, Karditsa (Thessaly):

500 families - 2,500 people in total - live in a built-up area where, apart from 100 detached houses, there are huts and tents. The roads have been paved with asphalt, water, electricity, lavatories and rubbish bins are available. Provision has been made to let the tent-dwellers have the ground of the rubbish dump as soon as this area is closed down. The relocation scheme is already under way. The houses are to be built by the Organization of Workers' Houses.

- Chios (Aegean Islands):

In early 1997, on the mayor's initiative, 10 Roma families were allotted land by the island's ecclesiastical authorities. The local people and the Police Commissioner reacted negatively to the settlement of these Roma in the area.

- Gastouni and Amaliada (Peloponese):

Both municipalities initiated a housing scheme for all local Roma in cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life. Tent-dwellers are to be temporarily transferred to prefabricated houses with full infrastructure. In the long-term, Roma will be enabled to acquire their own house through the Organization of Workers' Houses or the loan scheme.

F. "Official Ghetto" Settlements (3)

- Trikala - Raxa area (Thessaly):

Roma from various parts of Trikala were moved to the Raxa area with the promise that the site would function as an organized camp. In May 1998, the water was cut off without warning. For a long time, local authorities neglected to restore water supply, which in all probability was cut off by local people who wanted to send the Roma away. There was no lavatories or sewage system. In 2000, half of the residents of the site were transferred to prefabricated houses with full infrastructure in the area "Kipaki-Agroviz." The remaining 37 families are to be transferred to prefabricated houses as soon as a new series of houses is allocated to the municipality. Most of them object to their removal from Raxa, arguing that the site in Kipaki is not large enough to host all Roma tent-dwellers in the region. The Roma's local association in Raxa has proposed to the mayor that they would stay in prefabricated houses in Raxa. The municipality has not officially rejected this proposal.

- Patras - Makriyanni area (Peloponese):

In November 1997, local authorities with the consent of 25 Roma families - registered citizens of Patras - pulled down 23 shanties and built up the settlement again after they had evicted all Roma who were not registered citizens of the area. Roma had to put up with a small plot of land, which confined them considerably, even though there were lavatories and water supply. In May 1998, the settlement was full of rubbish and dead rats. A year before, 15 cases of meningitis had been reported in the settlement. By May 2000, the prefecture authorities had made efforts to provide the Roma with alternative housing solutions. 8 out of the 15 families of the camp left the site by making use of the prefect's rent subsidies scheme.

- Menemeni (Salonica):

A "model" settlement was built in an area full of chemical plants and besides an oil pipeline. Twenty-four Roma families (about 120 people) were moved with promises by the authorities

that they would be offered the means for a decent living. Initially the settlement had two lavatories and water but no electricity, forcing the Roma to steal power from a nearby pole. From 1996 until today, there has been no improvement despite the dramatic increase in the settlement's population.

Racially Motivated Decisions by Local Authorities

Some mayors and/or municipal councils take explicit racist or xenophobic decisions without any condemnation by the state, nor any disciplinary or other criminal action – called by the respective legislation - ever taken against them.

- On 20 May 2000, the municipal council of Nea Kios (in Argolida, Southern Greece) unanimously decided to evict all Roma living in their municipality, holding them collectively responsible for allegedly (but not verified by any police data) rising criminality. The government called the incident a case of “personal vendetta.” Excerpts of the decision:

We declare that we do not want the gypsies to be present, move or stay in our Municipality until the issue is settled in principle. We denounce all those who have sold land to gypsies up to now and we consider them instigators of the present situation. Those who do likewise will have to face the entire Municipality of Nea Kios as well the community itself. There is no room for more gypsies in our town. We invite those of the gypsies who have bought land in the area, since they cannot abide by the law and order, to return their property and we declare that we are willing to play a decisive part in this procedure.

- On 31 May 2000, the municipal council of Nea Tiryntha (in Argolida, Southern Greece) unanimously decided to evict all Roma living in their municipality, holding them again collectively responsible for allegedly (but not verified by any police data) rising criminality. Here the eviction decision was encouraged by the Ministry of Justice. Excerpts:

“The document of the Ministry of Justice with protocol no. 100324/24-9-99 concerns the decision for the allotment of a plot of land for the widening of the present road connecting the National Road with the Provincial Road that is adjacent to the Gypsy settlement. We are required to proceed regarding the following:

- a. Fencing the remaining property of the Country Prison*
- b. Eviction of the settlement of the Athiganoi.*

The above-mentioned allotment of land will be cancelled in case the previous two requirements are not provided for.

It is unanimously decided that the illegal settlement of Athiganoi will be evicted immediately from the area on the Provincial Road of Nafplio-Nea Kios, which belongs to the Municipality of Nea Kios and the State. This must be completed so that road-widening works can freely begin on the Country Road connecting the Nafplio-Argos National Road with the Provincial Road of Nafplio-Nea Kios. We request the assistance of the Public Prosecutor, the Police, the Prefectural Authority, and all other agencies for the eviction of the Athiganoi by the deadline date of 31 August 2000.”

- In July 2000, the municipal council of Midea (in Argolida, Southern Greece) unanimously decided (resolution 165/2000) to evict its Roma population, again collectively held responsible for unsubstantiated crimes. Excerpts:

“The area where Athiganoi live is an important crossroad used by the residents of all districts of the Municipality of Midea along with many other transit visitors. This puts at stake the sense of security of all passers-by, including of the Athiganoi. This crossroad includes the road leading to the archaeological sites of the Municipality (Dendra, Midea). As a result, many of the Greek and foreign visitors of those sites have been repeatedly assaulted and robbed by the Athiganoi.

To the increasing number of registered municipal residents of Midea, a large number of non-registered residents is being added, resulting to the highest criminality rates within the Prefecture.

Local Athiganoi with real estate property should remain in our region, though not at the existing site. Their property should be replaced with other land elsewhere. Regarding those Athiganoi without real estate, the Municipal Council should insist on its initial position namely the allocation of a suitable place for the accommodation of all Athiganoi in the Prefecture with the best possible infrastructure (water and electricity supply, sewage system, telephone, etc).

This proposal is submitted after having taken into consideration the feelings of anger of the municipal residents, resulting from all sorts of Athiganoi’s illegal activity. As well as from the large number of immigrants living in our region, which, for lack of personnel, the Police is in no position to control.”

Racism in Media

Greek media and public discourse are full of “hate speech” towards minorities and migrants that is hardly ever met even with simple condemnation by the state, let alone, when applicable, by the use of the special law prohibiting incitement to racial hatred. Extensive documentation of the negative stereotypes and hate speech in the media towards national, ethnic, and religious minorities for the period 1994-1998 is available in *Balkan Neighbours*¹⁶ and Mariana Lenkova (Ed.) *Hate Speech’ in the Balkans*¹⁷.

A case of “mainstreaming” of racist speech, is the following. The publication of a profoundly racist article on the Roma, first, on 26 November 1999, in the extreme-right newspaper *Chrysi Avgi* and then in the local paper *Proini* in Korinthos (Southern Greece), on 15 and 16 December 1999, did not draw neither any condemnation nor any action by the prosecutor. In the article entitled “Let’s talk about... Gypsies”, Roma (“gyftoi” in Greek, which has a pejorative meaning, like “gyps”) were presented as follows:

“Gyps are abnormal hybrids of the three races: the yellow, the black and the white. (...) They are all tasteless, unable to organize themselves and produce spiritual work; they are liars and dishonest people. They are parasites, living at the expense of the others, which is visible in their ‘artistic’ contributions. They have polluted the European culture

¹⁶ Issues 1-8, 1995-1999, published by ACCESS, Sofia.

¹⁷ Athens: ETEPE, 1998.

and tradition, just like the Jews. (...) It was a real fortune that for years they were living in the margin of society. For some of them, this is still the case. The word Gyps in Greek has a derogatory meaning. Everyone who dealt with Gyps knows that they are thieves, drug traffickers, and smugglers. The latest events in the Czech Republic show that Gyps are hated by all White Men.”

Racially Motivated Police Misconduct

In many cases monitored by NGOs, it has become evident that in the Greek police force there is deeply rooted institutionalized racism towards the Roma. Many cases are documented in the sections of this report on Roma and on police brutality. In answering NGO charges on one of these cases, in Nea Kios, the Greek Police General Staff wrote the following to the Human Rights Directorate of the Greek Foreign Ministry.¹⁸

“It is well known that Athiganoi are a traditionally nomadic people who in recent years have shown a tendency to permanently settle, without, however, overcoming their former living habits. This fact, combined with their illiteracy, moral standards, customs and occupations, creates an obstacle both to their adaptation to the native population and their acceptance by this native population. A consequence of what has been briefly mentioned above is the manifestation of their unlawful behavior in such a way that is usually the expression of daily life. This behavior usually takes the form of illegal driving and other violations of the motor vehicle code, violations of the Codes of Sanitation, Building and Commerce, illicit trade, unlawful weapons possession and, often, unlawful weapons use, theft, possession and trafficking of narcotic substances, etc.”

On 6 July 2000, police made a blanket raid on Greece’s largest and Europe’s most destitute Roma settlement, in Gallikos River, near Salonica, in search for drugs and weapons. That same day, the state-run Macedonian Press Agency published a wanton, defamatory and racist “news” report of the event, which totally inaccurately stated that “illegal aliens” were also arrested during the “clean-up raid,” and that “a number of the detainees are fugitives from justice, wanted for robbery, burglary, fraud, and other offenses, and that they are expected to be arraigned tomorrow.” GHM has intervened to the director of the MPA, asking for a full rebuttal to the publication and either the imposition of sanctions on its author or information on the person (most probably a police officer) who induced him to write such inaccuracies. Unfortunately, the only thing the MPA did was to repeat the news item the next day, maintaining that some of the detainees had prior “arrest warrants for burglary.” Even this was erroneous since all had already been released. This time, however, the MPA named “the director of the Thessaloniki Security Police, Fil. Karaghiozides,” as the source of the erroneous and defamatory information. Our NGOs asked from the Ministers of Public Order and Mass Media to engage disciplinary proceedings against the police and media persons involved. There has been no answer to that move, except that on 10 July MPA attributed the false information again to police sources - but did not even apologize to the Roma. So the leading police officer(s) responsible for unjustifiably slandering scores of Roma of Gallikos as “robbers, burglars, cons” have to date not even been under investigation.

Police Violence

¹⁸ As published in *Argoliki Enimerosi*, 31 August 2000.

- Police officers indicted by the Prosecutor's Office of ill-treating two Roma youth - E. Kotropoulos and L. Bekos who were arrested for attempted ice-cream theft at the Mesolonghi police station (8 May 1998) - were not removed from their job, nor have they been transferred elsewhere. Instead, they have exercised pressure to the victims to stop the proceedings against them. There was an unambiguous forensic report, charges pressed by the victims, and the active involvement of Greek and international non-governmental organizations with letters of protest and memos to competent authorities. Even more, the Public Prosecutor indicted three police officers "for torture and other deeds that are offensive to human dignity," However, not even a day in court has been set. While the police and the Ministry ordered a sworn administrative investigation for public order after much NGO pressure, it is not known to have reached any conclusions. Following an appeal to the Ombudsman, the latter, on 22 August 2000, asked the Greek Police to inform the Roma on the outcome of the investigation and the reason of the lack of transfer of the indicted policemen.
- A Rom, Angelos Celal, was killed by policemen in Partheni, Salonica, on 1 April 1998. A sworn administrative investigation was ordered by the competent Police Directorate and the Ministry for Public Order only after much of NGO pressure. The father of the victim pressed charges against the responsible police officers. In May 1998, the District Attorney's Office announced that three policemen were being prosecuted for murder, attempted murder, illegal possession and use of firearms, among other offenses. However, on March 29, 2000, the Council of First Instance Judges of Salonica issued an order to dismiss all charges against the police officers. The reasoning behind this decision was that they were acting in legitimate self-defense. Angelos Celal was unarmed - even according to the police - and was shot at the back as he drove away from the scene of a police ambush. According to police investigation, seventeen spent cartridges originating from firearms of the police were found at the scene of the shooting, while an additional one, possibly originating from a non-police weapon, was recovered. Such evidence can hardly justify legitimate self-defense, suggesting to deliberate shoot to kill. A request to the Office of the Prosecutor of the Appeal Court of Salonica to challenge the Court's ruling, lodged on 24 April 2000, by GHM and MRG-G has been disregarded. The appeal lodged by the father in May 2000 was rejected in July 2000, because of a mere minor technicality concerning the initial pressing of the charges. The Greek justice appears definitely determined not to prosecute the case. Angelos Celal was 29 years old, married and is the father to a child.
- In November 1996 during a police control on a public road in Viotia, Rom A. Mouratis, father of 6 children, was murdered in cold blood. While he was lying on the ground at gunpoint, Mouratis raised his head to take a look at his children who were also on the ground. This movement was considered as "threatening" by a policeman who shot and killed him. The officer was suspended while the sworn administrative investigation was in progress. He was indicted by the District Attorney, but was released pending his trial. No date is known to be set for the trial.
- On 12 September 1999, Nikos Katsaris, a 23-year-old Rom living in the Halandri camp was in a car heading towards Nafplio with his father, his underage brother and a cousin. On this Sunday, they wanted to have a look at three open-air markets, without having to deal with the sellers immediately. All three open-air markets were surrounded by barbed wire. When leaving the third market, three police officers stopped the Roma at gunpoint, telling them to get out of the car, and to put their hands up. The officer did a body search - swearing, kicking and beating them. The Roma claimed that they had only come to look at cars to buy, and not

to steal, as the police suspected. To prove this, they even showed the officers the notes with names and mobile phone numbers of the owners of the cars to prove their intention to buy a car. Nevertheless, they were taken to the police station and kept in two separate cells with ten other people, mostly immigrants awaiting deportation. They were detained because the police found court decisions against Nikos Katsaris and his father involved unpaid fines. The two underage youths were released the same day while Nikos Katsaris and his father were only released after their relatives paid the bail the next day. On 27 October, Nikos Katsaris, with the help of the GHM and MRG-G, pressed charges against the policemen involved and subsequently filed a complaint to the Ombudsman's Office. The police did not even deem the case worth of a "sworn administrative investigation," stating that an internal review in that police station showed that none of the allegations were well founded.

- In May 2000, Dimitris Panayotopoulos, Rom resident of Rio, while driving towards Zefyri in Athens was stopped for police inspection. The police officers were pointing at Panayotopoulos and his wife with their guns, telling them to put their hands up and to get out of the car. In the course of the inspection, the officers in question were addressing the couple as "dirty Gypsies" and "bloody Gypsies."
- In April 2000, Christos Tsirikos, Rom, also resident of Rio, visited a house in Trikala together with three friends. Local residents who thought of them as suspects for robbery called the police. Tsirikos and his friends were stopped by plainclothes officers while driving towards Ioannina. Swearing and pointing at them with their guns, the policemen asked them to lie down on their belly. While in this position, they were beaten with truncheons. They were then brought to the police station of Trikala where they were also beaten while the aforementioned officers were looking for pending warrants against them. They were detained, spending the night in different cells, with water only from the toilet tab, without regular meals and blankets. They were not allowed to make phone calls. They were not informed of their rights and were never explained the reason for their detention. Most probably they were considered suspects of robbery. Police reportedly confiscated 500,000 drachmas (USD1,280) they had been carrying with them as the alleged product of the robbery. Tsirikos was subsequently sentenced to 2 months in prison, for charges he did not quite understand.
- During the police raid of May 25, 2000 in the Romani settlements of Nea Kios, Rom Kostas Demetropoulos, his sons and his nephews were ill-treated by police officers. At around 6.30 a.m., police entered his hut with guns to conduct searches. K. Demetropoulos addressed himself to the Public Prosecutor and the officers, asking the reason for such an investigation. He was then dragged outside the hut and kept into a police car. His sons, Gerasimos, 16 years old and Thanasis, 17 years old, followed the police officers outside the hut, asking for the proper treatment of their father as he was ill. They were both being ill-treated. They were kicked and beaten with truncheons, and insulted. Together with three of his nephews, his two sons and his son-in-law who was just paying a visit to his fiancée, K. Demetropoulos was brought to the police station accused of stealing electricity. Around 15 people were kept in a small stinking cell. Demetropoulos invoked the police to take account of his illness and to put him in a less crowded cell, but it was in vain. Even when he fainted, the police officers denied him medical treatment and he was simply kept outside the cell with an old Romani woman. According to Demetropoulos, none of the detainees was informed of his/her rights and no one was allowed to make phone calls. Christos Demetropoulos, nephew of Kostas, (17 years old, who was also resident of Nea Kios) was beaten once with a truncheon in the back when he protested against the ill-treatment of his uncle. Christos was brought to the

police station together with his two brothers Thanasis and Kostas. They were set free when no pending warrants were found against them. Police officers had also entered his hut in the very morning of 25 May, with guns, swearing and pointing at him and his family.

- Niki Karagounis, a 59-year-old widow, was the Romani woman who was kept separately, outside the cell of the other 15 detainees of Nea Kios. She was also accused of stealing electricity. Karagounis had her foot wounded and could hardly walk. When relatives of hers brought food and blankets, police officers did not accept them. Her neighbor, 25-years-old Vasilis Theodoropoulos, was one of the aforementioned detainees, confirmed that the cell was very small and overcrowded. He also mentioned that no telephone calls were allowed and no food and blankets were distributed to them.
- In October 1998, Ziniye Cemiloglu, her father Yasar Ali Oglu, and her daughter-in-law Yasariye Yasaroglu were ill-treated by police officers in Xanthi, Thrace. Her son, Ceiyan, and her pregnant daughter-in-law, Yasariye, driving their new motorcycle that still lacked some of the certificates, were asked to stop for police inspection. They tried to escape and the police chased after them until Ziniye's parents' house where their relatives were commemorating an uncle's death. The police entered the house beating and swearing at the family members, Ziniye and her parents. The police officers were plainclothes and did not reveal their identity to Ziniye from the very beginning, the latter tried to prevent them from entering the place. She was arrested together with her father for resistance and was brought to the police station in Xanthi with her pregnant daughter-in-law. In the police station, they were being beaten, threatened and insulted by police officers who were trying to make them reveal where Ziniye's son was. Ziniye and her father spent the night in jail. Due to the lack of women officers, body search was performed on Ziniye by a man in a humiliating way. Her father, who was sick, was not allowed to see a doctor. They were asked to sign testimonies which were never read to them (both Ziniye and her father are illiterate in Greek). Despite the obligation stated in the Lausanne Treaty, *inter alia*, that an interpreter of the Turkish language must be present, Yasariye who speaks no Greek was interrogated - in German (as confirmed in her related sworn statement). They were not informed of their rights and they were totally ignorant of the reasons for their detention. The police was persistently asking for Ziniye's son, accusing him of drug trafficking. The accusation was allegedly based on a denunciation made by a family friend and friend of Ziniye's friend. Their trial for resisting arrest has already been postponed many times. The state hospital refused to certify her and the father's wounds from the ill-treatment, therefore, they had to resort to a private doctor's certificates.

Bureaucratic Harassment

- Some Muslim Roma were born stateless. Their ancestors moved from Bulgaria and were considered to be Roma. Christian Roma and most Muslim Roma whose ancestors were born in Greece were granted citizenship in the 1970's (most Roma had been stateless until then). But these Roma (self-identified Turks) were forced by police to acquire expensive alien's residence permits valid only for one year: on them police authorities mentioned they were of "undefined" citizenship and of Turkish nationality (i.e. ethnicity). The police department of Komotini refused in 1999 and again in 2000 to give an identity document (an obligation under the relevant UN Convention) to one of them, Mr. Sezgin Durgut, when our NGOs pointed out to him the possibility. Eight months after his application and only after the Ombudsman stepped in, police alleged that the reference to an undefined citizenship was a

mistake that had supposedly being repeated for years. They claimed that Mr. Sezgin had Bulgarian citizenship, and asked him to prove that he is not Bulgarian in order to consider him a stateless person. They made the same argument in answering a parliamentary question tabled by the Progressive Left Coalition MP, Maria Damanaki. On July 17, 1999, the Minister of Public Order had replied the following:

“In general all cases regarding aliens are being examined thoroughly by the competent authorities. When it comes to the case of Durgut Sezgin, in particular, to his request to be provided with an identity card for stateless people, it should be stated clearly that issuing such a certificate presupposes giving him the status of a stateless person. Mr. Sezgin has no such status based on the documents that the competent authorities possess. He is a Bulgarian citizen, therefore an alien. It should also be stated that, indeed, the latter has received permission to stay in Greece as a person with undefined nationality. In order to be able to seek treatment as a stateless person, Mr. Sezgin was advised to provide the Greek authorities with a valid certificate stating that he is not a Bulgarian citizen. In case he was unable to do so, he was asked to submit a valid travel document from the Bulgarian authorities for his application, regarding permission to stay in Greece, to be considered under law 1975/1999.”

But as far back as in 1997, Sezgin Durgut had provided the Greek authorities with a Bulgarian Consulate certificate saying that he was not a Bulgarian citizen. The Greek state was aware of that but was regrettably deceptively pretending it was not. A year ago, in this OSCE forum, the Greek delegation, probably misled by local authorities, also provided inaccurate information:

“The speaker (...) mentioned one instance, expanded at some length in the report, of one person, Mr. Sezgin, who has been trying to obtain Greek citizenship and whose efforts have not yet been successful. We welcome that such shortcomings of local administration in Greece are brought to our attention. I wonder, however, whether they are really worthy of being discussed in a forum like this, considering in particular that the persons involved cannot be said to be suffering let alone being endangered in any way. Those are cases of people going through a routine administrative process and encountering difficulties in it.”¹⁹

However, Mr. Durgut is suffering, as he has no identity papers at all. One consequence is that he cannot receive benefits for his children. So this bureaucratic harassment is affecting his life negatively. Moreover, his petition to receive Greek citizenship dates from 1990; even though he should have been granted citizenship immediately, as the son of a stateless father and a Greek mother, on the basis of Article 1 of the U.N. Convention for the Reduction of Cases of Stateless Persons (ratified as Law 535/1977 in Greece). After all, his sister was granted citizenship on that ground in 1993. Mr. Durgut resubmitted the same document of the Bulgarian authorities, in February 2000, applying for a second time to obtain a stateless identity card, but has not received any answer. His case was submitted to the Ombudsman who initiated a dialogue with all competent authorities, investigating the ground for such delay and bureaucratic harassment. The Greek Foreign Ministry has asked the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry to confirm the information in the 1997 document issued by the Bulgarian Consulate in Salonica. Months have gone by and no progress is made. Is all that “routine administrative process,” as Greece claimed in this forum last year?

¹⁹ Statement Made by the Greek Delegation in Exercise of its Right of Reply, Vienna, 21 September 1999

We appeal at this OSCE meeting to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry to speed up whatever answer it has to give to the Greek authorities so as to help expose the latter's real intentions: they do not want to admit that they had for years been harassing Mr. Durgut against all Greek and international laws and have even provided related misleading information to the Greek Parliament and the OSCE. In the meantime, for having dared challenge the Greek administration, for it Sezgin Durgut does not exist; he cannot travel abroad, have his driving license extended for his work or get a family allowance. Occasionally, policemen have even verbally abused him.

- Songiul Durgut, wife of Sezgin Durgut, on 11 March 1999 miscarried twins. She went to the public hospital of Komotini where she was told that she had to stay there for at least one day to allow for the necessary medical tests. Being afraid that the doctors in the public hospital would not take care of her, Songiul Durgut went to her private gynecologist. The latter told her that the embryos were dead, adding that she needed to undergo an operation, which required anesthesia. To her great surprise, Songiul Durgut woke up in the public hospital of Komotini. During the surgical intervention of the private doctor, some complications had occurred, so the doctor himself took his patient to the hospital in a state of shock. The doctors in the hospital explained to her that, since she had a perforated womb, they had to take out the vital organ. It took her a few seconds to realize the implications of this operation: she would never be able to give birth again. Songiul Durgut decided to investigate the matter and find out what the gynecologist's share of responsibility was. Once again, she addressed the hospital of Komotini asking for a certificate stating the reasons why her womb had been taken out. At first, she was told that for such a certificate to be issued, she would have to wait for at least one month, while the organ is being examined in the hospital's laboratory. The second time she was told to wait even longer. Yet, she discerned that it was an effort made by the personnel to discourage her from pursuing the case. After consulting with the GHM, Songiul Durgut addressed the hospital for the third time. She was told that the organ was never examined, nor was there any possibility for that to be done in the hospital. Songiul Durgut stated that it was her indisputable right to know what had really happened and that it was the hospital's responsibility to provide her with an explanation. Following this development, with the help of GHM, in February 2000, she filed a complaint to the Ombudsman asking for a proper investigation of the matter. In its first answer to the Ombudsman, the director of the hospital failed to provide the Ombudsman's Office and the victim with a concrete answer regarding the reasons for such an operation. However, the director acknowledged that when she arrived the hospital, her life was in very serious danger. The case remains pending.
- The Directorate of the Town Planning Service in the Prefect of Lesvos (Aegean Sea) fined the municipality of Mytilini for illegally constructing a Roma settlement two kilometers outside the main town of the island. In 1997, the municipal authorities took the initiative to resolve the housing problem of the Roma and provided them with some decent living conditions. The Association of Merchants in Mytilini, however, filed a complaint with the Directorate of the Town Planning Service accusing the municipality of Mytilini of illegal construction. The reason behind this complaint was due to the fear of the non-Roma merchants to their Roma business competitors. The buildings were pronounced illegal and the municipality got a 2 million drachmas (USD5,130) fine. In the last few years, old buildings in Mytilini proclaimed as "national treasures" have been reconstructed without the necessary permits and without any intervention from the Town Planning Service.

Education

*“In education, a 3-year project is now in progress, carried out by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the University of Ioannina, which aims at providing continual education to teachers of Roma children, publication of teaching materials, strengthening intercultural schools, helping high school students, etc. Also, in order to facilitate pupils who move frequently from one place to another, the system of the individual transit-pupil card has been introduced,”*said Permanent Mission of Greece to the OSCE (op.cit.).

In Greece, most Roma and almost all tent-dwelling Roma speak the Romani language. Yet, the aforementioned Education Program on Roma provides for preparatory classes and teaching material solely in the Greek language. Unlike similar education programs in other European countries, the Greek one seems to undermine the Roma identity of the children. On various occasions, Professor A. Gotovos - the director of the program - and his associates have argued that, in the name of diversity, ghetto policies in education have many times been legitimized. In Mr. Gotovos' own words, during the third annual meeting of the Program's associates in January 2000, the aim of this program is “to minimize the importance of cultural background as a contributing element to the organization of a class.” Despite the billions of drachmas allocated to the program, the percentage of illiteracy among Greek Roma, especially among tent-dwellers, remains at extremely high levels - 80%, occasionally reaching 90%. From comparative data of the Doctors of the World it becomes apparent that the percentage of Roma tent-dwellers who can write and read is 6% in Athens and 60% in Montpellier, France.

On 13 January 2000, Doctors of the World-Greece gave a press conference at which they presented the scientific results from their research in four camps in Athens: Agia Paraskevi, Halandri and Aspropyrgos (in Nea Zoe and the garbage dump). The overall population in the aforementioned settlements is estimated around 1,800. Based on this research, one in five children begs in the streets. Only 14% of the Roma have some sort of education. 91% of them have a primary school degree, 7% were registered at the high school level and only 2% at the college level. Literacy seems to be higher whenever there is a school near the settlement.

In addition, as a result of diffused prejudice among state officials (schoolteachers, directors, municipal and prefecture leaders) as well as common people against the Roma, their children's education is seriously impeded. On 22 May 2000, the daily *Eleftherotypia* reported that Roma children in the municipality of Velo (Corinthia, Peloponese) were not allowed to attend classes in the local primary school, following the reactions of non-Roma residents and teachers who locked the school. As a result, the children missed more than one year of preparatory classes under the Educational Program for Roma. The municipality and local society's behavior towards the children's parents was not much different. In one case, a resident even asked the exhumation of a Rom who was buried next to a non-Rom. The aforementioned Roma children were victims of similar racist reactions in a near-by municipality in 1997. Under the pretext of lack of space, the school authorities in Tarsina refused to accept Roma children for morning preparatory classes under the Ministry's program. Evening classes were not allowed either; the school was used by non-Roma children as a playground in the afternoons, and apparently football and classes could not coincide. The municipality helped the local residents to buy off the land where the camp was established, in order to force the Roma to leave. The settlement seized to exist and Roma were scattered around in neighboring sites.

As a rule, non-Roma parents react negatively at the idea of their children's coexistence with Roma schoolmates under the same roof, arguing that the level of education will be downgraded. Non Roma parents try to prevent Roma children's enrollment in schools. When they fail to do so, they take their children from the mixed schools. The third primary school of Zefyri (Western Attica) and the Christian school in Evlalo - an ethnically mixed village in Western Thrace populated by Muslim Turks and Christian Roma and Greek families - are indicative examples of previously mixed schools turned into "Roma schools."

Another discrimination is observed in Xanthi (Thrace). Muslim Roma children in the district of Drosero attend the Greek school program even though Greece is obliged to offer them Muslim minority education like every other Muslim, according to the Treaty of Lausanne. These children are not exempted from attending the morning prayer or the subject of (Orthodox Christian) religion. They have to parade on national holidays wearing Greek national costumes.

Health Care

An international survey by the Doctors of the World²⁰ directly associates the odious living conditions in the settlements with the poor health of Roma tent-dwellers. The results of hepatitis tests in Nea Liosia and Aspropyrgos are significant: 99% of the population has been exposed to hepatitis A. The same percentage for Hepatitis B is 50%: 18% are carriers while the healthy remainder of 32% are adolescents aged 10-18, most of whom go to school. These percentages are high in comparison to the rest of the population. Comparative data from other European cities show that percentages of Roma tent-dwellers in Greece with health problems are higher (42% for the women, 32% for the men). The Roma's access to the health system is insignificant. The Doctors of the World have found the Roma were living completely lack of first aid, vaccination and medical information. Roma do not trust hospitals and First Aid Services, and they find it impossible to follow the pace and procedures in practice in these institutions, except for cases when the doctor has created an atmosphere of trust. Only 15% of them receive benefits. Out of the 40% of Roma who have social security, only 30% are fully covered. These percentages are less than half of the equivalent average for Roma in other European cities. Based on research conducted by the Doctors of the World-Greece in Athenian camps, the average age of the Romani woman who gives birth for the first time is 16 years old. The average monthly income of a Roma family in these camps is estimated to be around 76,000 drachmas (USD 195), approximately half of the minimum salary in Greece.

²⁰ ROMEUROPE Program, Medecins du Monde, Juin 1999.