

Centre on
Housing Rights
and Evictions



THE HOUSING IMPACT OF THE 2004 OLYMPIC GAMES IN ATHENS

Background Paper

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Background

This background research paper is part of the COHRE Mega-Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights Project. It was prepared as a preliminary independent study of the impact of the Athens Olympics on housing rights. Similar studies were done for the cities of Atlanta, Barcelona, Beijing, London, Seoul and Sydney. The background research papers were used in the preparation of COHRE's *Fair Play for Housing Rights: Mega-Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights* report, launched in Geneva on 5 June 2007. The contents and opinions of the material available in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily correspond with those of COHRE. All documents published as part of this project are available at: www.cohre.org/mega-events/.

About the Greek Helsinki Monitor

Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), founded in 1993, monitors, publishes, lobbies, and litigates on human and minority rights and anti-discrimination issues in Greece and, from time to time, in the Balkans. It also monitors Greek and, when opportunity arises, Balkan media for stereotypes and hate speech. It issues press releases and prepares (usually jointly with other NGOs) detailed annual reports; parallel reports to UN Treaty Bodies; and specialized reports on ill-treatment and on ethno-national, ethno-linguistic, religious and immigrant communities, in Greece and in other Balkan countries. It operates a web site (<http://cm.greekhelsinki.gr>) and two web lists covering human rights issues and comprehensive and comparable presentations of minorities in the Balkan region.

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I. Introduction

The aim of the present study is to examine and assess the positive and negative impacts of holding the 2004 Athens Olympic Games on the enjoyment of the housing rights. This review includes an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of the Greek housing market as well as the importance attached to housing or housing-related issues in the Greek candidature file. Both positive and negative developments in the field of housing are examined in the light of the build-up and holding of the Olympic Games. Finally, the role of the civil society in bringing attention to housing issues in the run-up to the Olympics will also be examined.

II. Background on the Greek housing market

One of Greece's distinctive characteristics in the social plane is the fact that, for a variety of social and cultural reasons, the percentage of house ownership has been very high throughout the last decades, higher in fact than the respective percentage in most other European Union (hereinafter EU) countries. According to the latest census, as well as the latest housing survey that took place in Greece (both in 2001), 74% of the people living in dwellings in Greece owned the dwellings they were living in, while another 6% lived in dwellings without paying rent.¹ This could be either because the dwellings were transferred to them or allowed to be used by them for free (e.g. many families from rural centres buy houses in urban centres so that their offspring will have a place to stay when they enter into the various universities and other educational establishments) or vacant dwellings or social housing. As nevertheless the latter is very limited in Greece, it is believed that the biggest part of that 6% consists of second homes – this would bring the percentage of owners-occupiers in Greece to 80%. In fact, according to the Hellenic Property Federation (P.O.M.I.D.A.), a non-governmental legal entity with more than 30.000 members – real estate owners all over Greece- and a member of the International Union of Property Owners,² the current percentage of families owning the dwelling in which they live should be in the region of 82%, while approximately a third of the Greek families have a second home.³ A recent *Eurostat* survey, drawing on data from 2001, suggests that 84.6% of the households own the houses they live in. This percentage reaches 90% for households with income less than 60% of the median actual current income. Additionally, only 11.1% of households are living in houses they have rented, while only 5.3% of households with income less than 60% of the median actual current income are living in rented property.⁴ It should be noted however that the percentage of owners-tenants appears to be higher in the countryside than in the major urban centres.

¹ See survey *Housing Statistics in the European Union 2004, 2004*, commissioned by the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning of Sweden and the Ministry for Regional Development, Czech Republic, available at <http://www.iut.nu/EU/HousingStatistics2004.pdf>, page 50.

² POMIDA's website is available in English at <http://www.pomida.gr/english/index.html>.

³ Email from Mr. Stratos Paradias, President of the Hellenic Property Federation, dated January 12, 2006.

⁴ The data is available in the Eurostat's Website at http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=0,1136184,0_45572595&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL selecting "Living Conditions and Welfare", then "Income and living conditions", then "Non-monetary poverty and social exclusion", then "Housing" and then "Tenure status of accommodation by type of household and income group".

As a result, only 20% of the tenants have to resort to renting the dwelling they live in. It should be noted however that there exist significant regional variations in Greece: according to Greece's Initial Report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereinafter CESCR), the share of the rented sector was higher in urban areas, e.g. 31% in Athens, reduced to 27% by 2001, with continuous downward trends.⁵ It is also interesting to note that 93% of those at risk from poverty (i.e. below 60% of the median income line) live in houses they own. As a result, the fact that they do not have to pay for housing enables them to spend more money in order to satisfy other needs (the so-called "imputed rent").⁶

Recent economic developments in Greece suggest in fact that this trend towards increased house construction and occupant ownership might have acquired additional momentum. Most banks in the Greek market now offer highly competitive housing loans, with the monthly instalment being usually less than the average rent for a respective house – in appears in fact that 60% of those who acquired a home within the last five years used to rent a house before they decided to take advantage of the low interest loans and buy a house⁷ - according to official data from the Bank of Greece, about 80.000 housing loans were granted in the twelve month period between September 2004 and September 2005.⁸ This has had a serious impact on the leasehold market: one real estate agent estimates that there was an aggregate decrease of approximately 10% in the prices of rents during 2005 and that he expects that rents will be furthered decreased in 2006, since the "impressive", according to real estate agents, decrease in demand has not yet fully affected the rents requested by house owners. In fact, only a substantial increase in the interest rates of housing loans (an increase that is not foreseen to take place anytime soon) might force prospective house buyers to seriously contemplate renting a house, instead of buying one.⁹

For the time being however, the trend is definitely towards buying property rather than renting it. According to a latest survey by one major Greek bank, *Eurobank*, (the survey sample consisted of 1.373 households in Athens and another six major urban centres of Greece, where approximately 50% of the total population lives), 8% of the persons questioned will seek to buy a house within the current year (2006) while another 18% of those questioned are planning to do so within the next five years.¹⁰ It should also be noted

⁵ Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Initial reports submitted by States parties under articles 16-17 of the Covenant, Addendum: Greece [17 September 2002], UN Doc E/1990/5/Add.56, 23 October 2002, (hereinafter the Greek ICESCR Report), at [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/fc0f67050f79d862c1256d5f00565ee6?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/fc0f67050f79d862c1256d5f00565ee6?Opendocument), paragraph 305.

⁶ See Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Joint Report on Social Inclusion, summarising the results of the examination of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (2003-2005), Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 12.12.2003, COM (2003)773 final, at p19 (hereinafter Joint Report for Social Inclusion 2003-2005). The report is available at

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/joint_rep_en.htm. According to a 1998-1999 NSSG survey, 4,984 out of the 6,258 households in Greece live in houses they owe or have been given to them for free or have to pay a low rent. See NSSG Statistical Yearbook 2001, NSSG: Athens, 2001, p 530.

⁷ See Eleftherotopia Athens based daily newspaper, issue of January 21, 2006.

⁸ See Real Estate insert of Kathimerini Athens based daily newspaper, issue of December 21, 2005, available in Greek at http://portal.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/w_articles_tile3_26_21/12/2005_140799 The (telling) title of the article is "2006: Yet another difficult year for the leasehold market".

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The findings of the report were published in Eleftherotopia Athens based daily newspaper, issue of January 21, 2006.

that according to preliminary data for 2005, applications for housing loans went up by 28% in comparison with previous years.¹¹

Two additional factors should be borne in mind while examining the housing situation in Greece. The first concerns the age of the existing dwelling stock and the second the diversified needs of modern households. Impressive as the ratio between dwellings and inhabitants might be, according to the 2001 Housing Survey, old buildings (i.e. completed in 1980 and before) amounted to a full 66.6% of the available dwelling stock.¹² Old buildings are not only less comfortable than modern ones but they are also more dangerous: according to the General Secretary of the Technical Chamber of Greece, dozens of thousands of old buildings will be faced with the danger of collapsing within the next decade, should even a small scale earthquake take place. More specifically, buildings built between 1955 and the early 60's are the most likely to sustain serious damage, even collapse, due to the corrosion of the steel used in their construction. The average life-span for old buildings is about 50 years, while for newer constructions it is raised to 70-80 years.¹³

Similarly, the different needs of modern families (e.g. bigger and more rooms per house, to be used not exclusively for accommodation but also for recreational purposes) have contributed to a vibrant housing market: in 1990, 43.775 new buildings had been completed with a volume of 47.500 thousand cubic meters, making 100.339 dwellings (high rise buildings containing multiple dwellings are the norm in Greece). In 2003, the respective numbers were the following: 45.223 buildings with a volume of 65.686 cubic meters were built, making 127.008 dwellings.¹⁴ It should not be forgotten that in 1980, the average household numbered 3 persons while in 2000 this had dropped to 2.8, with continuing downward trends.

Cultural and financial considerations also lead many Greeks to acquire at least one and potentially more than one house, or a plot of land where they can build in the future. A house might be for an Englishman his castle, for the average Greek however it is also a safe investment which he/she can bequeath to his/her offspring.¹⁵ Moreover, the fact that social housing is virtually non-existent in Greece is another source of insecurity for many Greeks, who channel all their available resources into buying a house. This is not to say however that a social housing program does not exist. The Greek Ministry of Health and Welfare has a limited program for providing housing ("Popular Housing Program") to homeless individuals who cannot secure housing on their own and are not entitled to any other housing benefit (e.g. by applying for a house to the Workers Housing Organisation). Under the housing program of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry can proceed to construct houses whose ownership it then relinquishes over to the beneficiaries. In addition, it can provide rent subsidies and finally, it can provide housing loans under favourable conditions. Unfortunately, due to its limited funds (the program received 4,670,000 Euros from national funds during 1999-2004), no loans have been granted since 1986.

¹¹ Sunday issue of *Eleftherotypia* Athens based daily newspaper, January 22, 2006, Special supplement on Finance and Economics.

¹² Housing Statistics 2004 Report, page 41.

¹³ See Real Estate Insert of *Kathimerini* Athens based daily newspaper, issue of December 14, 2005, available in Greek at http://portal.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/w_articles_tile3_32_14/12/2005_140443.

¹⁴ *Hellas in Numbers* edition of the National Statistical Service of Greece, (NSSG), available at http://www.statistics.gr/eng_tables/hellas_in_numbers_eng.pdf, at page 15.

¹⁵ According to the Eurobank survey referred to above, 8 out of 10 households believe that buying a house is a safe investment, while 7 out of 10 believe it is also a profitable one as they expect prices to raise by 5% to 30% within the next 5 years. Interestingly enough, only 1 out of 10 house owners is considering of selling his/her house within the next five years.

Nevertheless, the Ministry has managed to keep the housing program running, by cooperating with the Workers Housing Organisation (WHO). Another form of social housing concerns workers who are insured in the major social security funds and who, under certain conditions, are entitled to houses, low interest loans and rent subsidies provided by the WHO.

The above have a considerable impact on the way legal provisions concerning housing are drafted and implemented. In general, it can be said that Greek law evinces a particular bias in favour of the owner, at the detriment of the tenant. This would appear somewhat incongruous with Article 21.4 of the Greek Constitution which provides that

*“The acquisition of a home by the homeless or those inadequately sheltered shall constitute an object of special State care.”*¹⁶

This constitutional provision however has not been translated into concrete legal provisions that would enable courts to enforce a justiciable right to housing. This was also admitted by the Greek state which noted that

*“Thus, the Greek Constitution and legal/political tradition form a rather flexible context that, on the one hand, obliges the State to assist Greek households in their efforts to acquire a decent house and, on the other, provides a political basis for demands by those in special housing need. This does not constitute clear-cut enforceable housing rights. As a result, there is a clear institutional gap in the Greek housing system in this respect even for individual cases of extreme need or homelessness: there are no legal avenues for demanding some form of shelter within a set time period or protection against eviction when rent payments cannot be met (though often judges substitute for social policy and give lenient rulings in case of extreme need).”*¹⁷

Lessees are, for obvious reasons, more threatened than owners from the fact that there is no such right. It should be noted however that legal provisions attempted to provide a minimum protection to the lessee threatened with eviction. Thus, according to Article 9.2 of Law 1703/1987, should the Court decide that a lessee should be evicted from a house that she/he rented and which she/he used as his home (i.e. it was not his office or a second home), the Court could postpone the eviction for up to six months, while the minimum period that could be conferred to the lessee before she/he would be evicted was forty days following the notification of the decision to the lessee. The same law also attempted to counter the issue of “own use”: should the owner claim that she/he wanted the house she/he had leased in order to live in it, then an expedited process of eviction was to be followed. Under Article 3.1 of Law 1703/1987, the owner could not claim “own use” before a two year period had lapsed. Moreover, should the owner not move within the vacated house within four months following the lessee’s eviction or move and live there for less than two years, then the lessee could bring a lawsuit against the owner that unlawfully evicted him with a view to recovering the expenses he incurred in moving out as well as twenty four monthly rent payments. Unfortunately, this law ceased to be in effect in 1997, bringing considerable distress to lessees who can now be more easily evicted by their owners. The Greek state has acknowledged that the complete deregulation of the rental sector has had an

¹⁶ The official translation of the Greek Constitution is available in English in the Greek Parliament’s site at <http://www.parliament.gr/english/politeuma/syntagma.pdf>.

¹⁷ See Greek ICESCR Report, *op. cit.*, available at [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/fc0f67050f79d862c1256d5f00565ee6?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/fc0f67050f79d862c1256d5f00565ee6?Opendocument), para. 350.

adverse impact on the lessees, yet it appears to consider that the rental sector will eventually, due to the intense competition, regulate itself.¹⁸

Summarizing the above, it could be said that the housing market in Greece is almost exclusively oriented towards purchasing and not renting, a feature that has severe repercussions on those who are renting a house. The average Greek family's desire to own at least one house continues unabated, thus fuelling the housing market with fresh capital and giving it momentum. This, coupled with the need to renew the old dwelling stock as well as perceptions as to the modern way of life, the lack of social housing and certain traits of the Greek family according to which older members (i.e. parents) are expected to cater, to the best of their abilities, for the future of their offspring, are expected to continue to contribute heavily to the already dynamic nature of the Greek housing market. It is submitted that the above should be borne in mind while assessing the housing impact of the 2004 Olympic Games on housing.

III. Background on Athens candidature

As it can be seen in the Candidature File, Greek authorities considered the holding of the Olympic Games in Greece as a highly emotional event: in the Candidature File, it was stressed that *“For Greece, the birthplace of the Olympic Spirit and the Olympic idea, the Athens Games will be a matter of supreme national and cultural significance. The Games will serve as a bridge between tradition and the potential of modern Greece, allowing the country to contribute to the development and promotion of the Olympic ideal in the modern ages.”*¹⁹ The Bidding Committee assured the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that all political parties as well as municipal authorities were unreservedly supporting the bid for the Olympics while it was also noted that, as of the date of the submission of the Candidature File, *“...not a single political or social group has expressed its opposition to the prospect of the Games being held in Athens.”*²⁰

The national importance attached to the holding of the Olympic Games, coupled with the absence of a strong civil society movement in Greece (for which see below, Section VIII) in the human rights field, meant that almost no feedback from members of the civil society was ever sought regarding the housing impact of the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, both the candidature file and the promises made by officials addressed most if not all of the environmental issues.

Indeed, while many promises were made to the effect that the Athens Olympics constituted a first-rate opportunity to make sure that environmental standards are being upheld, due to time-constraints and cost overruns a certain downsizing of these measures took place. As the date for the opening ceremony was drawing closer, things actually worsened, since the authorities did not uphold their initial commitments (e.g. in the case of the environmental layout of the Olympic Village, see below section VI, paragraph 1).

It is also interesting to examine the composition of the National Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG), set out according to Law 2598/1998 and responsible for the whole

¹⁸ Ibid, at paragraph 325. *“During the decade after 1985, the rental sector was under a regime of relatively strict controls with regard to both rents and evictions. Gradually, however, since the beginning of the 1990s and in full by 1996, the sector has undergone complete deregulation. Thus, aside from the protection and controls offered by Greek Civil Law, tenants enjoy essentially no legal protection against excessive rent increases and a rather limited protection against evictions.”*

¹⁹ Candidature File, Volume I, Theme 1, page 20.

²⁰ Ibid, page 18.

preparation of the Games. As such, the National Committee, from the time it is constituted communicates directly with the IOC, from which it receives instructions. According to Article 1a of Law 2598/1998, the National Committee is the expression “... of the political, social, intellectual cultural and sporting forces of the Nation for the perfect preparation, organising and holding the 2004 Olympic Games”. The National Committee would in effect supervise the planning of the Olympic Games, kept informed of any developments and issue recommendations to the Organising Committee. While institutions as diverse as the Church of Greece and the World Council of Hellenes Abroad were *ex officio* represented in the Committee, no members of the civil society were appointed or indeed their contribution solicited.

According to one of the few in-depth researches conducted on the Olympic Games, although the Candidature file was drafted and formulated according to the guidelines issued and addressed by the International Olympic Committee to all candidate countries (following for instance the guidelines for the protection of environment), it lacked the technical and financial solutions to numerous problems and the planning process seems to have been addressed very superficially.²¹

These findings are corroborated by a research project conducted by the Pan-Hellenic Federation of University Graduate Engineer Civil Servant Unions.²² According to their research, the Greek Candidature file was based on the previous Candidature file as prepared for the 1996 Olympic Games, without taking into account developments that had taken place in the meantime. In addition, there was no clear demarcation as to which agencies would be responsible for any given project, there was a perennial shortage of staff while much time was consumed in infra-agencies feuds. As a result of all the above and based on the information provided in the Candidature File as to the estimated time of beginning of construction and delivery of most of the Olympic Projects, the research (delivered on January 2001) noted that many Olympic Projects presented significant delays (ranging from 2,5 to 3,5 years) in the beginning of certain Olympic related construction projects, which were to be completed in half the time originally allocated. This, the report feared, would lead to both increased costs and concerns about the quality of the project deliverables.²³ It is noted that the delays observed in the majority of the Olympic Projects also had another pernicious effect: they prevented the taking of various measures proposed by NGOs (mostly in the field of environmental protection) as well as consultation with potential members of the civil society. The run-up to the Opening Ceremony of the 2004 Olympics was a veritable race against the clock and consequently many compromises had to be made in order for everything to be ready on time.

Regarding the Olympic infrastructure, fifty seven major infrastructure projects were scheduled to be constructed in addition to the numerous small and medium scale projects related to the Olympics. Twenty four of them concerned sports facilities, two concerned telecommunications facilities, fifteen projects aimed at expanding the road network and improving traffic while another five related to improving and expanding the electricity grid so that it would be able to compensate with the expected increased consumption of electricity. Seven media villages were also under construction, as well as the Olympic

²¹ Tassos Telloglou, *The City of the Games*, Estia, Athens 2004, p. 33, 34.

²² Their report is available in Greek at http://www.emdydas.gr/2004_porisma.htm.

²³ Telloglou, *op. cit.* page 25.

Village.²⁴ It should be noted that funding for many of these projects (e.g. the urban railway network) were scheduled to be implemented regardless of the Olympics, though certainly they helped towards them. Only three out of this multitude of projects would have a housing use following the completion of the 2004 Games, namely the Olympic Village and two of the press villages, namely those in the University and National Technical University Campuses of Athens.²⁵ Almost all of these projects were plagued by time and cost overruns, while some of them (not specifically Olympics – oriented, e.g. certain additional Metro lines) were actually not delivered in time.

In the beginning of the preparatory proceedings for the 2004 Olympic Games, the Government was seeking ways to assign the construction projects to private enterprises and investors. However, this proved to be ineffective and as a result the Olympic Games infrastructure construction was considered as yet another public work, to be funded almost exclusively by the state.²⁶ The main ministries involved in the preparation (and in relation to the sports facilities) were the Ministry of Environment and Public Works and the Ministry of Culture (to which the General Secretariat of Sports is seconded). Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Transport and Communications, were also heavily engaged.

In order to expedite the implementation of the planning and constructing projects related to both the “proper” Olympic projects (e.g. stadiums) and infrastructure projects of wider significance (e.g. road networks leading to the stadiums), the Minister of Environment and Public Works established two special services. The Special Service for Public Works / Olympic Works (2002 / 2004.), responsible for the planning and construction of Olympic installations and the Special Service for Public Works / Special Transport Works in the Attica basin (2002 / 2004.), responsible for the establishment of special transportation throughout the area of Attica.²⁷ The Ministry of Sport undertook the responsibility of finishing twenty-one Olympic works, whereas the Ministry of Environment and Public Works was charged the responsibility of six Olympic works.²⁸ Once again, there was no thought to include members of the civil society in the planning process. While there might have been thoughts subsequently to solicit the views of NGOs (especially in the field of environmental protection), schedule and cost overruns, together with the additional cost that NGO proposals would presumably incur, precluded any meaningful consultation with the civil society (see below section VIII)

²⁴ Extensive information concerning these 57 major Olympics – related infrastructure projects as well as information concerning their stage of completion by September 2002 is available in the Technical Chamber of Greece Bulletin, Issue 2216, date September 30, 2002, available in Greek at <http://www.tee.gr/online/afieromata/2002/2216/olybic.htm>.

²⁵ Out of the remaining five media villages, three will be turned into offices for various government agencies (Amygdaleza, SELETE and Marousi), one will remain a summer resort for Armed Forces personnel (Aghios Andreas) while the last one (Lofos Pallini) was built by a private construction company that will also exploit it after the Olympic Games). Information on the seven media villages together with photos is available (in Greek) at <http://www.athens2004.com/athens2004/page/magazine/issue11?lang=el&cid=6379ec08864acf00VgnVCMSErver28130b0aRCRD>.

²⁶ Telloglou, op.cit., page 70.

²⁷ Telloglou, op.cit., page 70.

²⁸ Telloglou, op.cit., page 78. These numbers subsequently changed as responsibility for the completion of certain projects was later on transferred to other agencies.

IV. The Candidature file and the housing dimension

It is quite characteristic that the Candidature file includes a whole chapter about environmental protection (Volume 1, Theme 4: Environmental Protection). One of the very first so called “Olympic Laws”, Law 2730/99 concerning the planning, development and construction of the Olympic works contained extensive provisions concerning environmental protection. All relevant subsequent laws included respective recommendations, providing that the preparatory proceedings and the implementation of the 2004 Olympic Games should respect nature and environment. Nevertheless, research showed that nowhere, neither in the Candidature file nor in the laws as ratified by the Parliament, is there a respective safeguard for the potential housing impact of the Olympic Games. In fact, the primary concern appears to be the speedy expropriation of land that was needed for the Olympics. To this end, legal provisions provided for exceedingly speedy judicial processes: under Article 4a of Law 2730/1999, civil actions concerning Olympics-related expropriations were to be introduced to the competent courts in addition to the cases already scheduled to take place, while the relevant court decisions were to be notarized and issued within thirty days from the date of the hearing.²⁹ This is especially important, since decisions have to be notarized in order to be appealed. Under normal Greek judicial practise, expropriation usually takes a lot of time (up to five or six months) for court decisions to be notarised and issued. This new Law related to the Olympic Games provided for expedite procedures, so that land can be appropriated as soon as possible to stall the Olympic projects.

Concretely, times limits concerning the lodging of appeals were shortened while it is to be noted that despite the urgent nature of the expropriations concerning the Olympics, different deadlines are set out concerning the expropriation of plots of land and of houses and offices.

Thus, under Article 7 of Law 2730/1999, persons who refuse to vacate plots of land for which a court decision authorizing to be expropriated are given a twenty four hours period to vacate the plot of land before they are evicted. In cases however of houses / offices, the respective period for compliance is set to ten days. It is reminded that before the expropriation takes place, the state is obliged to provide the expropriated owner with the provisional compensation set by the court.

²⁹ By way of comparison, it is noted that “ordinary” civil cases are scheduled to be heard many months (and often years) after their filing, while due to staff shortage, decisions are notarized months after the issuing of the decision.

V. The housing impact of the Olympic Games: negative developments

The housing impact of the Olympic Games in Athens can be looked at from three different angles: the issue of expropriation, the question of increase in the cost of housing following the Olympic Games, as well as whether forced evictions have taken place in relation to the construction of Olympic infrastructure. The following part will look at these three different issues in order to determine the housing impact of organising the Games in Athens.

1. Expropriations and post-Olympic use

Special legal provisions were enacted in order to facilitate the speedier expropriation of plots of land and/or buildings in order for Olympics related infrastructure projects to move forward. Although concrete data is lacking, it appears that the majority of these expropriations were in fact, in economic terms, beneficiary for the owners of the plots of land in question. Compensation for expropriation was adequate and in fact it appears that in some cases the sums awarded were in fact higher than those that the market value of the plots of land in question would suggest.³⁰ One of the reasons for this might have been the desire on the part of the authorities to prevent protracted legal proceedings with the owners, proceedings that would result in further delays in the completion of the construction projects, together with the totally out of proportion estimates concerning the value of areas where Olympic venues were set up. To give an example, the land where the sports facilities of the Olympic village were built was expropriated in 2000 at a price of 62 euros per square metre, yet today, following an assessment by the Certified Assessors for the purposes of holding a bidding competition, its value was estimated to 11.2 euros per square meter.³¹ In the interest of fairness however, it has to be said that one of the reasons for this depreciation might be the fact that most the owners of the houses in the Olympic Village have not, as of the date of writing (April 2006) moved in their houses (see below section VI, 1), while a number of infrastructure works in the area that are expected to have a beneficial impact to its value have not been completed. This is in fact a feature of most of the Olympic Venues: their post-Olympic fate has not been decided and consequently potential investors are rather apprehensive of committing themselves in projects with a high risk factor.

2. Increases in rental and sale price of houses

The research undertaken demonstrated that there were no significant increases in either rent ceilings or the prices of houses in Athens or in the other Olympic cities where sporting events were held. In order to reach this conclusion, numerous data was collected and analysed. It should be noted that the following analysis is based on data available until early 2004. As a result, new data for 2006 might modify some of the analysis's findings.

There is no agency in Greece collecting statistical data concerning the number of lease or sell contracts per year.³² Obviously, sharp increases in the numbers of lease / sale contracts immediately before and after the holding of the Olympic Games would point to a potential link between the Olympics and increased demand of houses. Due to the lack of the data, the research focused on a number of parameters for which statistical data was available. It is also

³⁰ E.g. see Telloglou, op.cit., p 112, 208.

³¹ See Real Estate insert in Kathimerini Athens based daily newspaper, issue of January 25, 2006, available in Greek at http://portal.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/w_articles_tile3_13_25/01/2006_143891.

³² See Nationals Statistical Service of Greece email to GHM, dated January 16, 2006.

advisable to bear in mind the “peculiarities” of the housing market that have been referred to in section II.

The first parameter to be examined concerned the cost of housing. It was believed that if there was an increased demand for housing in the run up to the Olympics, this would be reflected in the cost of materials, land acquisition etc. Data available from the National Statistical Service of Greece (NSSG) suggest that this was not the case. Using the corresponding prices of 2000 as a baseline (when the total cost of building a house was given the sum of 100), it was seen that in 2001, there was an increase of 2,73%, in 2002, 2,25%, in 2003 2,69% and in 2004 3,01%, while data for the first nine months of 2005 suggested a corresponding increase.³³ These increases appear to be the end products of Overall Consumer’s Price Index (inflation) increase – the aggregate inflation for 2001 being 3,4%, for 2002 3,6%, for 2003 3,5%, for 2004 2,9%³⁴ and for 2005 3,9%.³⁵

Another potential “tell-tale” sign of a sharp increase in rents or house prices could be an increase in the household’s budget for housing. Again however, according to the data maintained by the NSSG, the increases that were noted appear to be more the result of inflationary pressures together increased expenditure in order to repay housing loans rather than an Olympics-related housing / renting “boom”: the Housing sub-index of the Consumer Price Index presents a gradual increase from 102 (per thousand) in 1999 (which is also the baseline) to 108,3 in 2000, 110,2 in 2001, 113,8 in 2002, 118,9 in 2003 and 124,6 in 2004.³⁶ The Housing sub-index monitors developments in the fields of households expenses for gas (assigned a value of 14,67 per thousand in the sub-index), rent (assigned a value of 39 per thousand) and other house-related expenses (e.g. water rates, electricity bills etc).³⁷ It is true that the increase is substantial, especially in the year 2004, yet there is no evidence whether this increase is due to an increase in the prices of rents or for example to the increase of the price of petrol (the vast majority of Greek households use petrol for central heating). It is noted however that according to the latest NSSG Survey *Statistics on Income and Living Conditions for 2004*, using as baseline the year 2003, 20% of the households of the survey were found to be below the poverty threshold.³⁸ Only 11.7% of the “poor” households reported that they faced problems in either paying their rent or repaying the housing loan they had taken in order to buy a house – the respective percentage for the non-poor households being 8.3% and in the whole population (both poor and non-poor households) was 9%. Interestingly enough, 41,1% of the poor households and 21.5% of the non-poor households stated that they faced problems in meeting the payments for public utilities (water, electricity, natural gas e.t.c.): 25.5% of the whole population (both poor and non-poor households) faced such financial problems.³⁹ This discrepancy might be attributable either to the fact that most households, even the poor ones, live in households they own and hence do not expend much of their monthly income on housing (there was no question whether the household benefit of “imputed rent” in the survey) or because payments for housing are inelastic and have to be met with priority.

³³ See the NSSG table in Greek) concerning the cost of new construction of new buildings at <http://www.statistics.gr/>.

³⁴ Hellas in Numbers, *op. cit.*, page 21.

³⁵ See NSSG table concerning the Consumer’s Price Index (CPI) at <http://www.statistics.gr/>.

³⁶ Hellas in Numbers, publication of the NSSG, *op.cit.* at page 19.

³⁷ Interview with Mr. Yannis Mosxakis, NSSG, on February 8, 2006. Data for the housing sub-index are collected from 1300 households in Athens and Thessaloniki.

³⁸ The survey’s sample was 6.252 households.

³⁹ See NSSG Survey, available in Greek at http://www.statistics.gr/gr_tables/S805_SFA_2_DT_AN_04_1_Y.pdf, page 8.

Turning to the issue of land value, it is noted that while certain localities in Athens did acquire increased value in the real estate market, this was not because they were adjacent to Olympics facilities but rather because they were adjacent to major infrastructure projects (such as the new Athens International Airport or the Metro) which would have completed regardless of whether the 2004 Olympics were held in Athens or not or because they were located in areas that are already enjoying a high value, due e.g. to their proximity to Universities or Metro Stations. It is to be noted for example that significant increases in the latest (December 2005) table of the so called “objective value of real estate”⁴⁰ were observed not that much in localities where Olympic facilities were constructed (e.g. Maroussi) but in other areas, e.g. summer resorts. By way of comparison, the highest price per square meter in Maroussi was set at 1.900 euros; the previous highest price was 1.555, i.e. an increase of 22.1%. Nevertheless, in the area of Sounio (where many residents of Athens have country homes) and where no substantial Olympics facilities are located, the price per square meter increased from 1.555 euros to 2.050, i.e. an increase of 31,8%. Similarly, in the area of Thrakomakedones, where the Olympic Village was built, prices presented a modest increase from 968 to 1,2000 euros per square meter, an increase of 23,9%. In any case, the most expensive locality of Athens and of Greece continue to be the two municipal compartments (the first and the second) in downtown Athens,⁴¹ where the only Olympic Venue is the Panathinaikon Stadium, known as Kallimarmaro, that was also used in the 1896 Olympics.

It is noted that the so-called “Olympic effect” (that is the sharp increase in house prices before and after the Olympic Games) was rather limited in the case of Greece. According to research carried out by the British Halifax Bank, there was a 63% increase of house prices in Athens in the five years period leading to the Olympic Games –not significantly higher than the 55% increase of house prices in the rest of Greece. In Barcelona, for example, house prices increased by 131% in the five year period leading to the 1992 Olympics while only a 83% increase took place in the rest of Spain.⁴²

The buoyancy of the Greek housing market (for reasons already set out in section II of the present report) ensured that house prices were already increasing and would presumably continue to do so, even if the Olympics were not held. Indeed, according to latest research, house prices in Attica increased by 164% during 1995-2004 (as opposed to 134% in the rest of Greece).⁴³ The sharpest increases took place during 1999-2002, when most Olympic

40 Until the end of 2005, a piece of real estate essentially had two prices: the so called “objective” and the so called “market” value. There was a significant discrepancy between those two processes, with the objective value being much less than the market value; as a result, there was significant tax evasion since sellers / buyers of real estate had only to agree to the objective value of the real estate in the contract, even though the sum that was actually paid would be closer to the market value. Due to the above, the Greek government decided to increase the objective value of the real estate to correspond, as far as possible, to its market value. This brought a significant increase to the value of real estate as well as collateral expenses that a buyer would incur (e.g. paying the respective increased taxes to the Revenue Service etc). The last date when “objective values” were set was in 2001. The references to the values in the present paragraph are from the comprehensive tables available in Greece at

<http://www.euro2day.gr/articles/93537/>.

41 See the administrative map of Athens available in English at

<http://www.cityofathens.gr/portal/site/AthensPortalEN/menuitem.7cb0bb672deb221eebd1de1050000a0/?vgnnextoid=47600d82905f0010VgnVCM100000d2a4673cRCRD>.

42 See Halifax Plc Press Release, dated July 6, 2005, entitled “House Prices go for gold in Olympic host cities,” available at <http://www.hbosplc.com/economy/includes/06-07-05OlympicsandHousePrices.doc>.

43 The vast share of this increase appears to have occurred in areas near major infrastructure works such as the new Athens Airport and the new Athens ring road: thus in the area of Mesogeia (an area easily accessible by the ring road and where the airport is located), house prices have gone up by 90% in the five years before the Olympics; see article by Maro Tsantila, *Developments in the Athens Property Market*, Issue no 29, Winter 2003-2004,

projects were underway or had not even started being constructed. Always according to the research, this increase during 199-2002 was due to the Stock Market boom that took place that period, coupled with the deregulation of the housing loans scheme.⁴⁴ If anything, it appears that in general, house and rent prices presented a slight (“correctional”) decrease in the period right before the 2004 Olympics. This was, *inter alia*, a result of the supply of houses outgrowing the demand, causing prices to remain more or less stable. According to one expert, writing in autumn of 2004,

*“All of this is happening [namely various proposals concerning the future of Olympic installations] in what is a period of transition for the property market. Prices, which have risen sharply in recent years, have now slowed down, and estate agents have already noticed a significant drop in prices and rents. In their forecasts, those working in the real estate sector report that this “correction” in prices will continue.”*⁴⁵

3. “Cleaning the city”: persecution of homeless / drug addicts / asylum seekers

There have been reports about one rather sinister aspect of the run-up to the 2004 Olympics, namely the persecution against certain categories of persons who could give the city “a bad picture”. It has been noted for example that prosecutors liberally issued decrees ordering the confinement of drug addicts and homeless to mental institutions, while the police allegedly sought to confine asylum seekers in special camps, away from the Olympic Venues.⁴⁶

Such measures caused the reaction of many members of the civil society and the press that strongly protested against such measures. No further information as to these measures is available, although it would appear that most of them were not, in the end, implemented. It is also interesting to note that almost none of the members of the civil society or the mass media spoke against the violations of the Roma that were either underway or had already taken place in the not too distant past.

of the “Trade with Greece” publication of the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, available in English at

http://www.acci.gr/trade/No29/TRADE_60_62.pdf, page 61.

⁴⁴ See article in Athens based daily newspaper *Eleftherotipia*, issue of March 15, 2006.

⁴⁵ See article by Kostas Voutsadakis, *The “Olympic legacy” to the property market*, Issue no 31, Autumn 2004, of the “Trade with Greece” publication of the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, available in English at http://www.acci.gr/trade/No31/TRADE_37_39.pdf, page 38.

⁴⁶ See article in *The Guardian*, August 11, 2004, “Beggars and drug addicts disappear in in Athens clean-up before games”, available at

<http://sport.guardian.co.uk/olympics2004/story/0,14912,1280604,00.html>. See also Amnesty International Press Release Greece: Olympics “clean-up” hits city’s most vulnerable inhabitants, dated August 6, 2004, available at <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGEUR256082004>.

4. Forced Evictions and Denial of Housing Rights in relation to the preparation of the Olympic Games: Roma Communities Targeted

Forced evictions have occurred in relations to the preparation of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, with almost all cases concerning Roma communities. It is estimated that more than 2,700 individuals of Romani ethnic origin were adversely affected by the Olympic Games, undergoing either evictions or experiencing the abandonment of their relocation projects for reasons ostensibly related to the Olympic Games.

It is noted that there were hopes that the plight of the Roma in Greece would be addressed, especially in view of the Olympics, in order to, if nothing else, not blemish the country's image. Indeed, in Greece's 2001 National Report concerning the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda – Istanbul +5, it was noted

“Thus, the emphasis for the next five years will be put on the effort to confront the problems of urban planning and quality of life in Greek cities, rather than on a new, social, redistributive policy for housing. Nevertheless, long-standing problems such as those of the housing of minorities living in particularly poor conditions (e.g. the Rom), or new problems due to the influx of economic migrants, will certainly receive the attention of all those involved in shaping housing policy.”⁴⁷

Unfortunately however, as it will be noted in the following paragraphs, this was not to be the case.

4.1. Background on Roma and Housing in Greece

There is no official estimate on the number of Roma living in Greece. On the basis of various *ad hoc* data and reports, the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) estimates that there are about 300,000 – 350,000 Roma living in Greece. Approximately half of them have integrated and/ or assimilated into the mainstream Greek society while the rest of them live in destitute settlements. The Roma living in settlements face a host of problems, including lack of access to public utilities such as running water and electricity, illiteracy and adequate access to health care. Forced evictions, however, constitute the most important problem they face since they deprive them of even the home they have managed to secure.

Forced evictions of Roma communities are occurring on a large scale throughout Greece and highlight a pattern of severe discrimination against Roma communities throughout the country, notably in the housing sector. Very often, local authorities are the ones carrying out the forced evictions, which often involve police brutality.

In fact, it could be said that Roma constitute the population group that is almost exclusively the object of forced evictions in Greece. This is due to the fact that Roma are squatting on land and do not have money to rent / buy a house. This reality is acknowledged by the Greek state, which proceeded to draft and is currently implementing an *Integrated Action Plan for the Social Integration of Greek Gypsies*. While the Action Plan is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, it faces many problems in its day-to-day development, problems that are usually due to reactions by local residents where Roma communities are to be relocated and / or the reluctance (or open hostility) of local authorities towards Roma. Because of this situation and of the large scale forced evictions affecting Roma in Greece, various regional and international bodies have condemned Greece for violating a certain number of

⁴⁷ Available in English at <http://www.unhabitat.org/Istanbul+5/NatRep-Greece.pdf>, page 20.

international human rights treaties due to its treatment of Roma, notably in relation to housing.⁴⁸

In this respect, Greece often fails short in meeting international human rights standards according to which forced evictions should not leave the affected communities destitute and homeless.⁴⁹ Overall, the majority of forced evictions affecting Roma communities in Greece fail short to provide adequate redress, reparation and resettlement to the victims. In those rare cases where a resettlement plan is foreseen, the authorities often fail short to implement such measures. In any case and regardless of the implementation side, when authorities commit themselves to resettlement and compensations, these measures only cover Greek Roma. As such, non-Greek Roma who have legal residency status, such as Albanian-Roma, are systematically excluded from these measures.

Overall, the Greek state has refused to acknowledge even a right to alternative accommodation, let alone to housing, to the Roma, regardless of international standards and decisions thereof. For instance, the Council of Europe's Committee on Social Rights which found that Greece had violated Article 16 of the European Social Charter on three different grounds, namely that it failed to provide the Roma with adequate permanent housing, with an adequate number of camping sites and lastly because of the forced evictions and other sanctions the Roma faced.

It is also interesting to note that the Greek state is actually implying that even though state authorities might have failed to provide the Roma with alternative accommodation, they can nevertheless proceed to evict Roma squatting on public tracts of land. Courts in Herakleion, Crete and Patras, Western Peloponnese, have actually held that the eviction of Roma under these circumstances would be abusive and have gone on to quash the relevant protocols of administrative eviction.

4.2. Preparation of the Olympic Games: an aggravating factor for Roma

In this context, the preparation of the Olympic Games in Greece had serious implications on the Roma's enjoyment of housing rights, as the preparation of the Olympic Games has led to further forced evictions or threats of forced evictions for the Roma communities. As early as 2001, the Greek National Commission on Human Rights noted that

"It is also a fact that the holding of the Olympic Games has been an occasion for driving the Roma out of many regions. Local communities (very often untruthfully) invoked the need for the construction of sports facilities in order to get rid of the Roma, as was the case in Mexico in 1968. The president of the special committee for the Roma with the Council of Europe, Josephine Verspaaget, on a recent visit (June

⁴⁸ See the relevant European Committee of Social Rights decision, available at http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Esc/3_Reporting_procedure/1_State_Reports/Greece_16th.pdf. For one of the latest UN body references to the housing situation of the Roma in Greece, see UN CCPR/CO/83/GRC, *Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee: Greece*, paragraph 18: "The Committee is concerned that the Roma people remain disadvantaged in many aspects of life covered by the Covenant (arts. 26 and 27): (a) The State party should intensify its efforts to improve the situation of the Roma people in a manner that is respectful of their cultural identity, in particular, through the adoption of positive measures regarding housing, employment, education and social services." [emphasis in the original]. The text is available at [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/0b0fece5de7503b0c1256ffc00489e4b?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/0b0fece5de7503b0c1256ffc00489e4b?Opendocument).

⁴⁹ According General Comment No. 7 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

2001) - like the Ombudsman - denounced the illegal circumstances in which tents were destroyed and tent-dwellers driven out from Aspropyrgos in summer 2000 because of Olympic Games projects.”⁵⁰

In its Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Greece under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also expressed its concern concerning the eviction of Roma in the framework of the Olympic Games:

*“The Committee is gravely concerned about numerous reports on the extrajudicial demolition of dwellings and forced evictions of Roma from their settlements by municipal authorities, often under the pretext of construction projects for the 2004 Olympic Games, and frequently without payment of adequate compensation or provision of alternative housing.”*⁵¹

The Committee also called on Greece to

*“[...] provide, in its second periodic report, detailed information on the number of Roma evicted from their homes, especially in the context of the 2004 Olympic Games, and on any measures taken to remedy illegal acts which may have occurred in that regard.”*⁵²

The relationship between the preparation of the Olympic Games and forced evictions of Roma communities in Greece is twofold. In the first scenario, municipal authorities have been using and invoking the preparation of the Olympic Games as a pretext to carry out forced evictions of Roma communities. In the second scenario, the actual construction of infrastructure for the Olympic Games has led to the forced eviction of the Roma community of Marousi, located in the Greater Athens area and adjacent to the main Olympic complex.

5. Attempt or Actual Forced Evictions using the Olympic Games as a Pretext

The preparation of the Olympic Games has been used by Municipalities as a pretext to forcibly evict Roma settlements located in the Greater Athens.

The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights noted in this respect, during his visit to Greece on June 2002, that under the pretext of reclaiming land for the Olympic Games, certain local authorities were seeking to forcefully evict the Roma:

“Finally, an NGO, the Organisation mondiale contre la torture (OMCT), condemned the evictions of Roma communities from their dwellings in Athens ahead of the 2004 Olympic Games and criticised the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for its silence. I was assured by all my official contacts that it was quite untrue and that all families needing to be possibly moved because of the Games would be relocated on state-owned land. Apparently however, use of the Olympic Games argument is made by certain local authorities for refusing to take in Roma/Gypsy communities or hasten their departure, according to the people I met at Aspropyrgos. A future site of the Olympic facilities is indeed hard to

⁵⁰ NCHR’s Report on the Roma is available in English at http://www.nchr.gr/category.php?category_id=99.

⁵¹ See *Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Greece*, May 14, 2004, UN Doc E/C.12/1/Add.97 June 7, 2004, available at [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/0fcc2b5b27738e28c1256f430056245b?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/0fcc2b5b27738e28c1256f430056245b?Opendocument), para. 21.

⁵² *Ibid*, para. 43.

*imagine out there, so far from the centre and bordering on the refuse tip. I ask the Olympic organising committee to publish the list of proposed sites in order to prevent pressure from being brought to bear on families settled or wishing to settle in areas supposedly set aside for the organisation of the Olympic Games.*⁵³

The Roma settlement of Aspropyrgos, situated near Athens, has been one settlement where municipal authorities have been using the preparation of the Olympic Games as a pretext to forcibly evict Roma communities. Overall, from 1999 on, Roma communities of Aspropyrgos have been threatened with forced eviction either by police officers or by civilians threatening to call the police. While it was not clear for some time whether Olympic facilities would be built in Aspropyrgos, the Mayor of the town used this perspective as an excuse to forcibly evict or refuse the relocation of the Roma communities. Ultimately, no Olympic facilities were constructed in the area. In a 1998 document, the then deputy Minister for Environment, Town Planning and Public Works had suggested that Aspropyrgos could constitute one of the main “Olympics hubs”.⁵⁴ As early as February 1999 however, this proposal had been dropped: members of the IOC, together with a member of the OCOG visited on that date Aspropyrgos. They got lost in the maze of small-scale industrial facilities and warehouses that abound in the area, while the sight of the nearby rubbish tip could not have been overly pleasing. As a result, the IOC members asked for their immediate return to Athens without visiting the proposed area, which was turned down.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it can be seen that either because of non-information or intentionally, local authorities continued to make vague references to the Olympic Games when rejecting proposals for the relocation of Roma communities.

For instance, on July 14 2000, a municipal bulldozer, allegedly accompanied by the Mayor and the police, demolished numerous Roma huts in a Roma settlement situated on a garbage dump in Aspropyrgos. The huts, which belonged to Greek and Albanian Roma, contained the inhabitants’ personal belongings. All families in the settlement situated on the garbage dump were ordered to leave within three days. The Roma tent dwellers living in the upper part of the garbage dump were evicted some days before this incident, when the Mayor of Ano Liosia – a Municipality located near Aspropyrgos -- offered to each Roma family 100’000 drachmas (US\$ 266) to leave the settlement. Following the Roma’s departure, the municipality demolished their tents. All the Roma –the ones evicted on July 14 and the ones evicted a few days earlier- are now living in other settlements around Aspropyrgos.

Furthermore, in September 2001, the municipal authorities of Aspropyrgos, under the orders of the Mayor, proceeded to destroy 6 homes and damaged others under the pretext of carrying out a “cleaning operation”. The operation of September 2001 took place in a settlement close to one destroyed in July 2000. The demolition of the sheds was stopped following the intervention of GHM and of the Greek Ombudsman’s Office.

A report by the Greek Ombudsman, released on January 26th 2001, condemned the July 2000 operation and found that “in all likelihood, members of the Municipality of Aspropyrgos have committed criminal acts”. The report further recommended that a prompt and impartial investigation into the action of the Aspropyrgos Municipality be carried out in order to bring those responsible to justice. In his report, the Greek

⁵³ See Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Report by Mr Alvaro-Gil Robles, Commissioner for Human Rights, on his visit to the Hellenic Republic 2-5 June 2002, available in English at http://www.coe.int/T/Commissioner/Default_en.asp, at paragraph 26.

⁵⁴ Telloglou, op.cit. page 46.

⁵⁵ Telloglou, op.cit. page 53.

Ombudsman also recommended to the authorities to administratively sanction the Mayor of Aspropyrgos, George Liakos. To date, George Liakos remains in function. On the other hand, the Public Prosecutor indicted him for breach of duty. In the trial that took place on November 2, 2005, the Mayor of Aspropyrgos was acquitted; with the support of GHM, a Romni whose house was demolished lodged an appeal.

6. Abandoned relocation projects for the Roma due to the preparation of the Olympic Games

As noted above, approximately half of the Romani population in Greece lives in destitute settlements. In order to address this, it was suggested that Roma living in settlements should be moved in organised settlements equipped with prefabricated houses and all the necessary facilities (sewage, electricity, running water).

6.1. Roma in Herakleion

The city of Herakleion is located in the island of Crete and was one of the 2004 Olympic Cities. In the outskirts of Herakleion lies the Municipality of Nea Alikarnassos, home to a Romani community of more than 200 families. According to the Cultural Association of Athinganoi of the Herakleion Prefecture *Elpis* ("Hope"), based in Nea Alikarnassos, on January 23, 2003, the Nea Alikarnassos Mayor, Evangelos Sissamakias, authorised municipal employees to break into a site designated for the resettlement of the local Romani community, including forcing the entrance lock and placing iron props inside. *Elpis* also stated that part of the necessary infrastructure on the planned relocation site has already been constructed. The resettlement project is funded by central government resources and aimed at creating an organised settlement, equipped with all the necessary facilities that would allow the Roma to live under human conditions, until they would be relocated to proper houses.⁵⁶

Some days following the incident referred to above, the Nea Alikarnassos Mayor stated in an interview for the media that

*"You cannot have a Gypsy settlement next to a basketball court, part of the Olympics 2004 facilities, because Gypsies blemish one's sense of good taste and, in addition, they deal in drugs... I do not deny that I do not want the Gypsies in our area. Let them rent houses in Heraklion or Nea Alikarnassos. I cannot understand with they should be treated in a privileged way. If they want to be integrated into society then they should not be allowed to choose where they should be resettled... All Greeks serve their military service but only Gypsies have a right to break the law"*⁵⁷

In place of the Romani settlement and with a view to putting the infrastructure work that had already be completed to good use, the Mayor reportedly proposed the construction of a parking lot for the adjoining basketball court On January 28, 2003, SOKADRE⁵⁸ lodged a

⁵⁶ Much of the background information in this section is derived from the April 2003 Joint European Roma Rights Centre / Greek Helsinki Monitor Report Cleaning Operations: Excluding Roma in Greece.

⁵⁶ Statement (available in Greek) in Athens based daily newspaper Eleftherotipia, January 27, 2003, at http://www.enet.gr/online/online_p1_text.jsp?dt=27/01/2003&c=112&id=16178080.

⁵⁷ Statement (available in Greek) in Athens based daily newspaper Eleftherotipia, January 27, 2003, at http://www.enet.gr/online/online_p1_text.jsp?dt=27/01/2003&c=112&id=16178080

⁵⁸ The Coordinated Organizations and Communities for Roma Human Rights in Greece (SOKADRE) is a network founded in 2001; its members include 30 Roma communities and 5 Greek NGOs that have been working on Roma rights.

complaint with the Ombudsman's office and also lodged a criminal complaint against the mayor for violation of Greece's then only anti-racist law, Law 927/1979. In the trial that took place on June 29, 2004, the mayor was declared not guilty. As for the Roma, work on the prospective settlement was halted and the relocation did not move forward. As of the date of writing (June 2006), the Roma still live in the old settlement under unacceptable conditions while the parking lot was never constructed.

This was not the first time that authorities tried to use the Olympics as a pretext in order to evict this Roma community. Indeed, the previous mayor of Nea Alikarnassos had twice attempted to evict the Roma. In 1997, the municipality of Nea Alikarnassos issued a protocol of administrative eviction against the local Romani community, located in a settlement between a main road and an industrial zone, without garbage collection services or access to water, electricity or sewage system. A similar argument was also used: according to the then mayor, the settlement "*blemished the city's image*", although it is doubtful that his comment was an indication of his concern for the Romani inhabitants of the slum. In fact, numerous statements by members of the Nea Alikarnassos Municipal Council suggested that the municipality saw the Roma themselves, and not the squalid conditions to which they were consigned, as the problem. It is especially interesting to note that while the decision to evict the Roma was made in 1997, the mayor only sought to enforce it in 1999, which could suggest that the mayor had a particular motivation for enforcing the order at that time, namely the need to evict the Roma before the Olympics. Indeed, in a complaint that the local Romani community addressed to the Ombudsman's office on August 21, 2000, they alleged that there were plans to build a new sports hall in the area (indeed, a basketball court was built in the area and used for the Olympics – this is the basketball court referred to by mayor Sissamakis in his statement above), as well as to create a park in which businessmen had expressed their interest in buying plots of land and buildings.

The Romani community challenged the eviction protocol before the courts, and the Magistrate's Court of Herakleion subsequently declared it to be abusive.⁵⁹ The court ruled that the eviction could not be carried out unless alternative housing was provided. However, the municipal authorities were undaunted by the court's ruling and served a second, almost identical, protocol of administrative eviction on August 10, 2000. Following notification of the continuing intention to evict, the Ombudsman reminded the authorities of the court's ruling and stated that unless a place for the Roma's relocation were designated and the necessary infrastructure works securing a decent standard of living had been carried out, the second eviction order would most likely also be declared abusive. Indeed, on 2001, the Magistrate Court of Herakleion noted that as the Roma had not been relocated, there was no reason to depart from its previous decision and consequently found the second protocol abusive as well.⁶⁰ As such, the Roma continue to live in the same settlement they've been living the last 20 years or so.

6.2. *Roma in Lechaina*

Another instance of an abandoned relocation of a Roma community for reasons pertaining to the image of the Olympic Games is that of the small Roma community of Lechaina, in Western Peloponnese. The mayor of Lechaina, Mr. Dimitris Hadjigiannis, had submitted a proposal to house 35 Roma families (including Albanian ones) in 35 prefabricated houses on a municipality-owned plot of land, located adjacent to the national highway from Patras to

⁵⁹ Magistrate Court's Decision No 976/1999, issued on November 12, 1999.

⁶⁰ Magistrate Court's Decision No 47/2001, issued on January 29, 2001.

Pyrgos and incidentally the main route leading to Ancient Olympia. Mr. Hadjigiannis had actually secured half of the total cost of the projected budget, and work on the settlement was about to start when he received a call from the Director of the Town Planning and Environment Directorate of the Western Greece Region. The Director informed Mr. Hadjigiannis that because the suggested plot of land was within visual range of the national highway, the settlement's establishment should not go ahead as foreign visitors on their way to Olympia should not see the Gypsies living there. Mr. Hadjigiannis, thinking that this was a joke, called the Ministry of Interior, where the official with whom he spoke not only agreed with the rationale of the Director of the Town Planning Directorate but also suggested that an alternative could be the appropriate landscaping of the settlement so that a small hill be created between the settlement and the national highway, upon which trees could be planted so that no visual contact between the settlement and drivers on the national highway could be established. The journalist working on the story contacted the Director of the Town Planning and Environment Directorate of the Western Greece Region who affirmed that there were thoughts of not allowing Roma settlements to be established next to national highways for "aesthetic" reasons but that this was not implemented.⁶¹ In any case, the Municipality of Lechaina's proposal to relocate the Roma was not implemented.

6.3. Roma in Aghia Paraskevi

Similar was the experience of the Romani community of Aghia Paraskevi, in greater Athens region. A plot of land was purchased by the municipality of Aghia Paraskevi in the neighbouring municipality of Spata in September 2002, with a view to relocating the Roma concerned there. The Roma had previously agreed in writing with this prospect.⁶² The necessary funds for the purchase (approximately 243,580 Euro) were provided to the municipality by the Ministry of Interior, in the framework of the Roma Integration Action Plan, along with an additional 49,890 Euros: the whole grant was specified to be granted "*exclusively and only for the improvement of the Gypsies' quality of life and specifically for the purchase of a plot of land for the settlement of the Gypsies*".⁶³

However, the relocation has not taken place as a result of the opposition of the municipality of Spata, opposition apparently motivated by racial animus:

*"[...] It is obvious that the tastelessness (along with all other problems to be exposed below) noticed in every settlement of athiganoi [pejorative for Roma] will rudely insult the aesthetics of a cultural wine centre to be built in the same area, which is for us a symbol of our history and culture. Moreover, the plot of land bought by the Municipality of Aghia Paraskevi ... is a mere 1,000 meters away from the North entry to the airport ... Constructing buildings and installing Gypsies ... is not the most aesthetic thing across the airport, especially ahead of the 2004 Olympic Games, and the consequent traffic during that time ... As such an action will create uncontrollable situations, since the population of Spata will in no way accept the Gypsies of another municipality in its area ... all competent authorities should see to it that this resettlement of Gypsies is not allowed."*⁶⁴

It is noted that the above is contained in a letter addressed by the Municipality of Spata towards the Prosecutor's Office of Athens, which apparently found nothing objectionable.

⁶¹ Information kindly derived by the journalist who investigated the story for Eleftherotypia Athens based daily newspaper. The article was not published.

⁶² Letter to municipality of Aghia Paraskevi, signed by all ten heads of family, dated 1-7-2002 and with municipal protocol number 28393/2-10-2002, on file with GHM.

⁶³ Ministry of Interior Ruling Ref.no. 40330/18-10-2001, on file with GHM.

⁶⁴ Municipality of Spata, May 29, 2003, Ref. no. 3432/29-5-2003, , on file with GHM.

As a result of the abandon of the relocation to Spata, five Romani families have seen their sheds being levelled, as the owners of the plots of land the Roma squatted decided to execute the judicial decisions they had secured that ordered the eviction of the Roma. As of the date of writing (June 2006), the local authorities had essentially forced (since the alternative of relocating to Spata to which the Roma had agreed was no longer open and they were faced with more evictions) the Roma to agree to their relocation to a locality approximately 90 kilometres away from Aghia Paraskevi, near Chalkida.

7. Eviction of a Roma Community in Relation to the Construction of the Olympic Stadium

In 2002, the Roma community of Marousi has been asked by the municipal authorities to vacate their settlement because the 2004 Olympic Games Committee decided to extend the Olympic installation into that area to construct a parking lot for the Olympic Stadium. 42 Roma families who have been living for more than 30 years in three small settlements next to or opposite the Olympic Stadium in the municipality of Maroussi in Athens were concerned. All but ten of these families lived on a state-owned plot of land located right next to the Olympic Stadium, one of the main venues for the Olympic Games of 2004.⁶⁵

After the decision to hold the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, it was evident that the particular Roma community should be relocated – in fact the Roma living there thought that the Olympics were a golden opportunity for them, as they reasonably expected that the state would at last see to their housing problem.

At that time, the Municipality of Marousi assured the Roma families that special measures would be taken for their resettlement. In fact, an agreement was signed on August 1, 2002 between Panagiotis Tzanikos, the Marousi Mayor, and Stelios Kalamiotis, a representative of the 40 Roma families. It is noteworthy to note that this agreement covered only the Greek Roma but not the Albanian Roma legally residing in Greece and who, some years ago, proceeded to set up a settlement next to the one where the Greek Roma were living. As such, approximately twenty families of Albanian Roma who lived next to the families of Greek Roma in Maroussi and the majority of whom had legal residence permits, were not offered any alternative accommodation but were forcefully evicted. Such exclusion reflects Greece's general policy to use its various plans only for Greek Roma and not for immigrant Roma, even if they are legal residents.⁶⁶

Under the terms of this agreement, the 40 Greek Roma families (amounting to 137 people) would vacate the plots of land where they have been living for decades. In return, the agreement stipulated that they would receive subsidies to help them rent new accommodation.⁶⁷ As such, the Roma had to find houses/apartments, the monthly subsidy from the Municipality helping them to pay the rent. This was to be a temporary measure, as the agreement also stipulated that the Roma families would, in the future, be resettled in heavy duty prefabricated houses to be constructed by the Marousi Municipality. In the

⁶⁵ Excellent footage of the life in the Maroussi Roma settlement before its “velvet” eviction and the problems that Roma faced later are depicted in a small documentary available at <http://www.panoramatos.com/>.

⁶⁶ This practice was condemned by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its Concluding Observations on Greece, see UN Doc E/C/12/1/Add.97, 14 May 2004, *Consideration of Report Submitted by the States Parties under Articles 16-17 of the Covenant, Concluding Observation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Greece*, paragraph 44.

⁶⁷ This amount depends upon the size of the family. For instance, a family with two children –that is four people- would receive 735 Euros, while a family with six children would get 1150 Euros.

longer term, the agreement also underlined that this relocation would be temporary and that the Municipality would also work towards guaranteeing permanent resettlement to the 40 families. Furthermore, under the agreement, the municipal authorities agreed to provide special assistance to the Roma families in clothing and food, as well as to elaborate a special plan for the Roma's integration in the local society.

The agreement also stipulated that the Roma families would, in the future, be resettled in heavy duty prefabricated houses to be constructed by the Marousi Municipality. In the longer term, the agreement also underlined that this relocation would be temporary and that the Municipality would also work towards guaranteeing permanent resettlement to the 40 families. Furthermore, under the agreement, the municipal authorities agreed to provide special assistance to the Roma families in clothing and food, as well as to elaborate a special plan for the Roma's integration in the local society.

From September 2002 on, and on the basis of this agreement, Roma families started to leave their settlement. Some of them rented houses, while others preferred to go and stay in houses that relatives owned or rented. Although the Roma promptly kept their part of the agreement, the municipality soon defaulted on implementing its various obligations. Up to date, the Municipality of Marousi reportedly failed to implement the agreement. In that respect, some Roma families have voiced their concern that the agreement with the Municipality was merely a pretext to lure them to vacate quietly the land where they have been living, as infrastructure related to the Olympic Games had to be constructed there and in order to avoid bad publicity. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the Roma have not been paid the monthly subsidies since the end of the Olympics in August 2004.

7.1. The Municipality's failure to implement the agreement

After a few months time following the signature of the agreement the municipality started defaulting on the payments, causing severe financial hardship on the Roma. As a result, certain Roma families fell in arrears and were evicted by their landlords. As such, in September 2003, the two Roma families of Dimitris and Panayota Nikolaou and Petrou Mitrou and Dimitra Karagianni were evicted by their landlords because they could not pay the rent. Other families also faced severe economic hardship, as they did heavily rely on the subsidies to cover the rental costs.

Additionally, the Roma were threatened with a total cut off of the payment of subsidies unless they applied for loans, granted under favourable terms, to Greek Roma. The municipality plans to use these loans in order to prepare houses for the Roma. Nevertheless, there the agreement did not require the filling a loan application, while the exact terms as to how these loans will be repaid over the 22 years period (since the Roma are indigent and have no stable source of income), have not been worked out. The municipality claimed in the past that it will undertake to repay the loan payments, but the Roma are not so sure about that, reminded of the fact that the municipality already has failed to pay the subsidies in time. As of the date of writing (January 2006), the municipality owes each Roma family the equivalent of more than one year and a half's subsidies, while the locality where the Roma's houses will be built has yet to become known. Although the Roma families have reportedly asked several times the Mayor to tell them where the prefabricated houses will be located, the mayor has not yet answered. Regarding the provision of special assistance to the Roma families in clothing and food, some families have complained that they have not received much in the way of foodstuffs/clothing,

As early as March 8, 2001, the Ombudsman's Office addressed a letter to the then Prefect of Athens, in which reference was made to the Maroussi Roma community and the need to relocate it. In his letter, the Ombudsman refers to the numerous failures of the authorities to address the issue, while mentioning the Olympic Games, suggesting that, if anything, the issue should be addressed in view of the Olympics. Thus, according to the Ombudsman's letter,

*"In view of the above, I would like to underline once again the seriousness of the problems which emerged in regards to the Roma residing in your prefecture. The acuteness of these problems is even more intensified by the fact that these problems have become known to international organizations such as the Council of Europe, The Organization For the Security and Cooperation in Europe, and very recently, of the International Olympic Committee. The president of IOC is reported to have made –written-austere comments regarding the eventuality of violent expulsion of Roma from the areas about to be developed in the framework of the Olympic games 2004. For this reason, I request that you inform me, as soon as possible, about the courses of action you are planning to take in regards to the issues discussed here and the relevant proposals of the Greek Ombudsman. I would also like to communicate to me, if it exists, any long-standing correspondence of the Prefect of Athens with the Public Mortgage Corporation related to the relocation of the encamped within your prefecture Roma."*⁶⁸

The Ombudsman's Office appears to never have received any answer from the Prefect's Office. The next year, it proceeded to address a letter to the General Secretary of the Attika Region. In this letter, the Ombudsman essentially reiterates the concerns it raised in its letter towards the Prefect and attempts again to draw a connection between the Olympics and the situation of the Roma, apparently in an attempt to mobilise the competent authorities:

*"[...] The issue of course, for the time being, is not to locate and impute ethic and legal responsibility [to those responsible] for the creation, and above all, for the perpetuation and the heightening of the unacceptable, in every respect, position of the Roma in our country and especially in the capital city itself and its suburbs at the dawn of the new millennium. Not that such an action is unnecessary. Rather, more pressing and requiring immediate confrontation is the issue of the endangerment of public order and security, of social cohesion and, particularly, of our national dignity as a society governed with respect to its citizens and the rule of law. This danger is so immediate and has reached such proportions that it requires the prompt implementation of measures for defusing the existing situation and for the short-term restoration of conditions of dignified living and peaceful coexistence with all that lives nears for these vulnerable communities. It would be redundant to remind you, by way of placing additional emphasis on the urgency of the matter, that the current condition of the Greek Roma has attracted the attention of international organizations in view especially of the hosting of the Olympic games in Athens."*⁶⁹

The Greek Helsinki Monitor filed on September 26, 2003 a criminal complaint report against the mayor of Maroussi for his failure to honour the terms of the agreement. This report led to the forming of two separate case files and the launching of two different preliminary inquiries, one held by the Security Department of the Maroussi Police Station and the other by the Maroussi Magistrate. As of the date of writing (January 2006), both are still in the stage of preliminary inquiry, in breach of Art 31.3 of the Greek Code of Criminal Procedure that provides that such inquiries should not last more than eight months. Finally, it should also be noted that on October 12, 2005, the Ombudsman's Office addressed a letter to the

⁶⁸ Ombudsman's Letter Ref. No. 17724/00/2.2, dated March 8, 2001. Official Translation.

⁶⁹ Ombudsman's Letter Ref. No. 17724/00/2.3, dated February 26, 2002. Official Translation.

Municipality of Maroussi, asking for information concerning the implementation of the agreement.⁷⁰

8. Forced Evictions occurring during the Olympic Games

On August 17, 2004, a “cleaning operation” took place against Albanian Roma living in Riganokampos, on a plot of land belonging to the University of Patras. Two Greek Roma families who had set up their sheds next to those of the Albanian Roma were offered money in order to transfer their sheds on the neighbouring plot of land where the Greek Roma live. No such arrangements were made for the 35 families of Albanian Roma, the majority of who were away from their homes engaged into seasonal agricultural work in other parts of Greece. Although the municipality of Patras argued in public that the Roma abandoned the sheds and that its operation was merely a “cleaning one”, the language use in one document sent to the Western Greece Region attests to the racial dimension of the operation. Thus, according to the Patras Municipality, the presence of the Albanian Roma in Riganokampos “... further aggravated ...” the “...wretched and inhumane...” living conditions there. In the document, it is also stated that “concerted actions, in cooperation with the Police Directorate of Patras [led to] the ousting of Albanian speaking gypsies who, in addition to the prolongation of the problem, were illegally in our country and constituted the main source of origin for the street children. 35 families of Albanian speaking gypsies were ousted, the sheds were demolished and the whole area of about 70,000 square meters was cleaned up in order to be landscaped, for the benefit of the residents of the area.” In the document, it is also conceded that the Albanian Roma had settled there four years ago, i.e. in 2000.⁷¹ There is no mention of the University asking the municipality to clean the area, let alone to evict the Roma, though it is known that the University always wanted to get rid of the Roma; it is therefore highly likely that the University, unofficially, endorsed this cleaning/eviction operation,⁷² while technically speaking it should be suing the municipality for trespassing. According to press reports, the municipality of Patras had informed the Roma about this operation and had in fact issued them with an ultimatum.⁷³ The Albanian Roma however denied that they had been informed of the operation, while according to an article in a local daily newspaper, three Albanian Roma families that had returned to the settlement denied that they had been informed about this operation.⁷⁴ In any case, the issue whether they had been informed or not is moot, since they were not served with any eviction protocols or even any other written document. As for the local residents, their attitude towards the eviction was split: half of them appeared to be satisfied while the other half would have liked all the Roma to have been evicted.⁷⁵ In a subsequent press release on October 4, 2004, the Municipality of Patras claimed that the Albanian Roma had left the site, that only derelict sheds were located there and that it had received many complaints by local ethnic-Greek residents. According to the press release, the purpose of the cleaning operation was to clean up the area and set up an open theatre there, ostensibly to be used during 2006 when Patras will be the Cultural Capital of Europe. Nevertheless, as of the date of writing (January 2006), no work on the open theatre has started while the two Roma communities of Patras continue to face eviction within a virulently anti-Romani atmosphere.

⁷⁰ Ombudsman’s Office letter date October 12, 2005, Ref. No. 13939/2003.

⁷¹ See Municipality of Patras document, Ref. No. 13/351, dated September 9, 2004, on file with GHM.

⁷² The University also did not object to an eviction attempt that took place in August 2001.

⁷³ See Peloponnisos, local daily newspaper, issue of August 18, 2004.

⁷⁴ These Roma talked with the Chairman of the Cultural Associations of Patras who stated that “*it appears that the Gypsies had not conceded to this operation*”. See Peloponnisos, local daily newspaper, issue of August 21, 2004.

⁷⁵ See Peloponnisos, local daily newspaper, issue of August 19, 2004.

Lastly, it should be noted that the area where the Albanian Roma lived was not located very close to the Olympic venue of Patras (the Pan-Peloponnesian Football Stadium) and was not “visible” from e.g. the ring road of Patras. As a result, it would seem that the local authorities merely took advantage of the fact that the public attention was focused on the Olympic Games that were underway in order to quietly evict the Roma.

VI. Positive Housing Impact of the 2004 Olympic Games

The numerous large and small-scale infrastructure projects that were completed in the run up to the Olympic Games have enhanced the quality of life in Athens. Certain projects for example entailed the planting of trees and the improvement of the buildings facades, while the Athens transport network has been improved.

There have also been important developments in relation to the housing situation in Athens. Three out of the 57 infrastructure projects will have a lasting influence in meeting the housing needs of certain Athens inhabitants. These projects are the Olympic Village on the one hand and the two dormitories (one belonging to the Athens University and the other to the National Technical University of Athens) that accommodated a number of the journalists covering the events during the Olympic Games.

1. The Olympic Village

The Olympic Village constitutes the most extensive construction project undertaken in the framework of the Olympic Games. For town planning and environmental reasons, it was not built on the area originally envisaged in the Candidature File, where half of the land already belonged to the Greek state⁷⁶ but in adjacent area, belonging to private individuals. This necessitated numerous compulsory expropriation orders that are estimated to have cost 22 bln drachmas, roughly 65 mln Euros due to the increase of the price of land following disclosure of the fact that the Olympic Village would be built in the area.⁷⁷ The Olympic Village was built on an area of 1.240 stremmata surface (a measure of area used in Greece, roughly one quarter of an acre). The Workers Housing Organisation (W.H.O.) was responsible for the design and construction of the Olympic Village, which in turn proceeded to form a joint-stock company entitled “Olympic Village 2004”. It was W.H.O. that, out of its own funds, proceeded to pay the sums stipulated in the compulsory expropriation orders, under the condition that the Olympic Village would revert to its use following completion of the 2004 Olympic Games.⁷⁸ It should be noted that proposals had been made for the Olympic Village to be used to provide housing to Roma or to university students; such proposals however overlooked the fact that W.H.O. finances its numerous housing projects out of contribution made by both workers and their employers. As a result, it would not have been possible for W.H.O. to finance a project that would not be of benefit to its constituencies.

Only 1/3 of the surface is used for residential purposes; the remainder of the surface was taken up by sports training facilities, open spaces, shopping centres, a hospital unit and a

⁷⁶ Candidature File, Volume III, Theme 12, page 26.

⁷⁷ Telloglou, op.cit., page 92.

⁷⁸ Information derived from Olympic Village 2004 SA document to GHM, Ref. No. 17444, dated August 31, 2005, on file with GHM.

green park, three times the size of the National Garden of Athens. The approx 17.500 athletes and members of the Olympic were accommodated in 366 buildings, containing 2.292 apartments in which provisions had been made so that they could easily be adapted to their post-Olympics use. On average, each apartment has a surface of 95 square metres.

The importance of the Olympic Village cannot be underestimated: it presents one of the biggest housing projects undertaken in Greece, as it would provide homes to 2,293 families – beneficiaries of W.H.O., who will be able to buy homes at approximately half of their market value.⁷⁹ The former Olympic Village will actually be a small town of approximately 10.000 inhabitants, with its own schools, a church and a small hospital unit. Perhaps even more importantly these residences would conform, to a large extent, to the most exacting standards of habitability and would be surrounded by one of the largest parks in Athens. As demand for houses (approx. 17.800 applications were filed) is in excess of the number of houses available (2.292), W.H.O. proceeded to assign the houses to its beneficiaries by means of a draw. It was only in two cases where no draw was needed, namely houses destined for handicapped beneficiaries⁸⁰ and families with more than five children: these two categories concerned approximately 229 families. A complete assessment of whether the beneficiaries met all the necessary requirements had been completed in relation to 1.230 families.⁸¹ Another highly important feature concerning the allocation of houses is that foreigners who meet the relevant criteria laid down by W.H.O. are also entitled to take part in the draw – something that has angered certain ethnic Greek candidates.⁸²

Unfortunately however, one year and a half following the completion of the Olympics, the Olympic Village is still empty as most of its future inhabitants have yet to enter into their houses. By April 2006, only 400 families had moved in the Olympic village, facing numerous problems: there are no shops operating in the village, buses do not run frequently while there appears to be a dispute between the Municipality of Acharnai (to which the Olympic Village belongs for administrative purposes) and the Village's inhabitants over the former's refusal to collect garbage from the Village.⁸³ The protracted delay in the moving in of the new tenants has, in addition to a psychological, a financial impact on the tenants, since they due to the delays they might be forced to pay both the rent of the house they are currently living in as well as the first instalments towards W.H.O.

Another problem plaguing the Olympic Village is that, due to time and budgetary constraints, the high environmental standards laid down both in the Candidature File and in the various technical reports were silently abandoned. Thus, according to the Candidature File, the principal guidelines to be followed in designing and building the Olympic Village would be the use of new technologies in order to save energy (such as passive solar architecture, cross-season storing of thermal energy), new water management resources, new building materials and the adoption of a modern solid waste management strategy.⁸⁴ Similar recommendations are contained in W.H.O.'s 2000 *Town Planning Study of the "Olympic*

⁷⁹ It is noted that W.H.O. beneficiaries can actually apply for a favourable housing loan from W.H.O. in order to buy a house in the Olympic Village.

⁸⁰ It is noted that the Olympic Village also hosted the athletes of the Para-Olympic Games – as a result, certain houses had been modified in order to be more accessible to persons with wheelchairs etc.

⁸¹ See the relevant page in W.H.O.s website (in Greek) at http://www.oek.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=278&Itemid=106

⁸² See article in Ta Nea Athens based daily newspaper, issue of October 11, 2004, available in Greek at http://ta-nea.dolnet.gr/print_article.php?entypo=A&f=18061&m=N65&aa=1

⁸³ See Athens based daily *Eleftherotypia*, issue of April 16, 2006.

⁸⁴ Candidature File Volume III, Theme 12, page 26.

Village” settlement.⁸⁵ Unfortunately however, the mounting costs forced W.H.O. to discard most, if not all of these projects, leading Greenpeace to issue a scathing report in August 2003. In its report, Greenpeace notes that Athens has failed to take advantage of the environmental “know-how” transferred to it by the Australians – it is to be noted that Greenpeace awarded a mere “pass grade” (5 out of 10) to the Sydney Olympics, in terms of positive environmental effect. Greenpeace considers that W.H.O. failed not only to adopt measures that, while beneficial to the environment, would also have led to an increase of costs but also measures that would necessitate small scale modifications to the existing structures (e.g. the installation of photo-voltaic elements) and the cost of which could have been borne by other sources e.g. European Union funds.⁸⁶

2. The two Press Villages

For two of the seven press villages, it was envisaged that they would be used as University and National Technical University dormitories following the 2004 Olympic Games. Thus, the University of Athens Major Student Dormitory, located in Zografou, was renovated and almost rebuilt for the Olympic Games, after which its 523 rooms (174 rooms with two beds, 358 with a single bed; all rooms have their individual toilet and shower facilities) would be used by low income students. Additionally, two smaller student dormitories were also built at a distance of a few hundred meters from the Major Student Dormitory. These two new dormitories have a combined capacity of 294 rooms with single beds and individual toilet and shower facilities.⁸⁷ Similar, the Goudi Press Village was transferred following the 2004 Olympics to the National Technical University of Athens to be used as student dormitories with a capacity of 800 rooms.⁸⁸ A prerequisite for students to be eligible to be assigned to one of these dormitories is to have low income as well as not being in possession of a house at the place of study.

VII. Activism and the response of social movements to the housing impact of the Games

Research indicates that there was almost no reaction on the part of the civil society to the housing impact of the Games. To a certain extent, this was to be expected: as it has been noted above, the Olympic Games appear to have had an adverse effect on housing only in relation to the Roma, a social group that is not popular among the NGOs active in Greece, as well as among the public at large. It is therefore not accidental that almost all the Appeals or Letters of Concern regarding the Roma were drafted by international NGOs such as Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) and Amnesty International, in cooperation with Greek Helsinki Monitor. By sharp contrast, in the definitely very important field of environmental protection, local citizen groups or even individuals took judicial

⁸⁵ Telloglou, op. cit., page 103 et. seq.

⁸⁶ See July 2003 Greenpeace Report available in Greek at <http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/greece/press/118523/2004.pdf>. A July 2004 Report containing many of the elements referred to in the July 2003 report together with new developments and an assessment of the degree of environmental sensitivity of the Athens Games is available in English at <http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/greece/press/118523/how-green-the-games.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Information from the University’s Official site, available with photos (in Greek) at http://kapodistriako.uoa.gr/stories/053_th_01/index.php?m=2.

⁸⁸ Information and photos available in Greek at <http://www.athens2004.com/athens2004/page/magazine/issue11?lang=el&cid=0679ec08864acf00VgnVCMServer28130b0aRCRD>.

action, albeit usually with poor results: perhaps the most illustrative case is that of Dorilaos Clapakis, an architect who challenged before the Council of State the building of the Maroussi Press Village alleging numerous town planning violations.

The Council of State held, with its decision No 1528/2003 issued on April 9, 2003,⁸⁹ that the modifications to the town planning regulations that had been enacted in order to allow the building of the Maroussi Press Village were illegal since no adequate reasons had been given and that they were also in violation of Art 24 of the Greek Constitution concerning the protection of the environment). Ordinarily, such a decision would lead to the immediate freezing of the construction of the Maroussi Press Village. However, this did not happen and construction of the village continued despite the Court's decision. Applications to the local police station by Mr. Clapakis as well as Prosecutor's orders to the effect that construction be halted were ignored, with the local police commander stating that he is following orders from an unspecified "public agency". On December 24, 2003, Law 3207/2003 is voted and enters into effect. Its Article 6 concerns the Maroussi Press Village and aims at "legitimizing" it: indeed, with this stratagem, the six months of illegal construction are *ex post facto* legalized. During these six months, the Maroussi Press Village was, according to Tassos Telloglou, "*the biggest illegal building in Europe*".⁹⁰ Mr Clapakis together with other concerned citizens launched yet another legal battle before the Council of State, this time against Law 3207/2003: following six postponements, a day in court was set for March 7, 2006.⁹¹

According to press reports, while the Advocate General of the Council of State agreed with the points raised by the citizens in their arguments, he noted that since the building permit had been issued by means of a law (Law 3207/2003) and not of a ministerial decision, then the Council of State could not find the law *ultra vires* and quash it. As a result, the Advocate General proposed that the citizens' action be dismissed.⁹² As of the time of writing (June 2006) the Council of State's decision has not been made public.

In many ways, the result was inevitable: the Maroussi Press Village was one of the few private-financed Olympic Projects. The central government, burdened by the daily growing cost overruns, desperate in order to invite private investors and watching the opening date drawing near, was not in a position to "force its hand" and consequently gave in. The Maroussi Press Village was in fact used as a Trojan horse in order to allow the building of an enormous shopping mall, inaugurated on November 25, 2005. Needless to say, the mall was and is totally unrelated to the Olympics.

The issue of the almost non-existence of a rights-oriented civil society in Greece calls for a close scrutiny. At first, such a statement (i.e. that there is no rights-oriented civil society in Greece) would appear erroneous: indeed, in a 2000 survey, 13.552 volunteer organisations were identified! An earlier, 1996 survey had identified 1.200 such organisations.⁹³ The 1996 survey also contained an interesting breakdown of the fields of activity of the 1.200 organisations: approximately 65% were engaged into charity, 28% in various cultural activities while 27,5% were involved in environmental issues. The lack of any human rights

⁸⁹ According to Telloglou, op. cit., page 118, this is the only case out of approximately sixty cases brought in front of the Council of State against the Greek state that the latter lost.

⁹⁰ Telloglou, op.cit., page 117 et seq. The quote is in page 121.

⁹¹ See article in Galera Magazine, issue of January 2006, available in Greek at <http://galera.gr/magazine/modules/articles/article.php?id=68>.

⁹² See *Kathimerini* and *Eleftherotipia*, Athens based daily newspapers, respective issues of May 4, 2006.

⁹³ See article (in Greek) "*The idea of volunteering in the modern Greek society and the Olympic Games challenge*", author Roe Panayotopoulou, available at http://www.v-prc.gr/7/11/1_gr.html.

organisation is telling. Another interesting feature concerning the potential reaction of civil society groups to housing issues during the Olympics is that the vast majority of the public opinion was in warmly in favour of the Olympic Games, despite the fact that it was also aware of their mounting costs. More specifically, a percentage as high as 80% in the numerous polls that took place before the Olympics, expressed its unwavering support for the Olympic Games.⁹⁴

Conclusion

The final lines of the chapter of modern Greece entitled “Olympic Games 2004” have yet to be written. An important part of the Olympic heritage has yet to be taken advantage, constituting for the time being more of a burden than an asset. In the field of housing, the Olympic Games conformed to the maximalist/minimalist outcomes, prevalent in practically every aspect of life in Greece. In positive terms, the Olympics Games left Athens with a significant infrastructure that will ameliorate the living conditions of all its inhabitants, while the Olympic village will, despite all the problems it has encountered, provide a house to approximately 3.000 families, a no small feat considering the virtual lack of social housing in Greece. Similarly, the establishment and renovation of the student dormitories of the University of Athens and of the Technical University of Athens cannot but be a development to be welcomed by those low income students who until now lived in semi-derelict dormitories. On the minus side however, the Roma fell once again victims to real and imagined Olympic necessities that led either to their eviction or to the dropping of the plans for their relocation. If nothing, the Olympic Games amply illustrated that it is not the expertise, nor the funds nor the know how to address the housing problem of the Roma. What is lacking is, quite crudely, the will to tackle the issue.

⁹⁴ See article (in Greek) “*The Greek Public Opinion and the holding of the 2004 Olympic Games: national consensus and critical perspectives*”, article by Christoforos Vernardakis, available at http://www.v-prc.gr/oly/oly_gr.html.