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Education: Anti-Discrimination and
Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge**

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The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education:

Anti-Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge

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Introduction

General Background

There is no official information on the precise number of Roma or Kurbet¹ in Cyprus. According to the 1960 Constitution, the vast majority of the Roma in Cyprus were included in the ‘Turkish community.’² The Roma in Cyprus were not afforded ‘minority rights’ or any other form of ‘minority status’ as granted by the Constitution to the three ‘religious groups’. In 1960 the Turkish Cypriot community constituted eighteen per cent of the population (art. 2.2 refers to the ‘Turkish community’), whilst the smaller ‘religious groups’, as referred to in the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus (art. 2.3), consisting of Armenians, Latins, Maronites and ‘others’, constituted 3,2% of the population. A ‘religious group’ refers to ‘a group of persons ordinarily resident in Cyprus professing the same religion and either belonging to the same rite or being subject to the same jurisdiction thereof, the number of whom, on the date of the coming into operation of this Constitution, exceeded one thousand out of which at least five hundred become on such date citizens of the Republic’. The Constitution (art. 2.3) recognises three ‘religious groups’ (Maronites, Armenians and Latins), which were obliged to opt to belong to either of the two ‘communities’ in order to exercise their civil duties and enjoy their political rights and thus opted to belong to the ‘Greek community’ (art. 2.1). The Roma were not considered at all; the uncertainty about their numbers, their life-style and the fact that most were Turkish-speaking (and Muslim), and only a few were Greek-speaking (and Christian) who were gradually ‘assimilated’, presumably made matters complicated in granting a ‘religious group’ status. They were certainly never politically organised and, on the whole, have always belonged to the poorer sections of the population, never wielding economic power.

Following the geographical separation brought about by the de facto partition in 1974, most Roma in Cyprus moved to the north, together with the rest of the Turkish Cypriot population. Since the lift of the ban on freedom of movement between the occupied north and the Greek Cypriot controlled Cyprus Republic in the south, there has been a massive fluctuation of the numbers of Turkish Cypriots and Roma residing in the two areas, which results in even more uncertainty as to the exact figures. In any case there are no separate figures from the general

¹ The terms “Roma” and “Kurbet” refer to the same group. The term “Roma” is used in this paper.

² The constitution recognises the ‘Greek community’ (i.e. the Greek Cypriots) and the ‘Turkish community’ (i.e. the Turkish Cypriots) as ‘communities’, endowed with specific power-sharing rights; The Constitution defines three other ethnic groups (Armenians, Latins, Maronites) as religious groups, who only have minority rights.

category of Turkish Cypriots. A few hundred Turkish Cypriots and Roma remained in the south after 1974.³

Officially, neither the Republic of Cyprus in the south, nor the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC, in the occupied northern part of Cyprus), recognise the Roma as a separate ethnic minority group; they are considered to be Turkish Cypriots. Their total number in all of Cyprus is disputed and the estimates vary from 500 and 1,000, the majority nomadised.⁴ One report refers to 700 Roma,⁵ whilst another study puts the number as high as 2000- 2500.⁶ In the south the figure is estimated to be about 550 or 570 Roma, but this is an estimate.⁷

The majority of Romas in Cyprus are Turkish-speaking and have been classified as belonging to the Turkish Cypriot community. Most were Muslims who were thought to have more affinity with the Turkish Cypriot people, hence the generally accepted rationale for their 'moving' to the northern area following the 1974 war. However scholars suggest that their affinity is more closely tied to the Turkish language than it is to a religious persuasion⁸. But there are Romas who are Christians and Greek speaking, known as *Mantides*,⁹ and they were included in the Greek Cypriot community in 1960. They abandoned the nomadic lifestyle and inhabited the inner city of Larnaca, in what was for decades more or less a ghetto, known as *ta Mantika* or *Mantomallas*; were they carried on their traditional crafts and arts.¹⁰ Today they are largely assimilated and their descendants can be recognised, if at all, by their surnames (and their dark complexion).¹¹

The Roma in Cyprus have to a large extent been ignored, avoided and marginalised in society, never recognised as a national minority, religious group or anything that refers to their identity and culture.¹² There are regular reports in the press as well as complaints filed with the Commissioner of Administration from residents in the same or neighbouring areas where families of Roma live, complaining about the Roma lifestyle and demanding that they be evicted from the area.¹³

This study mainly covers the Republic-controlled area of Cyprus. Although efforts have been made to secure data and information about the situation in the Turkish Cypriot controlled north, the information collected is so limited that conclusions cannot really be drawn. For the purposes of this study, the term used will be "Roma".

³ Kyle, K. (1997) 'Cyprus: In Search for Peace', *Minority Rights Group International Report*, Minority Rights Group, UK.

⁴ Kenrick, D. and Taylor, G. (1986) "Gypsies in Cyprus", *Roma*, January (1986), 24: 36-38, available at <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/reprints/body4.html>

⁵ Newspaper Reports quote CIA figures that in 2001 some 700 gypsies and Turkish Cypriots crossed over to the Republic controlled south. They reside mostly in the old Turkish quarter of Limassol, but the rate of crossing over has been reduced since then (see Hadjicostis, M. (2002) "Gypsies in Limassol 'explosive' situation", in: *The Cyprus Weekly*, (14-20.6.2002).

⁶Williams, A. (2000) "The Gypsies of Cyprus, a DRC update", *KURI*, Vol 1 No 2 Spring/Summer 2000, available at <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/Kuri>

⁷ Based on a study conducted during 2003 (Interview with of Social Security Bureau Officer Anthi Peri in the presence of Ms Lauri, deputy director of Social Security Bureau, Limassol 22.10.2004). The total figure for 2004 is similar if the 302 estimated living in Paphos (Interview with of District Officer of Paphos, Mr Metaksas, Paphos 21.10.04) are added to the 350 estimated as resident in Limassol (Interview with the officer for Management of Turkish Cypriot Properties, Ms Eleni Christodoulou, 19.09.2004).

⁸ Williams, A. (2000) "The Gypsies of Cyprus", a DRC update, *KURI*, Vol 1 No 2 Spring/Summer 2000, available at <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/Kuri>

⁹ See Kyrris, C. (1985) "*I Mantides tis Larnacas*" [The Mantides of Larnaca], Rousounides, A. (ed.), *Praktika tou Protou Symposiou Laografias* (Limassol 20-25 May 1978), Nicosia, Cyprus. See also Kyrris, C. (1969) "I Atsingani en Kipro" ["The Gypsies of Cyprus"], Morfosis, September-October-November 1969.

¹⁰ Kyrris, C. (1985) "*I Mantides tis Larnacas*" ["The Mantides of Larnaca"], Rousounides, A. (ed.) *Praktika tou Protou Symposiou Laografias* [Minutes of the First Symposium of Folklore Studies], Limassol 20-25 May 1978, Nicosia, Cyprus.

¹¹ See Appendix 1 for information about the Roma.

¹² Version 3 of the Annan plan, suggested upgrading the Romas in Cyprus to a 'religious group'; nevertheless following objections by both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders in later versions of the plan this provision disappeared. The Greek Cypriot majority rejected the Annan plan on April 24, 2004.

¹³ The Commissioner of Administration has received a letter signed by a number of Greek Cypriots living near where the Roma are housed, demanding their eviction in racist language.

The origins, language, number and names of the Roma in Cyprus

Various groups of Roma have lived in Cyprus for over 500 years, the first immigrants arriving between 1322 and 1400.¹⁴ Their nomadic lifestyle changed with the de facto partitioning of the island in 1974.¹⁵ Today only a few hundred live in the territory under the control of the Cyprus Republic. The majority of the Turkish Romas in Cyprus or *Kurbets* resides in the northern part of the island, mostly concentrated in and around the towns of Morphou/Guzelyurt, and some reside in Famagusta and Trikomo/Yeni Iskele. Most Romas who arrived in 2001-2 to the Cyprus Republic controlled territory from the north reside in concentrated areas, such as the old quarter of Limassol, whilst some were temporarily settled in the village of Kofinou,¹⁶ and others were scattered in the district of Paphos. In Cyprus Romas are referred to by various derogatory names, aside from “Gypsies” and “Roma”, such as “*Tsiggan?*”, “*Athiggani?*”, “*Yifti?*”, “*Kouroupetti?*”, “*Fellab?*” in Greek and *Çingane*, *Fellab* or *Kurbet* in Turkish¹⁷. The term of their self-designation in their own language, is “*Kurbet?*”. According to one expert:

The Roma accept these designations from outsiders, but when asked what they call themselves they responded, ‘Kurbet’ and their language ‘Kurbetcha’. Turkish [as a language] has basically displaced Kurbetcha (...) Some of them said they understood a few words of Kurbetcha, but they did not speak it. In fact, their knowledge of the language was so limited that they did not realize there is a distinct numeric system. Only one ‘older’ woman who was approximately forty-five years of age knew some of the numbers—at least the first three numbers. (...) They generally agreed that only the older people who are still in the occupied area know the language [of Kurbetcha] well. Everyone else has adopted Turkish.¹⁸

General living conditions of the Roma in Cyprus

¹⁴ Kenrick and Taylor claim that “although there are no official records confirming the arrival of Gypsies in Cyprus, it has been estimated by historical calculation that the first immigrants came between 1322 and 1400, when Cyprus was under the rule of the Lusignan (Crusader) kings. Those coming to Cyprus probably came across from the Crusader colonies on the eastern Mediterranean coast (present day Lebanon and Israel)”. See also Kyrris, C. (1969) “I Atsingani en Kipro” [“The Gypsies of Cyprus”], *Morfosis*, September-October-November 1969.

¹⁵ After the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus in 1974 a change took place from the nomadic life to a more settled existence. The largest groups of Gypsies, about 600 are now settled in the towns of Morphou and Famagusta, both in occupied Cyprus. Current total population estimates for all Cyprus are 1.000-2.000 Gypsies. The Gypsies as Muslims were closer to the Turks, hence the move to the north after the Turkish invasion in 1974. See Kenrick, D. and Taylor, G. (1986) “Gypsies in Cyprus”, *Roma*, January 1986, 24 pp. 36-38, available at <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/reprints/body4.html>.

¹⁶ See Kambas, M. “It’s a bitter struggle for the gypsies”, *The Cyprus Mail*, 14.11. 2001.

¹⁷ The Scholars Kenrick and Taylor refer to a number of terms used by the host population: “Tsingos: the official term used in Greek documents and written material, derives from the term ‘Cingani’ (used already in the text of 1468) which derives from the archaic medieval Byzantine word ‘Adsincan’. Yeftos: The Cypriot dialect form of mainland Greek ‘Giftos’. This is common in speech and comes from earlier ‘Aigiptos’, a reference to the earlier belief that the Gypsies came from Egypt. Kouloufos. From the root koul.-This is a pejorative term with the meaning ‘untidy, not settled’. Kilingihros (also, Kollingogy). This may be connected with the term Kaliguri (plus ‘ghir’, turning) and just means ‘nomad’. Cingane: The Turkish version of ‘Adsincan’. The word has no pejorative meaning in Cypriot Turkish.” (Kenrick, D. and Taylor, G. (1986) “Gypsies in Cyprus”, *Roma*, January (1986), 24: 36-38, available in <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/reprints/body4.html>

¹⁸ Williams, A. (2000) “The Gypsies of Cyprus”, a DRC update, *KURI*, Vol 1 No 2 Spring/Summer 2000, available at <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/Kuri>. This expert refers to the Roma as ‘Rroma’ in his paper.

One of the few studies on the subject of the education of the Turkish-speakers¹⁹ points to 'a number of serious problems' faced by the Turkish-speaking community in Limassol, the most important of which being housing. The study points out that "some houses in the community lack basic necessities such as electricity and water supply as well as basic hygiene", a large number of individuals are crammed under the same roof and there is "lack of adequate space and children very often share their sleeping space with their parents".²⁰ The problems of poor housing in the area are known to the authorities for many years: a study in 2001 into the housing in the area by the Limassol municipality found that most houses were derelict and recommended that they be demolished because they were hazardous and dangerous for their inhabitants.²¹ Various newspaper reports have also pointed to the squalor and poverty of these houses.²²

Studies indicate that the local Greek Cypriot residents resent the Turkish-speaking Roma arriving in their neighbourhood in Limassol and accuse them of 'causing trouble'. Even Turkish Cypriot residents seem to want to distance themselves from the Roma population for fear that they would also be targeted and blamed by the Greek Cypriots. There have also been allegations of Police harassment.²³ There is strong evidence of discrimination against Roma in the Republic,²⁴ as they are generally viewed with suspicion by Greek Cypriots and even by Turkish Cypriots. The arrival of large numbers in the south was greeted with fear and suspicion,²⁵ particularly when the then Minister of Justice and Public Order alleged that they may well be 'Turkish spies',²⁶ whilst the Minister of the Interior, C. Christodoulou, assured Greek Cypriots that the authorities "shall take care to move them to an area that is far away from any place where there are any people living", in response to the racially motivated fears of local Greek Cypriot residents.²⁷ During a certain period of time, when a greater than usual number of Roma were crossing over from the north to the south, some families were held in Central Prison. Responding to criticism on this matter, the Interior Minister at the time alleged that they were being 'hosted there' in order to find suitable housing for them,²⁸ until the attorney general ruled that it was illegal to detain them in gaol.²⁹

In 2001-02 and for a couple of years after the initial hysterical reaction against the arrival of the Roma from the north, the situation seemed to stabilise. The opening of the 'borders' which allowed many thousands of Turkish Cypriots to come to the south was generally greeted by both Turkish Cypriots and Roma residing in the south with relief and optimism as they thought that they could no longer be singled out, targeted and harassed and there was a general feeling of

¹⁹ Spyrou, S. (2004) *Educational Needs of Turkish-speaking Children in Limassol*, UNOPS, February-March 2004.

²⁰ Spyrou, S. (2004); moreover, research conducted in 2003 shows that Romas consider housing to be their most serious concern (see Trimikliniotis, N. 2009 *A European Dilemma: Racism, Discrimination and the Politics of Hatred in an Enlarged EU*, forthcoming).

²¹ Confidential Report on the housing in the Turkish quarter of Limassol 27.09.2001.

²² See Frankou, M. "Ti eginan oi koulloufi tis Kiprou" ["Whatever happened to the Koulloufi of Cyprus?], *Selides* 324, 06.02.1998, Savvides, G. "O keros ton tsinganon", *Harangi* 04.11.2001, Economides, S. «I Roma tis Kyprou kai to dikaioma tous stin evimeria» (The Roma of Cyprus and their right to prosperity), *Economiki* 27.10.2001).

²³ See chapter 'Voices of the Subaltern in Cyprus: A Study of Racial Exclusion' in Trimikliniotis, N. (2009) *A European Dilemma: Racism, Discrimination and the Politics of Hatred in an Enlarged EU*, (forthcoming).

²⁴ See Spyrou, S. (2004). Also see Trimikliniotis, N. (2003) "Discriminated Voices - Cyprus Report", Work Package 2, The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of 'Racial' Discrimination, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005, http://www.multietn.uu.se/the_european_dilemma/.

²⁵ Hadjicosta, M. (2001) "Fears over gypsy influx", *The Cyprus Weekly*, 13-19.04.2001 available at *Dom Research Center* <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/news/cyprus/index.html>

²⁶ Remarks by Mr. Koshis, see Matthews, J. (2001) "More gypsies crossing from north as Koshis warns about spies", *The Cyprus Mail*, 03.04.2001, available at <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/news/cyprus/index.html>

²⁷ See Editorial (2001) "Our reaction to Gypsies raises some awkward questions", in *The Cyprus Mail*, 10.04. 2001, available at <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/news/cyprus/index.html>

²⁸ A former Interior Minister and the Chairman of ADIK, Dinos Michaelides stated that "To date all Turkish Cypriots, Turkish settlers and gypsies who have attempted to cross into the Republic have been sent back to where they came from," as "they are all considered to be spies." See Zenon, M. (2001) "Gypsies 'offered accommodation' in jail", *The Cyprus Review*, 20.04.2001.

²⁹ Hadjicosta, M. (2001) "Gypsies released from remand cells", *The Cyprus Weekly*, 20-26.04.2001.

optimism and rapprochement.³⁰ However, there was a tense atmosphere generated in the run up and aftermath of the referendum on the Annan plan to reunite the island on 24 April 2004. The Greek Cypriot rejection of the plan has given rise to extreme nationalist sentiments in the south.

The general conditions of Roma population in the south were adversely affected by a murder of the 14-year-old Roma pupil, Salih Mehmet Ez Houvarda, on 13 July 2004, after he was stabbed at the old port of Limassol in Cyprus by a Greek Cypriot, who was allegedly “under the influence of drugs”.³¹ Police mobilised units around the hospital and the Turkish Cypriot quarter of the town fearing reprisals. The Government spokesman and political parties rushed to play down the incident, expressing deep regret and condemning it as a “heinous crime”. A human rights organisation, issued a press release after the incident regretting the attempts by the government and all the political party leaders to interpret this act exclusively as a result of the psychopathic or drug abuse by the murderer, which is directed towards managing the political repercussions of the events rather than their in-depth and objective assessment and criticised the way authorities made use of psychopathologic factors or the drug abuse to condemn the nationalist and racist motives of such behaviour.³² KISA connected the incident with the situation and attitudes prevalent today and in particular the rise of nationalism in the Greek Cypriot community and that Turkish Cypriots have been practically abandoned to their fate without any protection and are treated as second-class citizens.³³ Since then the situation has been calm with no other incident occurring but it certainly left a scar, particularly for the child’s family who abandoned the south to live in the north. They buried their child in Morfou/Guzelyurt.

Since then the presence of the Roma in the Republic has not received much public attention, save for the allegations that Roma children were accused by Greek Cypriot parents of spreading Hepatitis in the school of Polis Chrysochoos in Paphos in 2005.

The Provision of Primary Education

The Legal Framework for Education

In Cyprus primary and secondary education (up to the age of 16 or the third grade) is compulsory and free for, irrespective of financial circumstances, racial or ethnic origin, colour, religion or belief. At a formal or official level, as far as the ‘right to education’ is concerned, ‘equality before the law’ is upheld as a cornerstone of the ‘rule of law’. Article 20 of the Cyprus Constitution provides for the right of education for the citizens of the Cyprus Republic and for foreigners (or ‘aliens’ as they are legally referred to) alike.³⁴ Allegations of discrimination are strongly rejected by the Cypriot authorities.³⁵ Cyprus has transposed the relevant anti-discrimination sections of the European Acquis.³⁶ Nevertheless, discrimination persists in practice and more ‘sophisticated’

³⁰ See Trimikliniotis, N. (2003) “Discriminated Voices - Cyprus Report”, Work Package 2, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of ‘Racial’ Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005, http://www.multietn.uu.se/the_european_dilemma/.

³¹The victim died in hospital and the assailant, a 29 year old Greek Cypriot, was arrested, taken immediately for a medical examination at the hospital psychiatric ward and is facing murder charges (Police Press release n.10, 13.07.2004).

³² KISA are initials which stand for “Kinisi gia tin Isotita, tin Stiriksi kai tin Allilengii” [Action for Equality, Support and Anti-racism] previously called ISAG- Immigrant Support Action Group. KISA press release 16th July 2004.

³³ KISA press release 16th July 2004.

³⁴ The Attorney General of the Republic has issued a relevant Opinion on the 6.8.2002. The constitutional provision is in line with Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

³⁵ There are express and clear instructions on the subject by the Ministry to all educators so as to promote tolerance and respect towards difference”, (Cyprus Labour Institute *National Annual Report 2004 – Cyprus*, RAXEN, which quotes the Ministry of Education and Culture (2003) Measure to Combat Discrimination in the Field Education in Cyprus, Document of the Ministry submitted in reply to relevant questions by the Research team.

³⁶ Directives 43/2000 and 78/2000 were finally transposed by Cyprus / N. 42(I)/ 2004 (19.03.2004), Cyprus / N. 58(I)/ 2004 (31.03.2004) and Cyprus / N. 59(I)/ 2004 (31.03.2004).

informal policies or social processes, particularly at a micro level, may produce indirect discriminatory results, as the provisions of the anti-discrimination directives provide.³⁷

According to the Cyprus constitution the ‘Communal Chambers’ are to regulate educational matters. Education had been divided under the British colonial authorities, which took over and ‘modernised’ the Ottoman millet system, and allowed for separate education on the basis of religion and national or ethnic background. Both ‘communal’ education systems have been exclusionary and ethnocentric: the Greek Cypriot education would foster ‘Greek-Orthodox’/Hellenism, whilst the Turkish Cypriot one ‘Turkishness’,³⁸ hence the spreading of the opposing nationalistic aspirations of the two communities.³⁹ Some provisions are made for non-Greek citizens of the Republic to be exempt from certain lessons (e.g. Religious Instruction and History) and state subsidies are provided in order for the pupils to attend private non-Greek speaking schools, which is usually one of the many English-speaking establishments or minority schools.⁴⁰

Upon Cyprus’ accession to the EU on 1 May 2004, a new body of laws came into force, transposing, inter alia, EU Directive 2000/43. The law⁴¹ contains a wide definition of discrimination and is wide in scope, covering inter alia, education, and opening the way for “positive action” measures to ensure that the anti-discrimination principle is implemented. However, seeking recourse to the courts or even filing a complaint to the Commissioner of Administration under this law is a procedure that requires both a level of awareness of the existence of this law as well as a certain degree of literacy, which are hardly ever present in the case of the Roma of Cyprus. An interesting provision⁴² is in Section 12 of the Law, which enables organisations whose objects include the fight against discrimination to file on behalf of and with the consent of the complainant an action in the courts or a complaint at the Commissioner’s office under this law. Although this provision has not been utilised so far, it is hoped that anti-discrimination NGOs, which are very few in Cyprus, will take up this challenge and open corridors of communication with the Roma with a view to promoting their rights.

General Social and Educational situation of Roma in Cyprus

The general picture of the educational situation of the Roma in Cyprus has been rather bleak. Their living conditions in the southern part of the island are those of poverty, unemployment or semi-employment, facing wide-spread prejudice, racial discrimination and social exclusion. The authorities do not acknowledge the seriousness of the problem: the recent governmental Report on Social Exclusion does not even refer to the Roma and the Turkish Cypriots as a group at risk of social exclusion.⁴³ In fact, the Roma are by far the most deprived Cypriot citizens.

Overall, there have been some improvements in dealing with immigrants, Roma and other minorities over the period under examination, in that there is more awareness of the issues and some elements of recognition of their cultures. However, the goals remain general and there are no concrete policies and targets, as proposed by the most important study on Cyprus education in the ‘Proposal for Educational Reform’. In practice reform was slow and contradictory and little has been implemented in terms of the content of education, the combating of discrimination and achieving a genuine multicultural education. With the election of Demetris

³⁷ EU anti-discriminatory directives provide for direct and indirect discrimination. See for example Directives 43/2000 and 78/2000.

³⁸ See the Report on Educational Reform titled: “*Dimokratiki kai Anthropini Pedia stin Evrokypriaki Politia*” [Democratic and Humane Education in the Euro-Cypriot Polity], available on the Ministry of Education and Culture Website. A summary can be views at <http://www.moec.gov.cy/metarithmisi/manifesto.pdf> and the full report at http://www.moec.gov.cy/metarithmisi/ethesi_epitropis.pdf

³⁹ See Attalides, M. (1979) *Cyprus, Nationalism and International Politics*, Q Press, Edinburgh; Kitromilides, P. (1979) “The Dialectic of Intolerance: Ideological Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict”, Worsley, P. and Kitromilides, P. (ed.) *Small States in the Modern World: Conditions for their Survival*, Revised Edition, Nicosia, Cyprus.

⁴⁰ See Cyprus Labour Institute (2004) *National Annual Report 2004* – Cyprus, RAXEN.

⁴¹ The Equal Treatment (Racial or Ethnic Origin) Law 2004 [Cyprus / No. 59(I)/2004 (31.1.2003)]

⁴² To be found in Section 12 of the Law Cyprus / No. 59(I)/2004 (31.1.2003)

⁴³ National Action plan for Social Exclusion 2004-2006, Social Welfare Office.

Christofias as President there has been a new impetus. But this can only be confirmed in the years 2008-2009, which has been named as the 'year for education reform' with the appointment of specialist committees for curricula revision.

The Ombudsman's Office examined a study conducted by the Limassol Regional Welfare Office concerning the social exclusion of Turkish Cypriots in Limassol, seventy-five percent of whom are Roma, and has found that there is clearly a pattern of low educational attainment of this specific group and a lack of interest by the parents over the educational opportunities of their children.⁴⁴ The same study establishes that the severe economic difficulties faced by these families, the squalid living conditions, low parental educational level and the wide spread prejudice against this group, generates a negative attitude from the Turkish Cypriots and Roma toward the educational system. The eventual outcome is the quick exit from the classroom seeking to enter the labour market, either as a beggar or working in unskilled manual labour. Furthermore, even if a child goes to a Greek or English-speaking school, the linguistic barriers arising from the lack of understanding of the teaching material and instructions may and usually do drive the pupil out of education. In one research project, Turkish Cypriots and Roma parents raised doubts about whether it is worth sending their children to school at all, as the children do not understand a word of what is being said in the classroom and are subject to abuse.⁴⁵

It is apparent that the generally poor living conditions of the Roma impacts on the education of their children. Spyrou refers to the inadequacy of light, the lack of space, desks, bookshelves or tables and chairs in their homes.⁴⁶ A study conducted the Social welfare Office of Limassol revealed that

some Turkish-speaking parents explained that they do not send their children to school because they do not have money to buy clothes and to provide them with food, and because they lack water in their homes to wash and clean them.⁴⁷

In another case investigated by the Ombudsman, the parents' association of the elementary school of Polis Chrysochoos in Paphos closed down the school between 22 September 2005 and 26 September 2005 demanding from the Ministry of Education to suspend attendance to the school of Roma pupils until they receive confirmation that none of them suffer from Hepatitis, following some Hepatitis incidents in a nearby village three months earlier. The Third ECRI Report on Cyprus refers to 'manifestations of racism and discrimination affecting Turkish Cypriots' and the few Roma, who reside in the south (para. 83).⁴⁸ The Report on Cyprus notes that "the Cypriot authorities have used language and displayed attitudes vis-à-vis these persons that were not conducive to defusing tensions and promoting acceptance of Roma by the local communities."⁴⁹

The educational system in Cyprus is, however, undergoing change which will inevitably have an effect on the Roma education as well. With the advent of over 100,000 persons foreign residents, mostly migrant workers in Cyprus, the increasing influence of European 'ideals' such as 'social integration', 'social cohesion' and multiculturalism have had significant effects on educational policy over the last years. There is a policy direction that where there are migrant pupils and/or other minorities, there is scope (need-driven) for 'inter-cultural education', however this is

⁴⁴ Interview with the Ombudsman's Office Human Rights Officer, Mr. Aristos Tsiartas 16.6.04.

⁴⁵ See Trimikliniotis, N. (2003) "Discriminated Voices - Cyprus Report", Work Package 2, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of Racial Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005, http://www.multietn.uu.se/the_european_dilemma/.

⁴⁶ Spyrou, S. (2004).

⁴⁷ Spyrou, S. (2004).

⁴⁸ See Trimikliniotis, N. (2005), *Oi oroi apasxolisis ton metanaston ergaton kai o rolos tou syndikalistikou kinimatos sti diasfalisi ton ergatrikon keklimnon*, Cyprus Labour Institute, Nicosia, Cyprus.

⁴⁹ Third ECRI Report on Cyprus, adopted on 16.12.2005, Strasbourg 16.05.2006, Council of Europe, p. 25.

confined to a school-wide or micro-level and not at a level of macro planning.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, ultimately there is a conflict between the notion of 'inter-cultural education' on the one hand and the ethnocentric core of the education system on the other. The Ministry may recognise the need for 'inter-cultural education', however it has historically been opposed to moves to create a genuine multicultural system organised at national level that treats all cultures as equally valuable to the Greek culture, as the then Minister of Education said.⁵¹

According to the *Report of the Committee of Experts on the application of the European Charter for European or Minority Languages in Cyprus*,⁵² in general there is little awareness on the subject of promoting regional or minority languages and as such the area is in need for further research: there is "no overall language plan or any national strategy plan at the promotion of regional or minority languages in Cyprus" and "there are no specific laws or policies aimed directly at protecting or promoting regional or minority languages." Moreover, there is a "particular issue concerning the Turkish language": although Turkish language is according to article 3 of the Constitution one of the official languages of the Republic, since 1963 "most of these provisions ceased to be implemented" and "with the *de facto* partition of 1974, the official bilingualism was terminated". The Committee of Experts noted that "Turkish has basically ceased to function as an official language and there are a number of Turkish speakers living in the government-controlled area – Turkish appears to be in a similar position to a regional or minority language in the government-controlled area" and therefore concludes that "the Turkish language does not seem to be fully operational as an official language" with "practical limitations of its use in communication with official bodies."⁵³ Although the Committee considers that "the obligations under Part II of the charter are probably fulfilled concerning the Turkish language in the government-controlled area", it requires more detailed information; the Report speaks of about 1000 Turkish Cypriots living in the government-controlled area "with an upward trend". Due to its mandate, the Committee of Experts did not examine the issue from the perspective of the general anti-discrimination provisions, nor does it refer to the fact that about 5000 Turkish Cypriot workers and other visitors cross over on a daily basis to the government-controlled area for employment, transaction or leisure, which makes the question of Turkish language a complex and central issue as regards both education and employment.

Enrolment, school attendance, educational performance and dropout rates

All four elements in the subheading are crucial indicators that provide a very poor picture as regards the public education of the Roma in Cyprus. There is some improvement with regard to attendance to the primary school as a result of certain measures adopted, such as school meals and a small subsidy paid to the parents to allow them to buy school uniforms and material. However the enrolment and attendance for secondary school children is particularly bad, as out of at least fifteen Roma school children who are obliged to attend secondary school, only two pupils have enrolled.

No official study exists to examine the educational performance of various ethnic and social groups; as such there are no figures to report. However, there is an abundance of evidence that Roma children generally fall far behind all other children. Many of them leave school 'functionally illiterate'. Studies and appraisals show that that the current curriculum is such that Roma children are not likely to succeed; far from it, as one study shows,

⁵⁰ For more details see Zikas, G. (2004) "Towards a Reflexive Intercultural National Curriculum", Intercultural Education and Antiracist Culture, 27th March 2004, <http://www.humanrights-edu-cy.org/projects.htm> .

⁵¹ This was quoted in Trimikliniotis, N. (2001) *The Educational Problems of the Pontians in Cyprus: Preliminary Research and Report on Primary Education*, Report on behalf of the Cyprus Association of Sociologists submitted to the Ministry of Education, pp. 30-31.

⁵² See the subheading of the findings of the Report, Council of Europe, ECRML (2006)3, Strasburg, 27.09.2006.

⁵³ See "1.5 Particular issue concerning the Turkish language", Report of the Committee of Experts on the application of the European Charter for European or Minority Languages in Cyprus, Council of Europe, ECRML (2006)3, Strasburg, 27.09.2006.

most of the children are predestined for failure in school. As one teacher explained, the main problems are “the weakness of the system to accept them, to help them rather, to offer them the alternative solution, so that they are not simply viewers, simply listeners in the classroom, but to have substantial participation.”⁵⁴

A study conducted in 2003 shows that Roma parents in Limassol see no reason to send their children to school as they understand nothing, they get into fights and are excluded.⁵⁵ There has been some improvement in the school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 as far as attendance at primary school is concerned. But, there is a serious problem with the extremely high level of drop outs as well as the transition between the primary and secondary education.

Segregation in different schools, different classes and ‘special schooling’

The official general policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture is the adoption of measures to integrate pupils of all cultural backgrounds and the desegregation of pupils from ethnic or minority origin, to avoid ghetto-based schools. This policy is followed with particular persistence by the Ministry, as illustrated by the institution of educational districts in Paphos.⁵⁶

There is no study on segregation as such. However, some studies do point to the element of segregation, despite the official policy. The Third ECRI Report on Cyprus refers to segregation of other minority groups as well. It refers to ‘reports of de facto school segregation of Pontian Greek children’ (para. 85), whilst some studies on racism and education record stereotypes and discrimination against migrant children,⁵⁷ Turkish Cypriots and Roma amongst the pupil population. There is evidence of segregation at schools attended by migrants and Roma. Many Greek Cypriot parents try to transfer their children from the school to avoid schools attended by migrants and Roma pupils; if they cannot succeed, they instruct their children to avoid contact with Roma children and many Greek Cypriot children do show racial prejudice towards the Roma children.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Spyrou, S. (2004).

⁵⁵ See chapter ‘Voices of the Subaltern in Cyprus: A Study of Racial Exclusion’ in Trimikliniotis, N. (2009) *A European Dilemma: Racism, Discrimination and the Politics of Hatred in an Enlarged EU*, (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ In April 2003 the Council of Ministers approved the school districts on the basis of a balanced distribution of pupils and the avoidance of concentration of pupils of Pontian origin in one school, with the aim of social integration of non Greek-speaking pupils into the wider educational system. The Commissioner investigated the issue as to whether has been adhered to or not in the case of the school of “Panagia Theoskepasti” in Paphos (See Cyprus Labour Institute (2004) *National Annual Report 2004 – Cyprus*, RAXEN).

⁵⁷ Trimikliniotis, N. (2001) “The Educational Problems of the Pontians in Cyprus: Preliminary Research and Report on Primary Education”, Report on behalf of the Cyprus Association of Sociologists submitted to the Ministry of Education 2001; Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) “Mapping Discriminatory Landscapes: Ethnic Discrimination in a divided Education System”, in: *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 16, N. 1, Spring 2004, Research and Development Centre – Intercollege, Cyprus and University of Indianapolis, USA; Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) “Institutional Discrimination” Workpackage 4, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of ‘Racial’ Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005; Trimikliniotis, N. (2003) “Discriminated Voices - Cyprus Report”, Work Package 2, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of ‘Racial’ Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005, Spyrou, S. (2004), Nicosia; Harakis C. (ed.) (2005) *Antikoinoniki Symperifora ton Neon tis Kyprou- Ratsistikes taseis*, Athens: Sakoula.

⁵⁸ See Trimikliniotis, N. (2003) “Discriminated Voices - Cyprus Report”, Work Package 2, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of ‘Racial’ Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005; Spyrou, S. (2004). Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) “Institutional Discrimination in Cyprus”, Work Package 4, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of ‘Racial’ Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005, http://www.multietn.uu.se/the_european_dilemma/. Some recent studies by graduates focusing on participant observation and interviews at the same school have an abundance of examples that illustrate the pupil relations between Greek Cypriots and Roma. Also see Agathokleous, G. (2004) *Politismikes Eterotites ton Tsiganon Mathiton stin Lemeso: Ekpedeftika Provlimata kai Anages*, Dissertation for Graduate Degree, University of Cyprus. Keskenidou, A. and Tsakiri, M. (2003) *I Eterotita tou Politismikou Kefaleou ton Athiganon tis Kiprou os Plesio Ermias tis simmetobis tous stin Ekpedefti*, Dissertation for Master Degree, University of Cyprus.

It is apparent that 'family and socioeconomic problems' penetrate school life. Studies show there is segregation between schools, in part reflecting the wealth or poverty of the surrounding neighbourhood with certain schools becoming the schools of the poor, the migrants, the Turkish Cypriots and the Roma⁵⁹. The primary school with more concentration of Roma in the south, the 18th primary school, has a large number of children from many families under the supervision of the Social Welfare Office (e.g. families with divorced or imprisoned parents), with problems that existed before the arrival of the Turkish-speaking children in large numbers.⁶⁰

As stated above, Greek Cypriot parents tend to move their children away from schools with high concentration of migrants, Turkish Cypriot/Roma⁶¹. Recent research conducted at a particular school in Limassol⁶² found that the principal claiming that there were problems because Greek Cypriot parents reacted very negatively to the presence of Turkish Cypriot and Roma students because "gypsy children have something violent attached to their character". As many as twenty-five Greek Cypriot pupils were moved from the school by their parents because of the presence of Turkish Cypriot and Roma children.⁶³ During the same interview, the principal rejected any claims of discrimination taking place but was critical of the systemic failure. Moreover, the principal seemed worried that children could not integrate in the school system: "a lot of gypsies learned to read and write but up to a point. What puzzles us is that they do not integrate. They do not feel that this school has rules, which they have to obey."⁶⁴

The idea of setting up a Turkish school was initiated by UNFICYP in 1995 and was supported by the Turkish Cypriot leadership. During 2004, UNFICYP carried out a survey amongst the Turkish-speaking families in Limassol (Roma and Turkish Cypriot) which established the desire of these families to have their children attend a Turkish speaking school and be taught the Turkish language, literature and culture. Following this, the Cyprus Government carried out its own survey amongst the same families, which established that the vast majority of these families prefer their children to remain in their existing (Greek Cypriot) school.⁶⁵ On 19 August 2005 the Ministry of Education submitted to the Council of Ministers a proposal for the setting up of a Turkish school in Limassol,⁶⁶ Cyprus' second largest city which hosts a fairly large Turkish-speaking community, made of Turkish Cypriots, Turks, Roma and Kurds. But the Papadopoulos government decided not to open such a school, alleging that none of the families of the Turkish-speaking pupils attending the 18th Elementary School wished to have their children moved to a Turkish school. The 18th Elementary school has, since the school year 2004-2005, hired two Turkish Cypriot teachers who teach the Turkish speaking pupils "their culture, their civilisation, their religion and their literature in their mother tongue".⁶⁷

⁵⁹ See Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) "Mapping Discriminatory Landscapes: Ethnic Discrimination in a divided Education System", *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 16, N. 1, Spring 2004, Research and Development Centre – Intercollege, Cyprus and University of Indianapolis, USA.

⁶⁰ Spyrou, S. (2004) *Educational Needs of Turkish-speaking Children in Limassol*, UNOPS, February-March 2004.

⁶¹ Hence there is a concentration of these groups in certain schools [see Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) "Mapping Discriminatory Landscapes: Ethnic Discrimination in a divided Education System", *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 16, N. 1, Spring 2004, Research and Development Centre – Intercollege, Cyprus and University of Indianapolis, USA. This paper draws on the report "Discriminatory Landscapes", Work Package 1, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of 'Racial' Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005.

⁶² Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) "Institutional Discrimination in Cyprus", Work Package 4, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of 'Racial' Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005.

⁶³ Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) "Institutional Discrimination in Cyprus", Work Package 4.

⁶⁴ Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) "Institutional Discrimination in Cyprus", Work Package 4.

⁶⁵ No effort was made to establish why there was a discrepancy between the two surveys, with both UNFICYP and the Cyprus Government making an extra effort not to appear uncooperative and suspicious of the other. There may be methodological reasons behind the discrepancy but the different answers were possibly prompted by the way in which the questions were phrased. Both surveys are referred to in the proposal of the Ministry of Education towards the Council of Ministers 951/2005.

⁶⁶ According to the Cyprus Constitution, the Turkish Cypriot community has jurisdiction through the Communal chamber over the educational issues of its community; this provision however ceased to be applied following the constitutional crisis of 1963.

⁶⁷ Declaration of the Diplomatic Office of the President of the Republic dated 27.09.2005, received under cover of a letter from the Ministry of Education to the Cyprus NFP dated 15.11.2005.

No special provision is made for the Roma pupils attending the school, who are treated by the authorities as “Turkish-speaking” and who are assumed to have Turkish as their mother tongue; although they all speak Turkish, they also speak Kurbetcha, a Romany dialect.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the union of Turkish Cypriot elementary school teachers KTOS, together with two Turkish Cypriot families residing in Limassol, have sued the Cyprus government for violation of the Turkish Cypriot children’s right to education, but their challenge was rejected by the supreme court.

Despite the fact that Cyprus has ratified the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD) in 1966⁶⁹, which obliges states to “prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of racial segregation”, as developed by the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in its General Comment 19, there is still segregation of the Roma in the Republic controlled south, in part as an unintended consequence of policy, and in part reflecting discriminatory attitudes, the ‘cultural capital’ and socio-economic and family conditions of the Roma.

Segregation or Integration?

The official policy is *not* to segregate and on occasion the Ministry of Education has been particularly drastic in taking measures to avoid segregation and the creation of ghetto-based schools, without much success. This failure is attributed to the concentration of migrants, Turkish Cypriots and Roma in a handful of schools. More than half of the Roma pupils are concentrated in one school, the 18th Primary School in Limassol, which has 50 Roma out of a total of 166 students. In itself such a situation is not necessarily negative, if this ‘concentration’ (a) was the result of the free movement of populations utilising their local affinities, family networks, ties and support, (b) the local area which they reside is not deprived but vibrant, multicultural and open to persons of different ethnic mix for cultural exchange; and (d) the multicultural mix of the school itself would act as solid basis for developing expertise and innovative teaching geared towards a multicultural environment and not as the basis for a marginalised, deprived and second rate school. In short, if the policy aims at the avoidance of deprived, ghetto-like schools in deprived areas and neighbourhoods, then the policy is in compliance with anti-discrimination and international law and human rights standards. By contrast, if the policy is one of blanket ‘dispersal’ with motives, such as to spread around ethnic minorities as a concession to native sentiment and attitudes that minority populations should ‘not affect native culture and tradition’, or to ensure that minorities and migrants are ‘not visible in public’, then it is clearly racially motivated and is in breach of anti-discrimination laws and standards.

Roma children are concentrated in certain schools. The available statistical data points to the direction of certain discrepancies in the implementation of educational policies. Whilst the official policy is in favour of desegregating the schools by allocating the minority children in several schools to prevent ‘ghettoisation’, there is failure in dispersing minorities, and in particular Roma across the country. Not only have the numbers of minority children risen at a specific school, there is an inverse relationship between the increased concentrations of students with a specific ethnic minority background correlated to a decreased enrolment of Greek Cypriot pupils in the specific schools.

In Limassol, on two occasions during the last two years classrooms attended by many Roma pupils were separated: in 2003/2004 the first form of this school and this year the sixth form were, following permission from the Ministry, divided into two. In the case of the first form, a

⁶⁸ A letter from the Ministry of Education to the Cyprus NFP dated 15.11.2005 states: “The term Roma is generally acceptable as reference to the special group but may not be the most appropriate one for the gipsies of Cyprus, as far as their language, cultural identity and special tradition are concerned...With regard to the language, Turkish classes are offered to them, which is their mother tongue, as well as support Greek classes, in order to improve their standard.” This is in line with the Cyprus Constitution which does not recognise any ‘minorities’, but only ‘religious groups’ which must necessarily belong to one of the two ‘communities’.

⁶⁹ The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) of March 7 1966, was ratified and incorporated as Law 12/67, as amended by Laws 11/92, 6(III)/95 and 28(III)/99.

total of twenty-nine pupils attended, whilst the total number of children permitted in one classroom was thirty. Nevertheless, and contrary to the existing regulations, the Minister of Education gave instructions for the division of the first form into two, on the basis that the large number of Roma pupils in the class posed obstacles in the successful education of the pupils. In 2004/2005 the sixth form was divided due to the large number of Roma pupils attending it. The total number of pupils attending the sixth form is thirty-two, out of which fourteen are Roma pupils.

No such problem has been recorded in for attending “special schools” or disproportionate representation has been recorded.

Questions of Attitude: ‘Majority’ population, Roma and Education

There are very few studies dealing with the attitude of the majority population towards the Roma in Cyprus. As a rule, the studies attempt to tackle wider issues such racial discrimination against all migrant and minority groups, including the Roma,⁷⁰ survey research on Greek Cypriot pupils and teachers,⁷¹ the educational needs of the Turkish-speaking communities in Limassol (most of whom are Roma), which include research on attitudes about Turkish Cypriots and Roma.⁷² Also there are some recent studies focussing specifically on Roma education by postgraduates and undergraduates students which is illuminating as to the attitudes of the majority population towards the Roma pupils.⁷³

Within the few studies conducted there are some elements regarding the attitudes of the Roma towards educational provisions made available to them, but there is no study directly dealing with this subject. The study on the educational needs of the Turkish-speaking communities in Limassol (most of whom are Roma) reveals a serious problem attributed partly to the language barrier, as many Roma tend to do better in subjects which do not require a strong command of Greek, and partly to the inadequacy of the school curriculum.⁷⁴ Another study, utilising a focus group methodology, which includes a Roma and Turkish Cypriot group casts light upon the attitudes of Roma parents towards education and of teachers’ perceptions of the Roma.⁷⁵ University papers from postgraduates and undergraduate students are also useful sources of information about the attitudes of the Roma towards the education provisions.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ See Trimikliniotis, N. (2003) “Discriminated Voices - Cyprus Report”, Work Package 2 and Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) “Institutional Discrimination in Cyprus”, Work Package 4, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of ‘Racial’ Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005, http://www.multietn.uu.se/the_european_dilemma/.

⁷¹ The research titled *Antisocial Behaviour of Youth in Cyprus and Racist Trends* was funded by the Cyprus Research Promotion Foundation, available at <http://www.research.org.cy>. The survey consisted of a representative sample covering the ages 15-23 and a sample of teachers and head-teachers answering the question ‘which community is disliked most’. Teachers and head teachers placed among seven groups the Turkish Cypriots as those liked least, then the Gypsies and then Arab labourers. The youth sample placed Turkish Cypriots as those liked least, then the Arab workers and finally the Gypsies.

⁷² Spyrou, S. (2004) *Educational Needs of Turkish-speaking Children in Limassol*, UNOPS, February-March 2004.

⁷³ Agathokleous, G. (2004) *Politisimikes Eterotites ton Tsiganon Mathiton stin Lemeso: Ekpedeftika Provlmata kai Anages*, [Cultural Differences of Gypsy Children in Limassol: Educational Problems and Needs], Dissertation for Graduate Degree, University of Cyprus. Keskenidou, A. and Tsakiri, M. (2003) *I Eterotita tou Politismikou Kefaleou ton Athiganon tis Kiprou os Plesio Erminias tis simmetobis tous stin Ekpedefsi*, [Difference in Cultural capital of the Gypsies of Cyprus as a framework of interpretation of their participation in education], Dissertation for Masters Degree, University of Cyprus.

⁷⁴ Spyrou, S. (2004) *Educational Needs of Turkish-speaking Children in Limassol*, UNOPS, February-March 2004.

⁷⁵ See Trimikliniotis, N. (2003) “Discriminated Voices - Cyprus Report”, Work Package 2 and Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) “Institutional Discrimination in Cyprus”, Work Package 4, *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of ‘Racial’ Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005, http://www.multietn.uu.se/the_european_dilemma/.

⁷⁶ Agathokleous, G. (2004) *Politisimikes Eterotites ton Tsiganon Mathiton stin Lemeso: Ekpedeftika Provlmata kai Anages*, [Cultural Differences of Gypsy Children in Limassol: Educational Problems and Needs], Dissertation for Graduate Degree, University of Cyprus. Keskenidou, A. and Tsakiri, M. (2003) *I Eterotita tou Politismikou Kefaleou ton Athiganon tis Kiprou os Plesio Erminias tis simmetobis tous stin Ekpedefsi*, [Difference in Cultural capital of the Gypsies of Cyprus as a framework of interpretation of their participation in education], Dissertation for Masters Degree, University of Cyprus.

Rethinking Roma Education

The concept of multicultural education is at its infancy in Cyprus. There have been few initiatives on the subject and no initiative targeting the Roma education in Cyprus. In the following section a brief description is given of some initiatives, which although have no direct bearing on Roma education, are likely to have a positive impact on the overall framework of education, including Roma education.

The Roma children are treated as children with special language requirements, despite international conventions on human rights⁷⁷ as well as specific rights in the fields of education.⁷⁸ Over the years the Cyprus Republic has been quite positive on ratifying treaties in the field of education and thus adopting some measures as a result,⁷⁹ particularly the European Social Charter (Revised)⁸⁰ and other international instruments⁸¹. There is generally little connection as far as policy-making with the fact that Roma are in fact citizens with rights under anti-discrimination/ human rights law, apart from the general provisions for the right to education and general 'humanistic' education. The second ECRI report recommends further expansion of extra curricula activities and human rights awareness at schools.⁸² At the local level, some elements of multicultural education and teacher training for primary and secondary education have been introduced to cope with an increasingly multicultural setting, but this is at an embryonic or at least at a very infantile, stage.⁸³

Council Directive 2000/43/EC has been transposed into Cyprus law⁸⁴ but its applicability to educational policies is rather general and access to its implementation mechanism is rather difficult for the Roma population, given their low literacy level.

Moreover, *European and International Law*: (a) must be considered. According to Article 12 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities⁸⁵, the Republic is under an obligation to "foster knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of [its] national minorities,...provide adequate opportunities for teacher training and access to textbooks, and facilitate contacts among students and teachers of different communities." Article 14 of the same Convention establishes the right of all minorities to be taught their own language "without prejudice to the learning of the official language or the teaching in this language."⁸⁶

⁷⁷ Convention of the United Nations against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (ratified by Law 235/90 and Law 35(111)/93). Also Cyprus ratified the European Convention against Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, together with Protocols No. 1 and 2. (Rat. Law No. 24/89 and 8(III)/97).

⁷⁸ The Convention against Discrimination in Education (ratified by Law 18/1970).

⁷⁹ Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities pursuant to Article 25.

⁸⁰ Incorporated in Law 27(III)/2000, Articles 11 and 12 state: to promote and facilitate the teaching of the national language of the receiving state or, if there are several, one of these languages, to migrant workers and members of their families; to promote and facilitate, as far as practicable, the teaching of the migrant worker's mother tongue to the children of the migrant workers.

⁸¹ E.g. Resolution ResCMN(2002)3 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Cyprus.

⁸² "ECRI encourages the Cypriot authorities to continue their extra-curricular initiatives aimed at promoting human rights awareness in schools and, in this framework, to devote particular attention to the fight against racial prejudice, respect for difference and promotion of tolerance. It also encourages the Cypriot authorities to extend education in human rights to the curricula of all school children."

⁸³ Multicultural education is not available across the board. For more details on discrimination in education see Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) "Mapping Discriminatory Landscapes: Ethnic Discrimination in a divided Education System", *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 16, N. 1, Spring 2004, Research and Development Centre – Intercollege, Cyprus and University of Indianapolis, USA.

⁸⁴ The Equal Treatment (Racial or Ethnic Origin) Law 2004 [Cyprus / No. 59(I)/2004 (31.1.2003)]

⁸⁵ Strasbourg, 1.II.1995. Cyprus signed this Convention on 01.02.1995. It entered into force on 01.02.1998.

⁸⁶ Section 14(3) of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Strasbourg, 1.II.1995.

The absence of Roma history, language, culture and religion from the school curriculum, the lack of training for the teachers and the fact that the Turkish language classes are offered at a time that deprives the Roma pupils from attending teaching in Greek are *prima facie* contraventions of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

(b). According to Article 8 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages⁸⁷, the Republic must make available pre-school education in the relevant regional or minority languages or provide for the teaching of the relevant regional or minority languages as an integral part of the curriculum or at least apply one of these two measures to those pupils whose families so request and whose number is considered sufficient. The same Article casts an obligation on the Republic to make available primary, secondary, technical and vocational education, in the relevant regional or minority languages or at least to those pupils so requested by the parents and provided their number is sufficient to justify this measures.

The qualification regarding the number of the pupils justifying the measure and the possibility to restrict the measure to those pupils whose parents request it, renders the effectiveness of this Convention rather weak in the case of the Roma who are not only small in numbers compared to the size of the population⁸⁸ but they are also unlikely, at least at this stage of the process of their social integration and participation, due to their low level of awareness and literacy, to request the Ministry of Education to take such measures. It is hoped that, through the education of Roma children, a process of transformation will soon begin within the Roma community to raise levels of literacy and awareness and thus enhance their capacity to pursue their rights.

As in the case of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages requires states to ensure that Roma history and culture are reflected in the regional or minority language and that teachers are trained to implement those. Also, the same provision requires the setting up of a supervisory body for monitoring the measures taken and progress achieved in establishing or developing the teaching of regional or minority languages and for drawing up periodic reports of their findings, which must be made public.

It is clear that the Cyprus Republic is not in line with its obligations under these two instruments. It should, however, be borne in mind that the language commonly spoken by the Roma of Cyprus is Turkish, which is not a regional or minority language but an official language of the state.

Also there are important *ECRI, CoE and OSCE recommendations* such as the following: The ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 3⁸⁹, the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to members states on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe⁹⁰ and the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area⁹¹, set out a number of recommended measures for implementation by the member states in the field of education and anti-discrimination. These include pre-school educational schemes, communication with and involvement of Roma community in curriculum design and policy development, inclusion of Roma history and culture in the school curricula, encouragement of the development of good practices, encourage computer literacy among Roma, offer scholarship schemes, introduce policy monitoring mechanism, recruitment and training of Roma teachers, encouraging research, exchange of expertise with other member-states, provision of legal aid to Roma, support to NGOs active in combating racism against Roma, confidence building measures and many more. None of these measures have been adopted by the Republic.

⁸⁷ Strasbourg, 5.XI.1992. Signed by the Republic of Cyprus on: 12.11.1992. Entered into force: 1.12.2002

⁸⁸ Although due to the large number of Roma in particular areas, their number in specific schools, such as the 18th Primary school in Limassol, can be significant.

⁸⁹ CRI (98)29 rev

⁹⁰ Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 February 2000 at the 696th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

⁹¹ Decision No. 566, PC.DEC/566, 27.11.2003

In reply to a question by the interviewer for the purposes of this study, the competent officer of the Ministry of Education and Culture claimed that all the measures proposed are in line with the anti-discrimination laws and international treaties.⁹² In practice, however, there is little actual linking of educational policy to international instruments or national anti-discrimination legislation in general.

Overall, the strategies discussed above should be properly linked to anti-discrimination policies/strategies, for example Council Directive 2000/43/EC and be effectively related to language policies in conformity with the European Charter of Regional or Minority languages of the CoE. In essence the whole issue of Roma education must be closely linked to the policies for social integration, equal participation of all groups and individuals, the processes of educational reform currently in progress and a strategy for national anti-discrimination in general. The debates around education reform and the scheduled curricula revisions for 2008-2009 should address the issue of the specific needs for education provisions for the Roma in Cyprus.

⁹² Interview with Mr Tsiakiros, an official of the Ministry of Education, in Nicosia, 04.10.2004.