

In February 2001, the Council of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) expressed deep concern over the conviction of Sotiris Blatsas for distributing EBLUL literature and called the conviction an apparent violation of free expression.

United States

In its first annual trafficking in persons report, issued in July 2001, the State Department gave Greece the lowest rating possible—along with Burma, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Turkey—for failing to combat trafficking, to acknowledge publicly that trafficking is a problem, to implement comprehensive antitrafficking legislation, to prosecute traffickers, to punish traffickers when they were tried, or to address corruption in the police and border control, which the report called “a major problem.”

The U. S. State Department’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000* noted that human rights problems in Greece included substandard detention conditions and occasions of arbitrary detention for foreigners awaiting deportation; the failure to combat trafficking of women for forced prostitution and police corruption in trafficking; ongoing discrimination against minorities, in particular Roma; and continuing abusive prosecutions under Greece’s criminal defamation laws.

Relevant Human Rights Watch Reports:

Trafficking of Migrant Women for Forced Prostitution into Greece, 7/01

Human Rights Watch Critique of Greek Immigration Bill, 2/01

Urgent Concerns: Conditions of Detention for Foreigners in Greece, 12/00

HUNGARY

HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

While the majority of Hungarian citizens enjoyed a full measure of civil and political rights and the benefits of a modernizing economy, those on society’s margins continued to face discrimination and abuse. The poor treatment of the country’s Roma remained the key concern, despite E.U.-funded government efforts to improve their status, while anti-Semitism and hostility towards gays persisted. Prison overcrowding and police misconduct continued to draw international criticism. Despite some improvements, the state response to violence against women remained inadequate. Asylum seekers faced long periods of detention before their claims were heard, and few were granted refugee status.

The situation for many Hungarian Roma remained precarious. With average life expectancy ten years shorter than the rest of the population and an unemployment

rate ten times higher than the national average, Roma faced discrimination in employment, housing, education, and the criminal justice system, as well as physical attacks. The French government's decision in March to grant asylum to fifteen Hungarian Roma underscored the gravity of their difficulties. The fifteen were part of a group who fled from the Hungarian village of Zamoly to Strasbourg during 2000 to escape threats, physical attacks and the destruction of their homes. Applications from ten other Zamoly Roma were rejected by French authorities, while others remained pending at time of this writing.

Police misconduct against Roma continued. On February 9, police officers raided a Roma settlement in the village of Bag. Four Roma were beaten, including an eight-year-old boy. An April 24 police raid on a Roma family party in Budapest left one family member hospitalized and four more injured. The police response to reports of violence against Roma was also a concern. The European Roma Rights Center reported that five Roma men were shot at and threatened in the village of Fiserbocsa on May 5, allegedly in the presence of a police officer. After several failed attempts to register a complaint about the attack with police in nearby Kiskoros, one of the men, Pal Sztoja, returned to the police station on May 10 with a hidden camera to report the incident. The officer refused to take down the complaint, threatened to beat Sztojka and said it was unfortunate he had not been killed in the shooting.

On June 17, gasoline bombs were thrown at the home of Jozsef Ajtai, the head of the Roma Minority Self-Government in Hencida village. Two of Ajtai's daughters suffered burns from the attack. Gasoline bombs were also thrown at two houses in the village of Jaszladany on June 5, one belonging to a Roma family. No one was injured.

Discrimination against Roma remained pervasive. On January 30, a Roma man was prevented from checking onto a flight to Canada by Hungarian airline staff who claimed he lacked proof of sufficient funds for his stay. His ethnic Hungarian wife and child were permitted to check in. The denial appeared linked to the large numbers of Hungarian Roma seeking asylum in Canada. On February 21, a primary school biology teacher in the village of Erdotelek told pupils that "Gypsies" were characterized by a "special odor" and were generally either unemployed or in prison. The leader of the Roma Minority Self-Government in Erdotelek reportedly received death threats after complaints to the mayor about the teacher.

Some positive steps were taken to improve the status of Roma during 2001, notably the March 8 decision by the state radio and television board to grant a permanent license to the Budapest-based Radio C, Hungary's first Roma-run radio station. In May, the government launched an E.U.-backed program aimed at improving infrastructure in Romany settlements and combating discrimination.

Discrimination was also evident in continuing anti-Semitic programming on state radio and anti-Jewish comments by the vice-president of the parliamentary Hungarian Truth and Life Party. In July, a district mayor in Budapest sought to ban gay and lesbian groups from participating in an popular music festival. Although the government signed the antidiscrimination protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights in November 2000, it again failed to introduce a comprehensive domestic antidiscrimination law, even after Parliament adopted legislation

granting freedom of movement and access to social welfare programs to the estimated five million ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries.

Prison conditions remained a concern. A comprehensive report on Hungary released by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) on March 29 identified overcrowding and limited access to work and exercise facilities as key difficulties, echoing the findings of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee's prison monitoring program. The CPT also flagged shortcomings in the treatment of pre-trial police detention, including reports of beatings by police and delays in access to legal counsel.

Hungary remained a popular transit country for asylum seekers and migrants, and a country of origin, transit, and destination for trafficking. Despite some improvements in the asylum system, many asylum seekers endured lengthy detention periods while their claims were adjudicated. Few of those accepted as having valid claims were granted refugee status, with most given "authorization to stay," granting little assistance other than protection from *refoulement* for one year, renewable after review. In late September, authorities transferred all Afghan asylum seekers and refugees to guarded facilities in Debrecen and Szombatheley, citing concern for the refugees' safety. Human rights groups believed the measure was motivated by fear of terrorism after the September 11 attacks on the U.S. and violated Hungarian law.

Following the suspicious death of a thirty-year-old refugee from Cameroon during his deportation by police on December 18, 2000, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee called for an investigation into the cause of death, which an official autopsy identified as a heart attack. Authorities failed to investigate the complaint.

The state response to human trafficking remained poor, with uneven enforcement of antitrafficking legislation, inadequate victim support services, and frequent police hostility toward women victims. Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in Hungary faced a biased legal system and a lack of support services.

The appointment of prominent member of the ruling Fidesz party, Karoly Mendreczky, as president of Hungarian Television (Magyar Televizio), on July 12, raised questions about the state broadcaster's editorial independence, despite Mendreczky's resignation from the party prior to taking up his new post.

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

There were no reports of government interference in the work of human organizations, although Roma community leaders who stood up for minority rights sometimes faced harassment and violence.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

United Nations

Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi addressed the U.N. Commission

on Human Rights on March 30, emphasizing Hungary's support for a binding convention on the rights of minorities. On November 6, the Hungarian Parliament ratified the statute of the International Criminal Court.

Council of Europe

The Committee for the Prevention of Torture report and Hungary's response to it were both published on March 29. On September 17, the Advisory Committee on National Minorities published its opinion on Hungary, noting much progress but also deep concern about the plight of Roma. Hungary signed Protocol 12 of the European Convention on November 4, 2000.

European Union

Hungary continued to be regarded as a front-runner for early accession to the European Union. During a visit to Hungary on April 5, European Commission President Romano Prodi highlighted the treatment of Roma as an area for further progress. Discrimination against Roma was also flagged in a May report by Luis Queiro, the European Parliament's rapporteur on Hungary, and reflected in the resolution on Hungary adopted by the full Parliament on September 5. The November 2001 regular report from the European Commission on Hungary's progress toward E.U. accession identified a need for greater government commitment to improve the lot of Roma.

United States

Secretary of State Colin Powell made no public reference to human rights in Hungary during a meeting with Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi in Washington DC on May 1 or during his visit to Budapest on May 28-30 for a meeting of North Atlantic Treaty Organization foreign ministers. Outgoing Secretary of State Madeleine Albright did raise discrimination against Roma with Minister Martonyi in Budapest in December 2000. The State Department country report on human rights practices in Hungary for 2000 reflected difficulties faced by Roma and concerns over police misconduct, and its July trafficking report criticized Hungary for failing to meet minimum standards.

KAZAKHSTAN

HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

As allegations of corruption against top Kazakh officials persisted in the international press, the government continued to tighten control over political life and