



Association FLEUVE IBAR / U.R.Y.D.
UNION DES ROMS DE L'EX-YOUGOSLAVIE EN DIASPORA

Vienna, 1 April 2006

Analysis of the Diaspora on the Roma Mahala in Kosovska Mitrovica

The Roma in Diaspora affirm that the Roma Mahala in Kosovska Mitrovica has existed for more than 300 years. This is proven by the fact that Roma who are today living in Diaspora can trace back the presence of their family at this place over seven generations.

Until 1999, the Roma Mahala counted 1,123 Roma houses, a number which is obtained by adding together the numbers of the houses, but there were certainly about 10 percent more houses: Indeed, on each courtyard there were three houses under one and the same house number, and in each of the houses there were several families living on different floors.

According to official records, ***about 8.500 Roma lived in Kosovska Mitrovica in 1997; 2,000 Roma lived in Diaspora at that time.*** From 1970 onwards, an annex of the city hall was opened in Rasadnik, which makes it possible to conclude that the Mahala in Mitrovica was the biggest Roma Mahala in Kosovo which had its own infrastructure and all the necessary facilities for daily life.

The Roma in Diaspora request from the working group in Mitrovica to maintain the Roma parcels on which Roma houses were built in the state they were before 1999. They also request guarantees that these parcels will not be usurped by some strangers from Southern Mitrovica.

They ask for the establishment of a commission which should lead an investigation among the Roma refugees in Diaspora as well as among the communities in the former Yugoslavia. This group needs to be financed by the working group in Mitrovica.

On 25 and 26 March, several prominent Roma political leaders took part in a meeting which was organised by the OSCE, ODIHR and ERTF in Skopje. The Roma from Mitrovica in Diaspora asked from the Skopje group to establish a group to conduct an investigation among the Roma refugees about the reconstruction of the Mahala. They presented the same proposal several times since 2001, but nothing was done. The Skopje working group promised to take this issue at higher level.

Mr. Rudko Kawczynski, President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, ERTF,

welcomed the proposal made by the Roma in Diaspora and concluded that such a survey could also be useful for the success of compensation claims over burnt houses, lost (looted) property and psychological traumas stemming from war as well as for compensation for the loss of working years since the beginning of war until today (see platform of the Skopje group).

At another meeting which took place in Vienna from 29 March until 2 April 2006, Mr. Dragan Jevremovic, President of the Roma Centre in Vienna, likewise welcomed the proposal, and promised to conduct such a survey in Austria.

After the discussions in Vienna, the Roma in Diaspora were suddenly afraid that the project of the Roma Mahala had been developed well before the meeting and involved also refugee returns. This is why a call was issued after the meetings in Skopje and Vienna to stop deportations of Roma in Diaspora. This is to say that Roma do not want to return to Mitrovica, but, at the same time, they do not want give away their homes.

After the meetings in Vienna and Skopje, the Roma in Diaspora made an analysis of the reconstruction of the Roma Mahala. The humanitarian problem of the Roma who are living in the IDP camps was also looked at in detail and several other political issues discussed.

Our group calls on any other group which does not care about the well-being of the Kosovo Roma and their children to stop speaking in the name of the Roma in Diaspora on any issue of the life in Kosovo including on the issue of the Roma Mahala in Kosovska Mitrovica.

The Roma in Diaspora and from the refugee camps in Kosovska Mitrovica ask for a compensation for the destroyed properties.

The Roma in Diaspora ask for a direct participation in the planning of the reconstruction of the Mahala. Anything else is unacceptable for our people and our representatives.

The UNHCR has obtained information from refugees from Kosovska Mitrovica who are currently in Serbia and Montenegro, and it is possible that the UNHCR will use this information. According to Mr. Nicolae Gheorghe, the UNHCR gave this information during a meeting of the working group for the reconstruction of the Roma Mahala on 28 March 2006.

The working group on the Roma Mahala can set up a sub-group which can conduct a survey among the refugees in Diaspora.

Subsequent to this, the Roma in Diaspora ask for the establishment of a dialogue between the Roma in Diaspora and the working group in Mitrovica. They consider that this is way it is possible to come to a real solution.

Proposal of the Kosovo Roma in Diaspora in France

Troyes- France
12 april 2006,

We, the Roma in Diaspora, participated in a meeting on the Roma Mahala and on a permanent settlement of the situation of the Roma who are currently living in the IDP camps organised by Mr. Xavier Blais, representative of HABITAT, on the behalf of the UNMIK office in Kosovska Mitrovica. This meeting was also attended by representatives of all the other international organisations working in Kosovo.

In August 2003, we participated in a meeting with Mr. Jacky Holmboe, representative of the UNHCR, with the Norwegian Refugee Council and with representatives of the Danish Refugee Council, which are involved in the return project.

In November 2005, we had a meeting with Mr. Philippe Vergne and his collaborators from the French diplomacy who are dealing with the situation of the Roma in the Balkans and in Kosovo-Methojia.

In Kosovska Mitrovica, we spoke with Mr. Rudolphe Richard from the French Liaison Office on the same topics.

We made suggestions for the Mahala, but there was no understanding on the side of our interlocutors. Our representative, Mr. Neziri, presented a location, where the Roma who are currently living in the camps could be moved and stay safely on a permanent basis.

According to the statistics, the Roma Mahala in Kosovska Mitrovica with the official name Sub-Municipality of Rasadnik until June 1999 looked as follows:

- The infrastructure consisted of 782 well constructed buildings with several floors and 341 buildings made of old and weak materials, thus 1,123 in total, built on a surface of one square kilometre, which can be proven on the basis of the house numbers;
- In October 1998, the Mahala had 9,000 inhabitants; 1,800 more of its inhabitants were staying abroad; thus 10,800 people in total. Today, there are about 15,000 Roma stemming from the Fabricka street including family members and newly born children. On the whole territory of Mitrovica - Roma were also living in the Sitnicko settlement, the Bošnjak Mahala and other parts of the city - there are some 3,000 more Roma. From this we can conclude that there are about 18,000 Roma from Kosovska Mitrovica.
- Since 1970 an annex of the city hall was located in the Fabricka street. There was also a building of the youth organisation Društva ROM from Kosovska Mitrovica, health care facilities, a veterinary station and a farmers' association. There were several companies in the Mahala such as Pobeda and Hidrotehnika, a cultural centre and a city park, where the cultural centre was located, and the park was on the Fabricka street, several kinder gardens, 4 sport centres, a company for the production of tyres, 7 grocery shops, 4 restaurants and pubs, 2 Albanian bakeries, 8 centres for religious education, as well as a large number of small and big trading companies and 2 celebration halls.
- 352 Roma had a permanent job, 600 received pension, 840 people welfare payments.
- 262 people had completed primary school, 190 technical school, 2 were university graduates, 4 had completed higher professional education. Two people studied at university, and about 400 children attended primary or secondary school.
- There was one radio broadcaster in Romani language.

The Roma were included in society. They participated in political life and in the institutions from the municipal to the federal level.

No one has the right to decide in our name about forced returns to Kosovo or Serbia. Any individual return need to take place on a strictly voluntary basis.

We welcome any meeting of well-intentioned Roma in Europe who seek for a solution for the well-being of our children.

We ask from the legal working group, where every individual has a strong support from the Roma in Diaspora, to carry out immediately a written INVESTIGATION as regards to the democratic will of the Kosovo Roma in every country of Europe where Kosovo Roma live and work. After its conclusion a decision on the return can be taken.

We warn ALL Kosovo Roma who present themselves as representatives of the Diaspora that they do not have the right to agree to a return of the Roma in Diaspora, nor to sign any document which refers to the return of the Roma in Diaspora.

We, the Kosovo Roma in Diaspora, will be represented in any discussion on the situation of the Roma, in Kosovo and on international level, by a person who has our confidence and support, who has given testimony of his patriotism, who is aware of the issue of emancipation and national self-assertion, who comes from our community and who has the support of a large number of people: Mr. Neziri stems from a well-renowned family. Everyone knows his qualities, interest and commitment. He is entitled to represent us and speak in our names on previously agreed issues.

It is normal that the solution of the Roma issue on all levels, on the local level as well as within the international organisations (OSCE, UN, UNMIK, etc.) will be on the agenda one day.

We have had enough of the historical - war genocide and of the permanent exodus from our places of living. We inform you that we do not want to be part of an EXPERIMENT, the attempt to create a multi-ethnic, independent Kosovo.

It is normal that the international community has to find Roma in order to have the problem analysed and discussed among Roma.

We suggest that the following conditions should be fulfilled as soon as possible:

We recommend that, BEFORE any return of the ROMA who are currently living in the refugee camps, all non-Albanian return on a voluntary basis and integrate in any aspects of life and work; that security is increased in Kosovo; that the future of the young generation is guaranteed.

When the Roma from the camps notice that all the above-mentioned conditions are fulfilled, the project of a return of the refugees from the camps can be realised on the basis of the following conditions:

- a) that the Roma are recognized as a NATIONAL community under the Constitution as equal citizens of Kosovo and as Kosovo's third entity with the guarantees of the European Council, the UN, UNMIK, etc.;
- b) that compensation is paid for the destruction and looting of property, physical and psychological traumas, for the time lost as well as for the loss of a job for those who had been employed, that a period of seven years is accounted for under the social pension schemes; the payment of the respective interest rates from June 1999 on until today;

- c) that the Roma from the camps are included in all municipal and public institutions as well as in the security forces regardless their level of education. Indeed, Roma have not been able to obtain the same level of education as other people as a result of discrimination and mistreatment. This is why positive discrimination measures are necessary.
 - d) the legal recognition of ALL administrative, identity papers, property titles, and any other proofs such as invoices;
 - e) the possibility to receive education in mother tongue; the recognition of Romani as an official language and third entity; a democratic radio and TV broadcasting with daily broadcasting in Romani language;
 - f) to secure a future of the Roma;
 - g) that the conditions for the free preservation and development of the culture, traditions and religion of the Roma are created;
 - h) that a modern infrastructure is set up in this location including schools, kinder gardens, sport centres, health care facilities, small enterprises, police station, religious institutions, etc..
1. Roma from Kosovska Mitrovica and the region should be given their own municipality, and all the companies which were located on their territory before the war such as Kosovatrans, Pobeda, Hidrotehnika, the veterinary school, Prvi maj Pirot, the farmers' association 23 November, Standard, three football fields as well as a sport complex (Partizan), should be transferred to this municipality. This way the Roma municipality will to be self-providing and have its own revenues.
 2. Strong guarantees from the international institutions.
 3. We want to have our own police stations as well as a Human Rights office such as the FIDH and the UNHCHR.
 4. All Roma should receive a parcel for the construction of their house in Rasadnik, where a large number of Roma had bought parcels before the war. They should also receive parcels on the other side of the Ibar river (the parcels located between the place called "red signal" and the entry of the village Suvi Do, where the canalisation is located, and the construction of a bridge for them.).
 5. Roma had their craft and blacksmith shops, car workshops, private MOTs and car washes, which were located on the other side of the train station. In the Sitnicki settlement, the Gusani family had a wood-processing company and sold construction materials.
 6. The issue of the Roma from Kosovska Mitrovica and of Kosovo should be taken at international level.
 7. Kosovo Roma should be recognised as WAR refugees and granted this status by all European institutions and states.
 8. Roma should be recognised as VICTIMS of the Kosovo war.

Because there are about 5,000 Roma in Prizren, we ask that these conditions should first be implemented there. When it proved that this is possible, a voluntary return of the Kosovo Roma refugees who are currently in Macedonia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia can be envisaged.

All Roma organisations in France support and agree with these conditions on the basis of the conclusion that NO ONE, Roma or Non-Roma, has the right to take a decision on a RETURN to Kosovo in the name of the Kosovo Roma refugees in Diaspora, nor to accept such a RETURN.

REMINDER: WE DO NOT AGREE TO ANY FORCED RAPATRIATION OF KOSOVO ROMA, WHETHER INDIVIDUALLY OR ON COLLECTIVE BASIS.

DISCLAIMER

We, Roma from Kosovska Mitrovica, lived in the Fabricka street for more than 300 years. We are real estate owners in the Roma Mahala in Mitrovica called Fabricka. We affirm that the real estate in the Upper Mahala called „Rasadnik 2“ is in our private property.

Several hundred PRIVATE residential buildings were built on the Upper Roma Mahala site (Rasadnik 2) to the new stadion (until June 1999).

The Council of the Municipality of Kosovska Mitrovica has given us this land as a construction site for permanent use.

We, Roma, have fulfilled payments related to the construction and legalisation of these buildings. The real estate is registered with the respective municipal institutions.

We possess the following documents to prove our ownership:

- the decision of the Municipality regarding the permanent private use of this construction land;
- building permits as well as proofs of the legalisation of our properties;
- proofs of the payment of all municipal taxes;
- proofs of the annual payment of the taxes for this land;
- our identity papers bear this address and house numbers.

The Upper Mahala had all communal infrastructures which the Municipal Fund established with our financial contribution including an electricity network, canalisation and a telephone network. The streets were asphalted and the lightening of the streets was about to begin.

We believe that you will accept that the upper part of the Roma Mahala in Mitrovica is in PRIVATE property of Roma.

We call for your attention and refute any other statement. Any other statement different from this shows that this person has NEITHER the quality, nor the KNOWLEDGE, contacts, support or entitlement, to represent us, the Roma from the upper and lower Mahala and from the rest of

Mitrovica.

We deny the statements and position of Brahim Music who left Kosovska Mitrovica more than twenty years ago. We warn him to stop his activities related to the project of RETURN of the Roma in Diaspora, and not to take a position which does not reflect the position of the Roma from Mitrovica.

People like him do not contribute to the future of our Roma population in a positive sense. They work for their own interests or they are PUPPETS of the international community which wants to carry out an EXPERIMENT with the Roma.

We also deny Music's statement according to which he has been dealing with the situation of the Roma from Mitrovica since 2002. We ask him when he was there for the last time before the war in 1999 and for the first time after the war. We know that he was in Kosovo for the first time on 18 January 2006, at the invitation and under contract of Mr. Nicolae Gheorghe, and not otherwise as he stated.

P.S.: Our collaborators in the former Yugoslavia will receive a copy of this document. Due to fears of manipulation, ERTF is responsible that no changes to this document occur.

This proposal has been submitted by the working group of the Roma from Kosovska Mitrovica in France. This is not a final document. Due to time constraints, our collaborators and we ourselves, have not able to present you our recommendations in full.

Yours faithfully,

The Roma in Diaspora