

## PRESENTATION OF SEBASTIAN SERIFOVIC AT THE BERLIN CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN OF ROMA FROM GERMANY TO KOSOVO

### Introduction

Thank you very much for giving me this possibility to address you with some of the very important issues that RAE communities are facing in their every day life in Kosovo. As you all might know, Kosovo has been going through 4 main phases during the last 10 years.

- Kosovo under the Serbian regime (the struggle for human rights and equal treatment of minorities was present in every day life).
- NATO campaign against Serbian military (the struggle for human right of minorities was also present during this period)
- Kosovo under the governance of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (Where minorities were fighting to be heard by all sides)
- Independence of Kosovo (Where Roma minorities get everything and nothing)

### Facts

It is estimated that the big majority of the RAE community members - at least 100.000 - still live outside Kosovo. Most of them are registered as IDPs and a large number still remain unregistered. According to the representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights of IDPs, 30% to 35% (10.000-20.000) of IDPs in Serbia are not registered.

According to the UNHCR, 2113 Roma and 4428 Ashkalia and Egyptians returned to Kosovo since January 2000. During this period, March 15th 2004 led to another major displacement of Roma people from Kosovo. This is considered as the largest incident since the 1999 Kosovo war.

It is estimated that 60.000 Roma people from Serbia and Montenegro and 35.000 failed asylum seekers from Germany will be forced to return to Kosovo. Further on we will examine how this return of IDPs could be impacted by Kosovo's lack of conditions to assist them. Today's unemployment rate in Kosovo is 45% of the overall population. The main income of the RAE communities depends on their families currently living outside of Kosovo, mainly in Germany and Switzerland. Due to the current economical and political situation, Kosovo's institutions and the UN failed to provide a sustainable return of the remaining 100.000 RAE people.

### **The problems that Roma people are facing in every day life are the following:**

Housing: because of the fear and past discrimination of Roma people, shortly after the 1999 war in Kosovo, more than 150.000 Roma left Kosovo. Their houses were burned and destroyed, which made the possibility of return even worse. The lack of documentation (since most documents were destroyed during the war) made them even loose their lands. Following March 2004 riots, a big number of minorities lost their houses and ended up living with their relatives.

Employment: as we previously mentioned the unemployment rate in Kosovo is very high, especially when it comes to RAE communities. The only jobs that are available for RAE communities in Kosovo are cheap labor, and many families are not able to fulfill their household's normal daily needs (food, soap, ...). Employment of Roma people in International Institutions is rare, and when it comes to the employment at the national level, the requirements to get the job are too high, knowing that RAE communities are usually not educated enough to apply to the positions.

Education: in order to be able to be educated in Kosovo a lot of different factors play a role;

1. Most of the Roma people have to learn Serbian or Albanian in order to attend the school. Because of this language issue many Roma children end up leaving school.
2. Parents cannot support the education of their children.
4. Uneducated parents don't realize the importance to push their children to go to school.

Political Participation: the biggest mistake made by the international community is the treatment of Roma as uneducated left behind 21<sup>st</sup> century peasants. On the other hand, this should not be the case as Roma should be considered as an integral part of the unification

and development of Kosovo. As Kosovo got independent and the European Union takes this area under its scope, Roma do not have much confidence that anything will be better than during the last 8 years.

**Conclusion:**

Regarding the situation we described above, Kosovo is not ready to host in a proper manner one returnee. Returning more than 100.000 people will cripple Kosovo's economy and will lead to the creation of new IDP camps.

There is no information and no guaranty that the returnees will be safe after their return, and that they will have the elementary conditions to integrate within the society and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

There is a lack of mechanisms and governmental assistance for returnees to re-integrate within the society. Thus, they become a burden to local RAE residents, and subsequently to Kosovo's social assistance budget. This negatively impacts the overall socio-economic situation in Kosovo.

**Note:**

This Research was conducted on February and March 2008, in five Kosovo regions (Prizren, Mitrovica, Ferizaj, Peja/Pec, Pristina), 200 families/cases interviewed.

**ROMA AND ASHKALIA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE**

The Roma and Ashkali Documentation Center works as the focal point for information for, by and about the R&A communities in Kosovo. As a facilitator of meetings, website, and information exchange, the Center supports the Roma and Ashkalia civil society in its work with government, partners and donors, in accessing opportunities, and in developing new initiatives.

The Center has projects supporting civil registration of undocumented citizens, documentation of human rights violations, and introducing the culture of the Roma and Ashkalia communities to all the people of Kosovo.