

## Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

**Working Session 11: “Discussion of Human Dimension Activities (with special emphasis on project work)”, Monday, 9 October 2006**

**Presentation by Oliver Schmidt-Gutzat, Senior Advisor on Minority Rights, OSCE Mission in Kosovo:**

*”OSCE support to the preparation/launch of strategy for Roma/Sinti in Kosovo; the role of the OSCE (OMiK/ODIHR) in facilitating co-operation between international organisations and local stakeholders”*

Honourable Delegates,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Mr. Chairman,

More than a year ago, The OSCE Mission in Kosovo started to advocate a Kosovo Strategy for the Improvement of the Situation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, aiming at implementing the OSCE *Action Plan for the Improvement of the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area*.

The political aspects of the strategy development will be explained by the Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo during Working Session 15 on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination on Wednesday afternoon.

I will include in my presentation the co-operation between the OSCE Mission and ODIHR with different international organisations and, in accordance with the thematic framework of this Working Session, the co-operation between our Mission and ODIHR.

One brief clarification at the beginning: Most of you might be aware that in Kosovo, there are no Sinti, but there are Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. In many areas, they face very similar problems. Therefore, we are convinced that a comprehensive strategy has to deal with all three groups together.

Kosovo is the only entity of the former Yugoslavia that has not yet developed a strategy for the improvement of the situation of Roma, and of Ashkali and Egyptians.

Therefore, in February and March of this year, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo carried out a first feasibility assessment. Mission members and an external consultant met with all relevant stakeholders.

The feedback from these first meetings was very positive from almost all sides. The Kosovo government and the Albanian political parties, both from the government coalition and the opposition, supported the initiative. International organisations supported the initiative. The Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian civil society supported the initiative. And the Roma and Ashkali political leadership supported the initiative. Only exception: The Egyptian political leadership represented in the Kosovo Assembly was and still is against a joint strategy for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, despite the approval of the Egyptian civil society.

Most importantly, the Kosovo government committed itself to develop the strategy. Earlier attempts of other international organisations have failed, mainly due to the lack of support by the Kosovo institutions.

Following this assessment, the OSCE Mission found a strong partner in the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, the Kosovo Branch of the Soros Foundation. The Kosovo Foundation for Open Society is the link to the Decade for Roma Inclusion in which nine countries of South-Eastern Europe participate. The aim of this partnership is to guarantee that neither the Decade for Roma inclusion nor the Kosovo Government exclude each other, but are complementary.

In May of this year, both the OSCE Mission and the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society received the official request from the Kosovo Prime Minister to support the *“the Development of a Kosovo Government Strategy for the Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities”*.

Briefly afterwards, the Office of the Prime Minister convened a meeting of the main international stakeholders in Kosovo working on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian issues, such as the Pristina Office of the Council of Europe, UNMiK’s Office for Communities, Return and Minorities, and the representation in Pristina of the European Commission. The aim of this meeting was three-fold: Firstly, to inform about the joint initiative of the Kosovo Government, the OSCE and the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, and to guarantee the continuous support for the strategy development. Secondly, all organisations were invited and encouraged to actively participate in the strategy development, for example by commenting on different drafts and by sending experts to the different thematic working groups to be established later this year. Neither the OSCE Mission nor the Kosovo Foundation nor the Kosovo Government claims to have an expertise in all the areas to be covered by the strategy. The expertise of other organisations is not only strongly encouraged, but will even be needed. Thirdly, the early information and inclusion of international stakeholders is aiming at securing their support, programmatically and financially, which is needed for the strategy implementation. Many international organisations support or carry out programmes to strengthen the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. To make them more efficient and sustainable, all these programmes could and should be included in the Kosovo Government’s Strategy Implementation Plan.

Last month, on 9 September, the launching *“Conference for the Development of a Kosovo Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians”* was jointly hosted in Pristina by the Kosovo Prime Minister, the OSCE Mission and the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society. Almost 100 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian civil society representatives participated. Another 50 representatives of the international community attended the conference, which was opened by the Kosovo Prime Minister, the OSCE Deputy Head of Mission and the Director of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society. Among the keynote speakers were the political leaders of Kosovo’s Roma and Ashkali, a representative of Kosovo’s Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians civil society, ODIHR’s CPRSI, the CoE, UNMiK, and the European Roma and Travellers Forum.

One brief additional remark regarding the participation of other international organisations during the forthcoming strategy development process: The thematic working groups will be established shortly. They will cover topics such as education for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, health, employment and economic empowerment, registration and civil

documents, housing – including informal settlements –, discrimination, and – probably the most challenging – return of IDPs and refugees. The working groups will be co-chaired by the Kosovo Government. International organisations with are invited and encouraged to co-chair in those areas where they have an expertise.

I have almost reached the end of my presentation. However, I have not yet mentioned the target groups of the strategy: the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Together with the Kosovo Government, they are the most important stakeholders in this process. Their representatives will participate in the thematic working groups. The OSCE Mission has communicated and coordinated on a regular basis not only with their political leadership, but also with the Kosovo Roma and Ashkali Forum, an umbrella association of almost 40 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian NGOs. This umbrella organisation is the most legitimate civil society representation of Kosovo's Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

During the forthcoming months, the Mission will facilitate a more institutionalised communication between the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians and the Kosovo institutions. The strategy development can significantly contribute to this communication.

To conclude this presentation, I would like to mention that ODIHR's CPRSI was often crucial in facilitating contacts, communication, coordination and agreements between the OSCE Mission and other stakeholders, including international organisations and NGOs as well as local stakeholders. ODIHR's expertise in the thematic areas as well as its contacts with the main stakeholders contributed significantly to an effective coordination and to a relatively quick launch of the strategy development.

The permanent communication, coordination and exchange of ideas between the Mission and ODIHR over the last one and a half years has helped to include all crucial issues and lessons learned, to consider risks and to overcome problems.

In addition, the expertise and experience of the CPRSI was crucial in reaching high quality conclusions and unanimous support for the strategy development by all Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian representatives who participated in the launching conference on 9 September.

ODIHR's continuous involvement will contribute not only to a successful strategy development, but also for its subsequent implementation.

More generally, the expertise of the OSCE Institutions is welcomed and needed in our Mission.

Thank you very much for your attention.