

Warsaw, 27 September 2007

OSCE HDIM – WORKING SESSION 6

Specifically selected topic: OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti: participation in political life, overcoming discrimination

STATEMENT BY THE GREEK DELEGATION ON ROMA

With respect to the agenda specifically selected topic we would like to emphasize on the legal framework in force regarding the exercise of voting and electoral rights. Considering that it is about Greek citizens, Greek Gypsies enjoy by constitutional law all civic and political rights entitled to Greek citizens *such as electoral – voting rights, freedom of association, syndicalism, expression etc.*

Particular **statistics on Gypsies participation** could not exist, since they are officially registered as Greek citizens with any reference to their origin. Still, following the recent parliamentary elections (2007) as well as the prefectural/municipal elections (2006), it is witnessed that Greek Gypsies **participate at/or constitute individual political parties, they vote and get elected too**. For example, during the recent parliamentary elections, 4 Gypsy representatives (3 men and 1 woman) stood as candidates with the mainstream political parties *at the electoral regions of A' Thessaloniki, Attica, and (the woman) the biggest electoral region of Greece, B' Athens. The fourth of the candidates withdrew its candidature claiming political support to a former Gypsy candidate at the same region.* On the other hand, they **participate at public life by organizing themselves in collective representative bodies<sup>1</sup>** towards the protection and promotion of their civil, educational and cultural rights. The relevant bodies are established on either local or/and nationwide level. To mention only some of those, we note of the "Panhellenic Federation of Greek Gypsy Associations", the "Educational Association of Gypsies at Agia Varvara", "Pan-Hellenic Association of Gypsies and Gypsy Music Friends", "Greek Gypsies Federation of Northern Greece, Macedonia, Thrace & Thessaly" etc. Finally, **participation at central or local government structures** is promoted as well.

In light of those mentioned above, particular difficulties in exercising political and civil rights in general are addressed through the legal framework in force regarding **candidates financial support**, and through the implementation of **alternative administrative procedures targeting lack of identification documents** either throughout the year for any purpose or specifically during the elections weekend. Still it should be clarified that these apply for all Greek citizens, whereas any further requirements apply specifically for gypsies.

Admitting that participation at all levels of public life and not just political is crucial and necessary in terms of equal and effective social integration, I would like to grasp the opportunity to refer in **brief update to the relevant national plan in progress, which is of major importance as to the empowerment of the Gypsy community**.

In the field of **housing**, carried out exclusively on national budgeting, we have **allocated 7.583 housing loans** to an equal number of families all over Greece. Following the modified assessment procedure, **6.224 families have been awarded** with the necessary administrative decision, whereas a total of **5.416 beneficiaries** have already **disbursed** their loans (94,13% increasing) from the banks. The program is based on mandatory submission of identification documents and following the latest **legal review** (6/2006), is held upon:

- **participatory procedures at local level operating committees** -on the basis of solidarity and proximity principles- engaging local authorities; Gypsy representatives and social workers,

---

<sup>1</sup> We note some of them: "Panhellenic Federation of Greek Gypsy Associations", "Educational Association of Gypsies at Agia Varvara", "Pan-Hellenic Association of Gypsies and Gypsy Music Friends", "Gypsies Association at Serres –H ANASTASI", "Greek Gypsies Federation of Northern Greece, Macedonia, Thrace & Thessaly", Greek Gypsies Association H ELPIDA" etc.

- **social assessment criteria** respecting Gypsies' living conditions and lifestyle, i.e. one-parent families, families with many children, people of low income, people with physical disabilities etc.
- **allocation of loans** with respect to existing housing needs throughout the Greek territory.

Another important development (in 2006) was the amendment of the law on the **approval of local urban plans on the grounds of emergency housing rehabilitation programs** for vulnerable groups of the society, including ever since, specifically the Gypsy population too. More **infrastructure works** are under way, involving the purchase of tracts of land and the construction of development works for the establishment of new settlements. Up to date, we have (Ministry of Interior) allocated 45.72 million euro from the national budget on infrastructure works held by the local authorities, whereas (till early Sept. 2007) payments amount to 20.31 million euro.

Further on, 27 *Socio-Medical Centers* operate, in the field of **health**, in permanent settlements, providing with basic health services, vaccinations, counselling and psychological support services. It is worth mentioned that socio-medical centers engage gypsy mediators too. Mobile units have been successfully operating too, in assisting the population living at distanced to the urban center settlements, whereas, with respect to *Gypsy women special needs*, one mobile socio-medical unit provides exclusively with women targeted health services, i.e. pap test and mammograms.

In the field of **culture**, integration in contemporary cultural life is promoted through the operation of 26 cultural houses and entertainment-workshop centers regarding the study and dissemination of the gypsy culture, as well as the enhancement and development of cultural skills and culture acquisition.

And finally, in the field of **employment**, the combat of discrimination while accessing the labor market is encouraged by subsidizing new posts for Gypsies and free traders, as well as through employment training under the EQUAL initiative.

Beyond any mainstreaming policies though, it is worth mentioned that following the modified Municipal & Communal Code (in effect since 2007), Greek Gypsies social integration is further envisaged on the basis of **positive discrimination measures** regarding **local authorities responsibility** on planning, implementation and participation at **local programs and actions aiming to the social, economic and cultural inclusion of Gypsies**.