

Yiannis needs to be helped urgently!

On 17 November 2012, the Belgian State Television VRT broadcasted an interview I had with Yiannis, a homeless Greek, on the streets of Athens. It is a very sad story and it has haunted me ever since. You can see the interview in Greek here:

<http://www.deredactie.be/permalink/1.1483409>



The broadcasted part of the interview only lasted 2 minutes, but it does not tell the whole story of Yiannis, which is representative for the social drama which is unfolding in Greece.

In 2000, Yiannis left Crete behind to come and work in Athens in the construction sector. In the wake of the Olympic Games of 2004, business was booming. Yiannis was specialized in placing marble: marble wall covering, floor tiles, stairs, etc.

When the crisis erupted, construction was one of the first sectors to be hit. Yiannis was fired from his job and had to find something else. He found a job in a completely different sector, which is still running fine during the crisis, probably because the personnel are being exploited. He worked as a security agent and was put in front of the building of the Greek financial police. His monthly salary: 520 euro, without any social security payments of course, because this is the way many of these security companies operate in Greece.

Yiannis got engaged a while ago and had taken out a loan from the bank to start a new life, but the relationship ended. The loan he had taken out, was on his name. With a salary of 520 euro per month, he could barely pay anything back. When public transport was almost constantly on strike during the autumn of 2011, Yiannis was forced to take a taxi to go to work. This cost him around 20 euro per day. He was unable to meet his obligations and asked his employer if he could get an advance payment on his salary, so he could at least pay back the loan. His employer denied. When Yiannis could not come to work one day, because he had no more money for a taxi, he was fired.

Since the security company had not paid any social security for Yiannis, he was not entitled to unemployment compensation. The bank kept chasing him, but he could not pay back his loan and he was forced to leave his house.

Since Yiannis has a medical condition with his kidneys, he was able to secure a place in the Red Cross shelter in Athens. This was 14 months ago. There are other homeless people in the shelter. Yiannis shares a room with one of them, and it is a very difficult situation since everyone has his own issues and this reflects on the way they live under the same roof.

Normally you cannot stay for more than 6 months in the shelter, but the Red Cross made an exception for Yiannis. He was allowed to stay for 15 months, but then he will have to leave. This term is over on 31 December 2012.

In the meantime he has done medical tests for his kidney condition, because Yiannis is very tired, even after walking short distances. He does not have money for these tests, since he has no medical insurance (in Greece you lose all medical insurance when you have been unemployed for more than 1 year). The Red Cross offers some help and some people, who follow him via Twitter (@IRinakakis) and who feel sorry for him, give him money. Tests showed that one of Yiannis' kidney is too small to see even on a sonogram, whereas the other is as big as a melon and has been strained. This is not the same as having one kidney only. Things do not look good and possible Yiannis will need a dialysis treatment, for which of course, he has no money. If there is no further treatment, things may look very bad for Yiannis.

I am trying to help Yiannis, but I do not know exactly how. He has 2 brothers on Crete who do not want any contact with him. When Yiannis' dad died last year, they paid the plane ticket for him to come over, but he was not even invited anymore for the memorial service this year.

He has 2 bank accounts, but it is not that simple to just put money on those accounts. It is a possibility, of course. But at the moment, money is not even the most urgent issue for Yiannis. He is afraid to sleep on the streets, he says. At the end of the year, he will be thrown out of the shelter and he will have nowhere to go. Yiannis is looking for some certainty that he will have a roof above his head, so he is looking for someone who might have a small room available, so he won't have to live on the streets. He could do some chores and small jobs in return for shelter. He told me he could make money by starting to sell drugs on the streets in Athens (he has the connections – he is being confronted with the drug dealers and drug users all day), but he does not want to ruin people's lives.

Yiannis uses his twitter account: this could be seen in the interview that was broadcasted. He has become very versed in finding ways without having to pay to get on twitter with his phone, the only thing that remains from his former life. Maybe people can be found via Twitter who are able to offer him help in one form or another. A few months ago he sent a tweet that he did not have any shoes and a follower came to offer him a pair of new shoes. Maybe someone can be found who can offer him shelter.

I know it is just a small drop in the ocean, and that there are thousands of people in Greece who are in the same situation as Yiannis. But since I talked to him, I have taken his fate at heart. Maybe there is a way we can help Yiannis. If you know of a way to help him, please contact me: http://btersago.com/blog/?page_id=3284