



## **FLASH REPORT ON RACISM & XENOPHOBIA IN CYPRUS, Issue 2, August 2009**

[Next Flash Report in October 2009]

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### **1. UPDATE ON POLICY DEVELOPMENTS**

#### **Teachers oppose reconciliation measures**

A circular issued by the primary school teachers' union POED urging its members to refuse to implement the year's targets set by the Ministry of Education for the development of a culture of peaceful coexistence with the Turkish Cypriots, and especially the proposed measure of organising visits by Turkish Cypriot teachers and pupils, had been the subject of complaints to the Equality Body. The complaints alleged that the teachers' union circular cultivates fear and distance amongst the pupils of each community and essentially urges the teachers to discriminate against Turkish Cypriot pupils and teachers, which is an unlawful act of direct discrimination. On 05.06.2009 the Equality Body found the circular of the teachers' union indicates a mistrust and suspicion towards Turkish Cypriot pupils and teachers and that the union's reaction to the Ministry's announced targets had been "rushed", calling upon the teachers to reconsider their position. The report falls short of delivering a full-blown decision that the union's action amounted to unlawful discrimination contrary to the EU anti-discrimination acquis. The report deals with a highly politicised issue in a manner and tone clearly designed not to offend or provoke the teachers; however, by doing so it fails to address the issue of racism inherent in the union's action.

#### **Anti-trafficking policy**

A press release issued by the Cyprus Women's Lobby issued on 11.06.2009 expresses its concern over the fact that the policy which had been announced by the Interior Ministry in November 2008 for the abolition of the 'artistes' visa category, a well known conduit for sex trafficking, had not been put in place yet. The press release stated that the renewal of such visas continue to take place and criticised the government for lack of transparency in policy decisions and for failing to adopt a holistic and comprehensive approach against trafficking. ([http://www.epacvaw.org/IMG/pdf/CWL\\_Press\\_Release\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_Women\\_EN.pdf](http://www.epacvaw.org/IMG/pdf/CWL_Press_Release_Trafficking_in_Women_EN.pdf)). At the same time, the US State Department on Trafficking in Persons Country Report issued in June 2009 which places Cyprus in Tier 2 Watch List for a fourth consecutive year, criticises the Cypriot government for not fully complying with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The report expresses satisfaction at the announced abolition of the 'artistes' visa', indicating on the one hand that the results of this new policy remain to be seen and expressing on the other hand concern over the increase in 'barmaid' visas (526 "barmaid" work permits were issued in 2008, compared to 416 issued in 2007), fearing that the barmaid work permit may take the place of the "artiste" work permit in facilitating sex trafficking to Cyprus. (<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/123361.pdf>)

**Ratification of Protocol on Torture:** By law 2(III)/2009 Cyprus ratified the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture and other Hard, Inhumane or Humiliating Treatment or Punishment which appoints the Ombudsman (also the national specialised body) as the national machinery for the prevention of torture, authorising her to visit detention centres following written notification in

order to monitor compliance with the Convention and to submit recommendations on policy and law reform.

## 2. UPDATE ON LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS AND AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGNS

### **Racist, anti-immigrant and xenophobic discourses articulated in European Parliament Elections**

This is the first time that such discourses were openly articulated in Cypriot elections, where traditionally there is no typical far right / xenophobic populist or Neo-Nazi party, focusing on anti-immigration populism or anti-Semitic politics. In previous decades Cyprus had a violent far Right group in the form of the Greek-Cypriot 'Ethikon Metopo' (National Front) and later 'EOKA B' and the Turkish-Cypriot TMT, which was connected to 'Grey Wolves' from Turkey, but these are of a different kind: they were highly localised and connected to the 'deep state' (in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus), the far right and authoritarian traditions, the dictatorships and politics of the Greek and Turkish states and their connections with the CIA to fight communism during the cold war. In the 2009 European Parliamentary elections a neo-Nazi type of party called 'Ethniko Laiko Metopo' (ELAM) contested the elections and received 663 votes (0.22 percent); it received no media coverage or air time [<http://ethnikolaikometwpo.blogspot.com/2009/06/2009.html> (22.07.2009)]. Also a small party on the Greek-Cypriot Right, Evropaiko Komma (EVROKO), tried to capitalise on xenophobic anti-immigration, arguing that Greek-Cypriots "are becoming a minority in their own country"; it connected the issue of Turkish settlers to the alleged 'out of control' employment of 'illegal aliens' who are blamed for taking the Cypriots jobs and for criminality. The party was criticised in the press for adopting racist and xenophobic agenda against migrants but failed to respond to the criticisms. One article complained the party leader "attacked foreigners who are working in Cyprus on the cheap accusing them of stealing jobs from Cypriots and are responsible for increasing unemployment" and posed the following question: "Had Mr. Syllouris read a little history, perhaps he would have discovered that it was with the same line of arguments Adolf Hitler exterminated the Jews, the Poles, the Gypsies, the mentally deprived and the homosexuals in Nazi Germany; after this racist ejaculation, we wonder how many of our compatriots will vote for EVROKO." [D. Dionisiou, (2009) 'Στρουθοκαμηλισμός', in: *Πολίτης* (24.05.2009)]. Another commentator criticised EVROKO's immigration discourses for being based on the assumptions and disseminating the ideas via its slogans that there is "unchecked employment of illegal aliens and the uncertain future for work of Cypriots, the increase of the illegal immigrants and the accentuation of violence and criminality," arguing that EVROKO must be considered as a "an extreme Right minority" in Cypriot society, which "transmits a racist, xenophobic and far right message" [N. Kyriakou (2009) 'Ακροδεξιές μειονότητες', in: *Πολίτης* 31.05.2009, p.12.]

### **Slogans inciting racial hatred in Army training camps: 'a good Turk is a Dead Turk'**

A complaint has been lodged to the Cyprus Equality body against the Ministry of Defence and the Commander of the army training camp in Paphos for inciting racial hatred. This was based on reports by ASTRA radio (23.07.2009) that young conscripts soldiers are routinely ordered by their officers to shout slogans such as "A good Turk is a dead Turk", "We will annihilate Turkish village", "We will make Turkish mothers cry", "Greece cover us" etc. The reports received wide publicity in the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriots media. The complaint is available at <http://thetrim1.blogspot.com> (29.07.2009)

### **Maronite School**

On 12.05.2009 the Equality Body issued its decision with regard to a complaint submitted by the Maronite Community that not all teachers appointed at the Maronite school are Maronites and the Maronite language is not being taught. The state educational committee responsible for the appointment of teachers responded that the said school was set up as a regional school for Maronite and other pupils and it is subject to the laws regarding public education service. The Equality Body

report criticised this line of argument, which offered the Maronite community only equal treatment before the law, adding that the protection of national minorities must go beyond that so as to recognise and promote rights of a collective character. The decision states that special treatment involves deviations from the principle of equality, which take the form of positive measures or special rights targeting a certain group aiming at the elimination of discrimination, and proposed that the staffing issue is detached from the usual procedure followed for the placement of teachers in schools and that it is formulated as a positive measure. The decision also recommends the introduction of the teaching of the Cypriot Maronite language so as to comply with the Charter for the Protection of Regional or Minority Languages, as well as the adoption of measures so that the institutional role of the representative of the religious groups, as provided by the relevant law, is exercised in a meaningful manner.

### **Educators' Training Course in Human Rights Education**

The Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe through its Youth Programme on Human Rights Education funded a National Training Course entitled 'Educators' Training Course in Human Rights Education: Building Inclusive Environments in Cyprus', organised by the national NGOs Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies, PRIO Cyprus Centre and the Centre for the Study of Migration, Inter-ethnic and Labour Relations, held between the 06-10.07.2009 at the University of Nicosia. Participants included 22 Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot teachers, youth workers, trainers in non-formal education and youth –related NGO volunteers. The aim was to mainstream Human Rights Education in Cypriot youth policy and work and promote a human rights culture in formal and non-formal education. A number of activities were conducted from *COMPASS: A manual on human rights education with young people* while various presentations and guest speakers/trainers dealt with issues such as discrimination, xenophobia, gender equality, vulnerability and human rights, refugee and minority rights, children's rights, poverty etc. Further information will shortly be uploaded on the website [www.medinstgenderstudies.org](http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org)

### **Trafficking convictions**

The recently issued U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, published in June 2009, states that in 2008 the Cypriot police investigated and filed charges against 70 persons in 29 suspected trafficking cases, compared to 45 persons charged in 27 suspected trafficking cases filed in 2007. The Cypriot government initiated prosecution in 21 of these cases in 2008, a slight increase from 17 cases initiated in 2007. However, only two of these 2008 cases were prosecuted to completion, both resulting in acquittals. Of the 31 cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation pending at the end of 2007, 11 remained in the prosecution phase, 10 resulted in acquittals, five were dismissed, one was suspended and three remain under investigation. The government obtained only one conviction in 2008, resulting in a two-year sentence. This is a significant decline from eight convictions obtained during the previous reporting period. A court acquitted three police officers suspected of trafficking-related complicity in 2008; another case involving four police officers remains pending <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/123361.pdf> (25.07.2009)

### **Ceremony honouring heroes who saved others in intercommunal conflicts of 50s, 60s, 70s**

The ceremony to honour ten heroes for their acts of courage and humanity in times of war was organised by 14 Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot NGOs. These were people who, during the intercommunal conflicts of the 50s and 60s and the Turkish invasion of 1974, risked their lives to save and protect members of the 'other side', their supposed enemies, at immense personal risk. Commemorative plaques and olive branches were presented to the men, in some cases by those whom they had saved. In an emotional celebration, their stories were heard through firsthand accounts or through the testimony of their families. The event is available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OBQu-kAXbY&feature=related>

### 3. RESEARCH

#### **Paper on Trans-Border Crossings: Cypriot Women's 'Liberation' and the Margins**

A research paper was published by M. Hadjipavlou on women domestic workers in households of professional women in both communities, based on a qualitative research in 2007-2008. Despite the fact that professional women are economically independent and have taken on the role of second bread-winner in the household, the gender-based division of domestic labour and the value system that sustains the patriarchal structures have still remained intact. Cypriot women's 'liberation' is enabled through the migrant women's engagement in their households. The migrant women interviewed experienced exploitation, abuses, contracts violations, fear of expulsion, overwork, and violence, but they also developed agency, social networking and assertiveness. A joint struggle is proposed, based on gender consciousness, female solidarity and inter-dependence so that real liberation and social change may be attained. (*Cyprus Review*, Vol. 21, no.1, spring 2009, pp. 59-80, not available on Web).

**Learning from Comparing Conflicts and Reconciliation Processes:** PRIO Cyprus centre organised a conference 18-20.06.2009 (Ledra Palace, Nicosia), which examined various ethnic/national/state conflict situations from a comparative perspective; alternative modes of understanding and learning from the conflicts and dealing with the violent past, so as to achieve resolution of the conflict and reconciliation in society; ways of bridging the gap between disciplines and specializations through which 'conflict' is studied separately from 'reconciliation'. The aim was to provide effective answers to complex problems, these dimensions ought to be integrated into a broad interdisciplinary perspective as well as a theoretical and policy-relevant perspectives towards developing a holistic approach to reconciliation, by locating the relevance of other conflicts to Cyprus and making some generalisations. (<http://www.prio.no/Cyprus/Event/?oid=43308658> )

#### **The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion**

This book edited by A. Varnava, N. Coureas and M. Elia (published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing), which brings together the current state of the art research on minorities in Cyprus, is the first about the subject. It is based on papers presented at the first conference in Cyprus dealing with the development of its minorities on 24-25.11.2007, entitled "Minorities of Cyprus: Past, Present and Future" (European University Cyprus). The book deals with the Maronite, Armenian and Latin inhabitants, which are recognized as 'Religious Groups' according to the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, but there were also communications on Gypsy and Anglican minorities as well as comparative papers. It examines the general context, the social, legal and political roles, customs, culture and language of the various minorities are examined as they evolved through time and in response to internal and external developments affecting Cyprus in the political, economic and global spheres. They are discussed not as static entities, but as evolving groups that have adapted with greater or lesser degrees of success to the radical and at times painful changes Cyprus has undergone, especially over the last 150 years, in all walks of life. Finally, the book analyses what the future holds for the minorities in the light of Cyprus' EU membership and the prospect of reunification.

**Book publication *The Armenians of Cyprus*:** Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra's web publication deals with the multicultural character of Cyprus, the legal status of the Armenian religious group, the origins of the Armenians, the course of Armenians in Cyprus, the demography of the Armenian – Cypriots, places of education, worship and repose, the religious identity of Armenians, the Armenian language, publications, associations and activities, monuments and important figures. [http://www.hayk.net/docs/The\\_Armenians\\_of\\_Cyprus.pdf](http://www.hayk.net/docs/The_Armenians_of_Cyprus.pdf)