
Forced evictions of Roma in Greece

Written question No 474 to the Committee of Ministers

Doc. 10694

1 October 2005

Reply from the Committee of Ministers

adopted at the 939th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (28 September 2005)

I. Written Question No. 474 by Mr Cilevics (Doc. 10637)

In a decision made public on 8 June 2005, the European Committee of Social Rights held that the Greece's policies with respect to housing and accommodation of Roma infringe Article 16 of the European Social Charter due to, in particular, the systemic eviction of Roma from sites or dwellings unlawfully occupied by them.

One of the most recent evictions has taken place in Patras where a number of settlements have been destroyed and a notice of eviction of 21 other Roma families has been issued by the authorities while prosecution for illegal settlement have been initiated with respect to 16 Roma families. Moreover, there were three attacks against the Roma settlement in the past few days, two with flares and one with a "Molotov cocktail".

On 21 June 2005, a number of NGOs, including the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), the Coordinated Organisations and Communities for Roma Human Rights in Greece (SOKADRE), the European Roma Information Centre (ERIO), the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), the Minority Rights Group International (MRGI) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) appealed to the Prime Minister of Greece Mr Kostas Karamanlis expressing their grave concerns of the systematic violations of the right to adequate housing and the racist and discriminatory treatment of the Roma of Patras.

Mr Cilevics,

To ask the Committee of Ministers,

Is the Committee of Ministers intending to take any action concerning these evictions which violate fundamental human rights and against the mounting antigypsyism which accompanies these evictions?

In the Committee of Ministers' view, which Council of Europe bodies should be employed to combat this serious problem?

II. Reply by the Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers wishes to inform the honorable Parliamentarian that, in the context of collective complaint No.15/2003 lodged by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) against Greece under the European Social Charter and referred to in his question, it adopted Resolution ResChS(2005)11 on 8 June 2005.

2. In this resolution, the Committee, having regard to the report transmitted by the European Committee of Social Rights, in which the latter found that the insufficiency of permanent dwellings, lack of temporary camping sites and forced evictions constituted a violation of Article 16 of the Charter, as well as to the information communicated by the Permanent Representative of Greece to the Council of Europe at the 924th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (20 April 2005), took note that the implementation of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for the Social Integration of Greek Roma is still in progress, that evaluation and reform of the IAP is currently ongoing in order to ensure more effective coordination of the IAP between all partners involved (including the local authorities). It also took note of the extension and revision of the housing loans programme for Greek Roma and of the establishment of a Commission for their social integration.

3. In the light of the above resolution and of the fact that the situation in Greece in this respect will be regularly followed under the reporting system under the European Social Charter, the Committee of Ministers sees no reason to take any further action in this field at this stage. Besides, in the specific case of the Roma population of Patras, the Permanent Representative of Greece has informed the Committee of Ministers that the Greek Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Administration for the District of Western Greece and the Municipality of Patras, are currently working on finding a permanent solution to the housing problems of the Roma population of Patras. Specifically, the Municipality of Patras is seeking to identify sites adequate for the relocation of the Roma families and acceptable to all parties involved. The Administration for the District of Western Greece has suggested to the City of Patras to consider, among other possible solutions, a possible allotment of tracts of public land – where the Roma have already arbitrarily settled – in order to avoid further relocations. In the meantime, the Administration for Western Greece has already secured from the budget of the Ministry of the Interior sufficient appropriations to finance the construction of an adequate settlement in the area to be chosen by the Municipality of Patras.

4. The Committee of Ministers wishes to recall its recently adopted Recommendation Rec(2005)4 to member states on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe, in which it underlines that the right to housing is a basic human right and recommends member states inter alia to ensure that Roma are protected against unlawful evictions. The Group of Specialists on Roma, Gypsies and Travellers (MG-S-ROM) will be considering housing policies and unlawful evictions at its next meeting to be held later this autumn. The Council of Europe is also planning to organise a seminar with local authorities towards the end of this year on housing issues for Roma and on evictions affecting them.

5. In general, the Committee of Ministers recalls that questions of racism and intolerance including phenomena of anti-Gypsyism in Europe are very high on the agenda of the Council of Europe. A number of bodies are concerned by these issues such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

6. The recently established European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), an international non-governmental umbrella organisation for Roma and Travellers with observer status in a large number of Council of Europe bodies, is also expected to address issues relating to housing and anti-Gypsyism.

7. Finally, a conference addressing the topic of anti-Gypsyism in Europe will be jointly organised in Warsaw on 20 and 21 October 2005 by the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).