



KOSOVO

COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

October 24, 2008

Kosovo Roma diaspora warns of plans for forced return

We, representatives of the Kosovo Roma Diaspora, would like to express our disagreement with the organisation of an international roundtable on the integration of Roma from Kosovo by the Project on Ethnic Relations in cooperation with the OSCE/ODIHR.

We believe that this conference, which is taking place today at the headquarters of the OSCE in Vienna, has no other purpose than to set the basis for the forthcoming forced return of several ten thousand Roma refugees to Kosovo.

In June 1999, the international community, including KFOR and the OSCE, did nothing to prevent the violent expulsion of ten thousands of Roma from their homes in Kosovo and the destruction of their properties.

In ten years, the international community did hardly anything to allow the return of the internally displaced Roma in Kosovo, leaving people knowingly in situations which are harmful to their lives (see the situation of the internally displaced in Kosovska Mitrovica).

Asylum applications of Kosovo Roma were rejected on no grounds. Asylum application procedures such as those in Macedonia were denounced as flawed and unfair, including by the EU Commission and the US government, with no consequence for the treatment of those who had become victims of these discriminatory practices.

Despite the ban of the UNHCR, Kosovo Roma have been subjected to pressure to either leave their host country voluntarily or to be forcibly returned to Kosovo. There have been, throughout these years, attempts to deport Roma to Kosovo, some of them stopped, in the last minute, by UNMIK. In other cases, Kosovo Roma were deported to Serbia.

With the imminent declaration of independence and as a price to pay for it, the Kosovo government adopted, in October last year, a strategy for the reintegration of the returnees. It goes out from this document, which was obviously drafted with heavy input of the international community, if not entirely masterminded by it, that the Roma as an ethnic group are the main target of forced repatriations.

The UNHCR currently withholds a new position on the continued need for protection of individuals from Kosovo. Countries such as Switzerland have recently announced that they will start returning minorities including Roma to Kosovo next year. In other



KOSOVO

COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

countries such as Sweden, there has been an increase in negative decisions by tribunals, awakening fears of forced deportations also from these countries. The German "Bleiberechtsregelung" offers only limited opportunities for the regularisation of Kosovo Roma refugees, leaving more than 20,000 people with the threat of a being forcibly deported.

The Kosovo government has recently issued a draft strategy for the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Kosovo Egyptians. This strategy belies the fact that Roma in Kosovo were well integrated before the war. It also belies the fact that Roma were comparatively well-off, sometimes even better off than their Albanian neighbours. We fail to see in this document any recognition of the crimes committed against Kosovo Roma for which no compensation was ever offered. We fail to see any recognition of the ongoing discrimination and violence against Roma in Kosovo.

We noticed that we have not even been included in the Kosovo constitution as a people of Kosovo. Our language is not recognized on the same level than Albanian and Serbian. We have no guaranteed political representation at local level in spite of the enhanced powers of the local institutions. On central level, we are guaranteed one representative while our community was once the third largest in Kosovo.

The meeting in Vienna comes at a moment when all the major decisions have already been taken. Some finger-picked individuals are called in to give their agreement – in the name of whom? – to a strategy decided by others, a strategy which implies a discretionary decision over the lives of several ten thousands of people, a strategy which implies acknowledging injustice and creating new injustice, a strategy which implies driving a whole people into misery.

We ask, who decided about this meeting and who set up the agenda? We are not aware of any consultation with the Diaspora. Instead, the information was circulated almost secretly and in a language which most of us do not understand. Only a few days before the conference, the (provisional?) list of invitees was made available. We realise that the majority of the representatives in this meeting are representatives of international organisations or national governments. Have they been consulted with, when the agenda was drafted, or how will they be able to participate in the debate?

We want to have a discussion and we do have issues to discuss. This concerns in first place the denial of asylum to Kosovo Roma. This concerns our exclusion from political processes including the status negotiations and the drafting of a constitution. This also concerns the issue of compensation. It finally concerns the bringing to justice of war criminals.

We expect from the OSCE/ODIHR to facilitate the creation of a permanent forum of Kosovo Roma representatives which would have the means to start consultations among its constituency on issues such as refugee returns. It should also have the means to compile and analyse information such as war crimes, property returns, etc..



KOSOVO

COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

Only then can we start to talk about a real dialogue. We are deeply ashamed and outraged by the fact of being treated as a social under-class and outcasts whose destiny is left at the hands of some NGOs who act as the henchmen of Western governments and line up their pockets on our backs. We have lived in Kosovo for more than 600 years. We request the same respect than which is given to other people from Kosovo.

We call on our brothers and sisters who are present at this meeting to abstain from any decision which will put them at odds with their own people. We ask them to watch and listen carefully and to report back to their constituency, because the final vote belongs only to those who are actually concerned.

Signatories:

Murat Haliti, Romano Them

Brahim Music, Ternikano Berno

Muharem Gasnjani, Committee of the Kosovo Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali Refugees in Macedonia

Imer Kajtazi, Romano Dzuvdipe, URYD Belgium

Mifailj Osmani, Amalipe Rom Nevo Dive/ URYD Switzerland

Nedzo Nezirin, URYD France