

ON 1 JANUARY 2007, BULGARIA W EUROPEAN UNION. WHAT ABOUT T



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THE ROMA FROM SERDIKA AND VRABNITSA AREAS ARE BEING FORCIBLY DISPLACED AND HOUSED IN BARRACKS

A new Roma ghetto will be created in the former military barracks of Chelopechene. It will first accommodate the current inhabitants of the Serdika residential area, many of whom actually own their homes. "The Municipality has to sweep the ghetto out in 24 hours", Bojdar Dimitrov insists, who is the head of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) group in the Municipality. Probably the fate of the Roma in Serdika will soon be shared by those inhabiting the Vrabnitsa residential area. A list has been made of the former barracks in the areas of Mirovyane, Chelopechene, Dobroslavtsi and Suhodol. Who will the next displaced Roma to be housed there be?



WILL JOIN THE THE ROMA?



— CHRONICLE —

In February 2004, a petition was filed in the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee by inhabitants coming from several blocks in the Serdika residential area regarding the reluctance of the Sofia Greater Municipality (SGM) to "eliminate the Roma ghetto in Serdika in compliance with Decision 39 of the Sofia Municipal Council (SMC) of 11 December 2000." The issue about the Roma populating the area illegally has been referenced to the Sofia Inspectorate and the Parliamentary Committee on Civil Appeals and Petitions, the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the Sofia Regional Governor, the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Construction Control Inspectorate, etc. Expressing their indignation at the inaction of the local authorities, the residents of the blocks have also filed 8 suggestions to the SMC, including their "being notified in writing, or through personal meetings, about the details regarding the latest decisions and the actual actions of the SMC and the SGM on the elimination of the ghetto, which also have state the respective deadlines" and "until the complete elimination of the ghetto, to intensify the control, terminating the influx of new Roma, and the building of new buildings and the formation of new waste pits."

On 25 June 2004, the media informed the public about the forthcoming displacement of the moving-in Roma from the residential areas of Serdika, Vrabnitsa and Lyulin to the former military barracks in the quarter of Chelopechene. The negotiations about the displacement were held between the provisional mayor of Sofia Mincho Gerdjikov, the Chair of the Sofia Municipal Council Vladimir Kisyov and the Minister of Defence, Nikolay Svinarov. An approval decision is pending by the Council of Ministers for the barracks to be transformed in private state property and to be exchanged against 10 municipal homes. The reason for the talks were the numerous petitions of the Bulgarians residing in adjacency with the Roma.

On 26 June 2006, the residents of Chelopechene declared through the media: "We will make human chains. If we have to, we will blow the bridge, which connects us with the city, but we will not allow any Roma moving in."

On 1 July 2004, the *Obektiv* team met Ms. Snejana Popova, a

senior inspector in the Chelopechene quarter, who said: "We learned from the papers about the planned moving of Roma into the closed barracks. On the day of the publication in the *Novinar* paper, the phone lines were hot with the incoming calls of people asking whether it was true. They do not want the Roma in and are ready to do anything to stop them. They constantly read paper articles about the crimes committed by them, and have a negative attitude. In the last year, the Zrankovi family was moved here in the barracks and the inhabitants of Chelopechene went on strike and blocked the traffic until the Roma were moved elsewhere. I am afraid that the same thing will happen now. The problem calls for a different solution, one possibility for them is to be moved in the Stranja Sakar region."

On 2 July 2004, the mayor of the Vrabnitsa area, engineer Yanko Yankov, stated before *Obektiv* that no petitions have been filed in his mayoralty and there nobody intends to displace the Roma. He emphasised that there were no distinct Roma neighbourhoods, but only compact clusters of adjacent houses were built here and there.

On 5 July 2004, the mayor of the Serdika municipality, engineer Yordan Dimitrov, said that no problem existed in the territory of his municipality with Roma settling in arbitrarily and no displacement is pending.

On July 6 2004 Ms. Seizova, mayor of the Vazrajidane municipality, in whose territory the Serdika residential area is located, stated in a telephone conversation that, in order to avoid possible conflicts, the Roma from the problematic plot had to be displaced and that the Sofia Grater Municipality was to take a decision in this respect as soon as possible. She expressed her conviction that "if the Roma were moved out, the criminogenic element in the municipality will be cleansed" and that "wherever they go, their living conditions will be much better than now."

We are impatient for another meeting with Ms. Seizova and we are also awaiting to see the development of the talks between the Sofia Greater Municipality and the Ministry of Defence regarding the moving of the Roma from the Serdika area. ■