

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE RROMANI MAHALA IN MITROVICA

Analysis and proposal for a durable solution

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INTRODUCTION

More than seven years after the end of the bombing during the Kosovo¹ crisis, who could say that the populations, among others the Rroms, have returned to normal life? By no means, unfortunately, and the most irritating thing is that a healthy restoration of the society could have been already achieved, if a number of political players, including most international missioners, had not made some basic mistakes or even faults, by lack of information, lack of political will to collect realistic information and lack of humility in front of a some societal mechanisms they did not even try to understand.

As a result, thousands of lives have been jeopardized; dozens of thousands of persons have remained the hostages of various political deals, inside Kosovo or abroad, with repeated delays of years for any attempts of solution to their despair and distress, again and again postponed due to a severe lack of attention and means in the domains where they are most needed.

However we consider that reconstruction is still possible, including reconstruction of traditional multiethnic life (*komšiluk*), for which the present report attempts to give some guidelines, especially for the social restoring of the Rromani area in Mitrovica.

In order to make our report more accessible, it is necessary to recall a few basic historical and social facts, which have a scope wider than Mitrovica itself and have been neglected by most political circles. On the other side, there are some local groups starting well-informed, mature and efficient work, among others Balkan Sunflowers in Priština or RADC in Mitrovica, but generally speaking these are not very much supported by great international structures and sometimes they are even compelled to act despite these structures' control. The wrong approaches have definitively to be avoided or even combated in the project of reconstruction set forth by this paper, to the benefit of people who work efficiently and of our society as a whole.

A) A Conceptual Framework: The reality of Kosovo is the following:

Language was not always the basic feature of ethnic identity

The modern approach of identity is based on language, which implies also cultural specificity. This could be relevant in many parts of Europe but in Kosovo there were other factors conveying identity. A good example is given by the flux of Slavs who colonized the Moravian valley (Gnjilane, Uroševac, Vitina) at the times of the Agrarian Reform after WWI; although hardly any of them were from "Shopluk" (Dimitrovgrad area), they were labeled Shops by autochthonous Serbs (most of these alleged "Shops" were coming in fact from neighboring Vranje area) and no intermarriage occurred between them until very recently (Срби сас Срби, Шопци сас Шопци). The Shops would consider the Serbs as "closer to the Albanians" than to themselves (men

¹ We will use here the form "Kosovo", which prevails in OSCE documents, although Kosova would be more accurate, since – in spite of the remote Slavic etymology of *kos* "blackbird", Kosova is the Turkish form (and also Albanian and Rromani) and the extension of the name of the battle-place to an entire area is due to the Ottoman administration. We will not use dr Ibrahim Rugova's proposal of reviving the antiquity name of Dardania nor the latin classical name Cossovia.

separated from women in weddings, female clothing etc...), while the Serbs would consider the Shops as dirty and their females rather frivolous. On the other hand, the Serbs would admire Shops for the variety of their occupational skills; they learnt from the Shops to eat red tomatoes, which were deemed, prior to this contact, poisonous by the Serbs.

Even within the Shops there were distinctions, related to the wave of arrival of their ancestors (10 years earlier or later). In many places one can meet two different Shop-Mala (Shop quarter). Similar distinctions, based on genealogy, settlements, faith, food, events of the past, ancestors etc... existed also among Albanians, Roms, Turks and all "nationalities" with endless nuances and family responsible spokesmen were very much aware of these subtleties, which they would use in inter-clan intercourses. This knowledge was a skill of itself.

One can understand under such circumstances that the categorization of boundaries according to the linguistic profile (as perceived by foreign researchers, not by native speakers) is but a misleading caricature brought from outside the area.

In the past, violence has not been related with ethnic variety

While it is established that all nations and nationalities of Kosovo (or widely in the Balkan) **have been living in ethnic peace** for centuries (at least until the arrival of modern nationalism), foreign players take for granted that ethnic hatred is the basis of our societies. True enough violence has always existed in Kosovo as in any other part of the world, but it was exerted among clans, irrespectively of their ethnic belonging. Pushing ethnicity to the forestage is a recent trend in Balkan conflicts, aggravated after WWII. The wrong account for the past and tradition results in justifying, and therefore to some extent encouraging, inter-ethnic violence. To quote an example of this extremely harmful error, Mr Antoni Marek Nowicki, UN mediator in Kosovo (2000-2005) writes: "Any serious discussion about a multi-ethnic Kosovo has irritated me deeply. Such a reality has been coined after theoretical patterns of international policies and has no chance of success in the future. Communities in Kosovo, especially the Albanians and the Serbs, never lived together but separately in adjacent spaces during all their cohabitation. The idea of multiethnic society in Kosovo is but an exercise in rhetoric of international policy" – this text evidences that **Mr Nowicki does not have the slightest idea** of both history and real life in Kosovo at the grass-root level and such an amazing ignorance bears serious responsibility, especially regarding the position he was holding during 5 years. He is only conveying arrogant Bismarck style stereotypes.

Everybody who has experienced traditional Kosovo life knows that the relationships between the clans, belonging to various ethnicities, were maintained very carefully by means of mutual visits, common events and a much **elaborated system of inter-clan diplomacy** – which did not always prevent violence, exactly as it is the case between states and in all kinds of human relationships.

The Roms have been honoring this heritage longer than others

While Serbian leaders – who had a state of theirs, and Albanian leaders – who were yearning for such a state, developed mutual hatred which should be called **rather inter-nationalistic than interethnic**, which penetrated deeper and deeper their respective communities, other nations, who were not so much interested in achieving national autonomy than in spending **happy and brotherly life**, did not fall into the trap of nationalistic escalation. It was also the case of the Kosovo Turks (as a matter of fact

a significant number of them had been compelled to emigrate to Turkey in the '50), the Gorans, the Ashkali-Egyptians and the Sandžaklije (also called “Muslims” or “Bošnjaci”).

The case of Montenegrins is slightly different since some of them have been enrolled in the anti-Albanian project. However, autochthonous Montenegrins have always been in especially good relationships with the Albanian majority, especially in the countryside.

It is worth emphasizing that the Serbian and Albanian majorities have been only **partially and comparatively late involved** in the ethnically based polarizations, while most individuals and families have maintained until late a friendly *statu quo ante* in their everyday practice, especially autochthonous Serbs in the countryside, unlike Serbs transferred to Kosovo from outside (mainly South Serbia) in Raković's times. The **sociable atmosphere at the village or mahàla level**, as opposed to harsh conflicts between political leaders, can be compared to the one existing between Turks and Kurds in Turkey at the level of so called *komşisfera* (“neighboursphere”, neighborhood with mixed population) while nationalistic issues rage in the political classes.

As a matter of fact, a **handful of Rroms have taken part** in the Albano-Serbian question: Kasum Cana even had even to go into exile to Zagreb, due to his deep and active implication in Albanian self-determination project. On the other hand, several persons, like Luan Koka or Bajram Haliti, have declared publicly loyalty to the Kosovo deprivation of autonomy. Since they were journalists, their voice was very widely heard and forwarded by Serbian media, what gave a **negative image of Rromani intellectuals and leaders** (journalists were perceived as intellectuals by uneducated masses) among the Albanian population.

However, **this was not the position of the Rromani majority**, who refused repeatedly to get involved in an issue viewed as artificial. The Rroms would consider other persons and possible partners on the basis of their personal qualities and clan back-ground, not according to the language they speak – mainly due to the fact that Kosovo Rroms can speak as well Albanian and Serbian. This attitude has been **often despised as archaic**, but it was a political choice made by elders of the Rromani families. Anyway it was far less destructive than the nationalistic challenge – provided that no nation hinders other nations' right to identity affirmation and development.

Our project follows a **similar political choice**, since we are trying to develop a societal concept which could be viable and dignified for all identities, **irrespectively of the final statute** of the area: should it be independent, incorporated into Serbian, Albania or Europe.

Only rare cases of violence have been really ethnically motivated

Another misinterpretation has been extremely harmful: ascribing to inter-ethnic violence **common law crimes**, explained as ethnically based by criminals, an explanation that should never have been picked up by international players, as Kouchner did, giving criminals a golden excuse. It is clear that one part of the violence was due to the extreme backwardness of rural population, exasperated when they discovered their homes reduced to ashes upon returning to their villages, when they had to move to cities where humanitarian aid was being distributed and where they were lacking any social control (no acquaintances) and especially in the context of war, which usually leads to far more destructive responses. It was also a chance for

unpunished **robbery, looting, revenge and generation-old feud** – what could not possibly be recognized but rather presented, indeed justified”, as less guiltily inter-ethnic violence.

Be it as it may, a sheriff of New-York City who participated in the Kosovo First Peace Conference (Dec. 1999) established after statistical data that there had been less physical aggressions in Kosovo in autumn that year than in the same period in his district. **Exaggerating the number of victims** of one’s side, irrespectively of real data – or pretending they are fake, is also a dangerous **weapon, wrapped in the velvet cloth of mourning**, but leading far from peace and reconciliation.

It is pointless to argue about the collective responsibility of one nation prior to the Kosovo crisis and totally inappropriate to accuse “the Albanians”

Expecting an evolution (amending) during the last years only or mainly on behalf of the Albanians, as if only these people were guilty for the past, is both unjust and dangerous. This major fault can be found however in a recent text by Antoni Marek Nowicki (see above), and it is a matter of worry that a mediator can utter such inaccuracies. Not only it can by no means be justified to speak of “the Albanians”, “the Serbs” or “the Roms” as a whole – since inter-ethnic assistance has been observed even during the bombing, but nobody is entitled to urge any people more than any other in Kosovo to improve its behaviors, since such an attitude would **result in a collective accusation** of one of the nations, what is not consonant with real responsibilities – to be discovered far higher.

This attitude recalls Rebecca West’s brilliant text in “Black lamb and grey hawk” (1940), who criticizes Englishmen with “humanitarian feelings and reformatory temper” who used “to choose deep down in their heart a Balkan people always victim and never tormenter”. It is necessary to approach all peoples in a similar way and only thereafter appreciate, in a comparative way, what are the respective merits and credits of the various groups (not nations but concrete groups of interest).

Anyway we are still in want of any positive action or even declaration brought by this “mediator” for Kosovo Roms.

Accordingly, our approach is based on an open dialogue with duly recognized authorities of all identities in Kosovo, be they majorities or minorities, on both the basis of the good practices of the past (**komšiluk**) and of the many fields that urge us to unite, not only traditional friendship but also demanding challenges for the future: economy, education, health, progress, environment, energy etc...

So-called “Roma NGO” have resulted totally inappropriate in Kosovo reconstruction

Many players have been keeping the belief (of pretending to do so) that the so-called “Roma NGOs” are interested in the fate of the people they claim to represent – although they are all self-appointed. As a matter of fact, they have **been making profit of the tragic situation of the Roms** to justify ethnic-aligned non-Rromani political propaganda (mostly pro-Serbian) and in this respect exaggerating issues which could be of some profit to their purpose while neglecting more important but less attractive (in terms of showbiz politics) problems. It is even useless to mention the direct financial profit they did in this context.

Until today **democratic education has been totally lacking in Kosovo**. Only some mottos have been circulated in schools to please internationals but no ground work has ever been carried out in education – the teachers themselves are not clearly aware of

what democracy is. In such circumstances it is but logical that individuals yearning for recognition, carrier and profit, decided to build the newly imported structure called “Non Governmental Organization”, just to ensure an office, a salary and perspectives of social ascension. Such a behavior, which can be criticized from the point of view of rich western countries, is consubstantial to the present state of the local population, irrespectively of their ethnic background. The under-estimation of this mechanism – denied by local NGOs for obvious reasons, but also by outsiders who prefer a fictive image of these NGOs’ efficiency, for the sake of tranquility, has brought many damages. This does not mean that we are not expecting a step by step improvement of these local NGOs, provided that internationals acquire a lucid insight of internal mechanisms enabling them to advice them efficiently but also if, vice versa, the outsiders understand quite a lot of local practices are good, even sometimes better than the western pattern of NGOs.

Nevertheless, no “Roma NGO” has ever pushed forward to date the issue of the Kosovo Rroms’ fate. On the contrary, they have followed a political line of lamentation and rejection of constructive dialogue with Albanian and Serbian local authorities, because it is clear that common lamentation with the Serbs can by no means be considered as a “constructive” or even as a “dialogue”. Outsiders from neighboring areas, especially from Serbia and Macedonia, have fostered this attitude, which was profitable for their ideology. Other Rroms, especially in Prizren, have played the Albanian card, which lead to a total break-off between them and other Rroms. As a result the Romani population has remained forgotten of its NGOs, more involved in majority confrontation than in defending this orphan population. We have here a case of blameworthy negligence of internationals who have accepted without hesitation any person introducing himself (rarely herself) as a Rromani leader, instead of scrutinizing the real implantation of this person in the community he was claiming to represent. The systematic underestimation of the elders’ role in the community is also blameworthy. In this entire problem, the responsibility of foreign authorities is greater than the one of the local NGOs.

In a real democracy, only three kinds of persons are entitled to be consulted for major decisions: elders, who enjoy respect in their community, thank to a long life of visible constructive unselfish deeds, professionals who have acquired a sound expertise in a given domain as a result of their studies, researches and analysis, and persons who have been elected after a serious campaign of information and awareness raising among voters. Unfortunately, in Rromani matters, the self-appointed leaders are ignored by the community – when they live in such a community, what is not always the case, they lack any expertise, being often half-illiterate, and if elected, they have been elected by a handful of kin and very close friends. Treating them as if they were real representatives, an attitude which could never occur with a “recognized nation” (like Catalans, Kabyles or Irish people), is but an exercise in pure demagoguery, which can be considered as a new form of racism.

We are now in a situation emergency with Rroms deported from Germany to former Yugoslavia

In spite of the programmed inefficiency of the Roma NGOs on the spot, it is an absolute emergency to progress in the solution of the Kosovo Rroms’ issue. Everyday Rroms from Kosovo are deported from Germany to Kosovo and when they refuse to go there, there are deported to Serbia (or sometimes Montenegro) where the situation is far more damaged than in Kosovo itself. Not only they fall in society of rejection but they also bring new anti-Albanian frustrations and lamentations to this society. Other

families, who manage to escape to the deportation from Germany, attempt to come to Belgium and France (more recently also Spain) where they are sure they cannot obtain asylum. Some have attempted to restart, although hopelessly, a procedure of asylum-seeking in France in order to postpone their final deportation – which they can feature only as a hell.

While Roma NGOs in Kosovo, with the benediction of internationals, have not even attempted to conceive out any form of improvement of the Rroms' conditions of life on the spot, while German NGOs, who have promised the Kosovo refugees they will obtain asylum status, keep supporting the void defeatist discourse of Kosovo Rromani NGOs, hundreds of families live in everyday terror of loosing all they have gained in material and educational terms during seven, ten or fifteen years in Germany (especially schooling for their children) and of being sent to face a society which will asphyxiate them by lack of accommodation, employment, education and other allegedly "social" mechanisms – in fact, a collective way of crushing unwelcome returnees. In this respect, the *Mahàla* project is not a theoretical model but a necessity for all these persons.

True enough, thanks to dr Marcel Courthiade and Nedžmedin Neziri's lobby with the then French home minister, all Kosovo Rromani refugees have been granted since 2000 the asylum status in France for an unlimited period, but there is a great danger of questioning their right to renew their "carte de séjour", if hundreds of Rromani families come illegally from German, what can be used by the current French Home minister, a gypsophobic, as a pretext to get rid of families in precarious situation.

It is wrong to infer a diagnosis for the entire region on the basis of Mitrovica's problems

The historical back-ground of Mitrovica has too often been neglected and statements denying the possibility of restoring inter-ethnic common life in Kosovo have often been illustrated with the example of Mitrovica and the bridge across the Ibro² River. One should point out here that these areas were included only after 1945 to Kosovo and that Leposavić was included even in 1949 in order to raise the number of Serbs in the entity (and balance the Albanian majority). Therefore it would be inappropriate to treat similarly Mitrovica and older areas of the entity, as Priština, Ipëko or Prizren.

Generalizations in this field (as well as in most other fields) are often an expression of the striking ignorance of westerners in Balkan and Rromani matters. One has just to remind that the French battalion garrisoned at Mitrovica informed the French ministry of Defense that there is no "Rromani problem in Mitrovica, since they have identified no camping site" – at the very moment when Albanian vandals were burning the last ruins of the Rromani Mahàla "Fabrička", right in front of them.

None of them knew that Mitrovica Rroms have been a rich part of the population already in Ottoman times and that right before the destruction, their houses, not to mention their other riches, could have raised jealousy of many a French bourgeois.

² In this paper (and with the exception indicated in note 1), we use the Rromani place names : Mitrovica e Kosovaqi (Serbian Kosovska Mitrovica, Alb. Mitrovica e Kosovës), Ibro (Serbian Ibar, Alb. Ibër) etc...

Rromani children have a good command of two or three languages

There is recurrent manifesto that Rromani children are allegedly poor at school education because they speak Rromani as a home language and their command of the school language is insufficient to follow the tuition process. This is a very widespread stereotype aiming at eradicating Rromani under pseudo-scientific and pseudo-pedagogical allegations. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of Rromani children have a command of the school language quite similar to that of non-Rromani children of a similar social background. In other terms, linguistic deficit – if any – in school language is not due to their home-language (since both languages, sometimes three or four, are used at home) but only to the educational level of the speakers. As native bilinguals, they even have a privilege upon their non-Rromani class-fellows in the process of further language acquisition.

Nevertheless there are cases of deficit in Albanian and/or Serbian: among Rromani children who have grown up in Germany or other western countries, only the local language (German, French etc...) have been used at home and Yugoslav languages have been abandoned in everyday practice, resulting in a total lack of knowledge of these languages (and cultures) by refugee children. Similar cases have been evidenced as well among Bosnian non-Rromani refugees, returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We insisted in presenting these “frame-work mistakes/faults” as an introduction to our analysis, which will in addition attempt to identify more concrete mistakes and faults made during the last seven years.

b) History of the Rromani presence in today’s Kosovo

The origins

To our luck, the first Rroms reached Kosovo centuries after the arrival of Albanians and Serbs, so there is no point to raise the question of anteriority of any of them from the Rromani perspective. Be it as it may, we do consider that the ancientness or anteriority of any population in a given area is totally irrelevant in present policy. Although the Turkish population has arrived in Kosovo even after us, we consider them a full-right and constitutive part of the entity, on a foot of full equality with us, the Serbs and the Albanians.

The first mention of Rromani presence in Kosovo dates back to an Ottoman census in 1544, which encompassed only a part of today’s Kosovo (called Kosova in Turkish) but comparison with surrounding areas (especially Dubrovnik, a Venetian fortress, formerly Raguse) suggests that the first Rroms settled in Kosovo during the 13 century (their first contact with Europeans most probably date back to the beginning of 12 century in the Holy Land during the crusades). Already during the Ottoman occupation, we were under-estimated, since the Turks viewed us as “half a millet” while other nations were “millets” or “nationalities”. During the Ottoman Empire, many Kosovo Rroms were Christians as still evidenced by their costumes and they switched to Islam progressively, keeping common worship places with Christians (as Letnica, in eastern Kosovo). There is not a slightest difference between the dialect of so-called **dasikane Rroma** (Christian Rroms) and **xoraxane Rroma** (Muslim Rroms). Quite a good part of the Rroms reached a comparatively high position in the multiethnic society and some of them became land-owners. There was a kind of “Pax Kosoviana” with focus not on ethnic identity but on family or clan back-ground, as explained above. We lack enough

testimonies to describe this period as the “golden age”, since Ottoman fierce rule was exerted everyday and everywhere, but at least this rule stimulated a strong feeling of solidarity among all nations³ present on the Kosovo soil.

There was an exception in Prizren, where Roms were in excellent terms with Ottomans, but also with Muslim Slavs (Gorans) and other populations.

After the creation of the borders in 1913 and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, renamed Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, there was no major change regarding the Romani presence: rich Roms remained rich and respected, poor Roms were not treated better than any other poor – but any way with some humanity, since respect for the poor was in the local religions a value ensuring a gateway to heaven.

During WWII, one should emphasize the Romani participation to the wide movement against nazism. Little is known about it, since nobody ever tried to research this domain of memory, but some movies have integrated anecdotes involving Romani partisans. However, the main contribution was constituted by everyday material assistance to other partisans. One should mention the case of Mitrovica e Kosovaqi where Shyqyri Haliti e Šezaqo, a Romani employee of the city council falsified German documents in order to pretend there are no Gypsies in Mitrovica, what saved the local Romani population from deportation.

In Tito’s times, the Roms were viewed not as a nationality but as an ethnic group (as the Arumanians); there was no policy of promotion of their identity, except for a yearly festival in Niš and a few hours weekly on radio and later TV (Priština). However, some Roms from Kosovo were reputed activists, mainly Osman Kosović from Priština and Hadža Redžep from Mitrovica.

C) *The Romani Mahàla in Mitrovica*

The positive aspects

You can find hereby attached a plan of the Romani Mahàla of Mitrovica, prior to the destructions caused by vandalism and looting in the after-bombing period.

We consider it just and advisable that the Mahàla is reconstructed on the same area as it was formerly, not in a smaller space corresponding to the old cadastre, as set forth a couple years ago by the mayor of southern Mitrovica and, if necessary, with a small extension in the area hatched zone on the plan – according to the last in date negotiations. This hypothesis has been raised during the consultation in January 2006 at Mitrovica and meets now a rather favorable attention on behalf of the municipal authorities.

In any case it is important to remind of the social multi-ethnic character of our neighborhood, labeled “Romani Mahàla”, not because it was inhabited exclusively by Romani families, but because we were there the majority. In addition to Roms, there

³ One should probably record here the presence of an important autochthonous Latin-speaking population (more than a quarter of the entire population) as evidenced in Tzar Dušan's Hrisovulje. This population eventually disappeared (probably melt into the Albanian speaking population).

was a quantity of Ashkali (called Arliura in Mitrovica Rromani) with whom we had some matrimonial alliances. The Arliura corner was mainly in lower part, but with inter-marriages, members of this community were present in various blocks of houses. There were also some Albanian, Serbs and Gorans scattered among the Rromani majority. The emotional ties with them were extremely strong. Not only Ashkali women would learn Rromani and use it as a home language as soon as entering a Rromani family, but everybody, including Albanians, Serbs and Gorans, had some knowledge of our language. At several occasions, Mitrovica Rroms gave their life to save members of other nationalities living in our area and the opposite is also true. The family background always prevailed upon ethnic identity, as explained in attached document (a report by a Rromani refugee of Mitrovica), an attitude sometimes expressed by the expression “«who are you?» makes more sense than «what are you?»”.

From the social point of view, there was a wide range of occupations, from municipal or army employees to shop-keepers, from miners to sawyers etc... Only liberal occupations (only three Rroms physicians, no lawyers, no professors, a handful of school-teachers) were lacking. As a geometer, graduated from the Belgrade high school of geodesy, I was sent to field work in all settlements of the area, including small villages, inhabited only by Arliura, Serbs or Albanians.

This good common life can account for the Rroms' reluctance to follow the nationalistic machine of ethnic polarization during the escalation of violence. True enough we had suffered of the sultan-like attitude of many Albanian civil servants, as soon as they could grasp a chair in administration, but this did not change our view upon our Albanian Mahàla-fellows. It would be a major mistake to consider that this reluctance of ours was an archaic feature of illiterate Gypsies – as some journalists maintained; it was a real political position of pacifism and respect of the individuals irrespectively of nationalistic decisions taken far from our biotope. In addition, our commitment was to promote the values of **phralipe**, **jekhipe** (fraternity unity, central motto in Tito's Yugoslavia – and which proved efficient during several decades), the Yugoslav idea and social integration while respecting linguistic, cultural and ethnic heritages. This was not naivety or archaism but the spirit of those times, hold in great sincerity, before the destruction of mutual confidence which was the scourge of the last two decades.

Common life was facilitated by the fact that most populations would share similar rituals, feast and ceremonies. Exchanges of delegations in cases of family event (joy or mourning) would confirm the ancient inter-clan alliances. Islam was practiced in a very smooth and human way by the majority of the inhabitants, alongside and in good relationship with the comparatively small orthodox population. In cases of conflicts, wise persons of various ethnic back-grounds, respected by all, would gather for customary councils to seek a solution. Family intercourses beginning in childhood would create a Mahàla micro-culture, with specific humor, references, tact and taboos. This is very far from Mr Nowicki's depiction of Kosovo life, as he perceived it through his readings of biased reports.

The negative aspects

Unfortunately, there was also a dark side of the story. A severe lack of education, caused by the very low level of schools on the spot and the reluctance of most families to send their children to schools better thought of in Belgrade or other cities of the north, lead to the almost total lack of liberal occupations, as indicated above. Our language and culture, although visible in absolute freedom everywhere, were not recognized as such and no effort was done to promote their development, in spite of the efforts (often ill-advised or fake) of the activists, whose main concern was to be distinguished by political authorities, waiting for recognition and/or reward, and not to improve their people's life. This situation was not specific to the Rroms or to Mitrovica,

but was rampant everywhere in Yugoslavia, probably more in the South, and it is still prevailing in current NGOs.

We suffered also from a striking lack of information mainly in History and culture, not only of our people, but even generally speaking. There was no real civic education, except for some basic motto uttered but never really explained in schools or in the media. Corruption was a kind of national sport all over the country but it was more harmful in poor areas of the South.

As a result, some families could not integrate in the system, while others lost their former level of integration. This reduced them to severe poverty, or in some occasions even to delinquency, rarely on the spot but more often in Italy, including trafficking. There was also an important rate of emigrants, to such an extent that in the 80s, one could consider that one half of "our Mahàla's blood" was living abroad. However, in that period of time, emigration was perceived as a temporary sacrifice before repatriation. Most emigrants were building huge houses in the Mahàla and feeding their family with money transfers, waiting for a happy return – which never occurred.

D) *The current situation*

Genesis of the current situation

One should notice that, unlike the situation in Dukagjin/Metohija plain, all Roms have emigrated from Mitrovica and Priština. Since the object of this paper is Mitrovica, we will focus upon our city. Another paper could be devoted to the situation of the Roms prior to the bombing in early spring 1999 but we should start our report here with the massive exodus which occurred in June and July 1999. Much has been said about the potential danger of Albanian returnees and lack of protection after the departure of the Serbian forces, but for a realistic account of the situation, one should emphasize that the main factor of this exodus was the sheikh's decision to flee to Belgrade and Western Europe. Indeed, enjoying a considerable authority in the Mahàla as sheikh, but also because of his richness, he was imitated by the Roms, even though the motivation of the departure was not the same. The sheikh had privileged relations with Serbs, and was implicated personally in the events, as he hosted big amounts of animals stolen by Serbians to the Albanians. Fearing the vengeance of the Albanians who would return soon, he left immediately after the Serbian forces. The Roms felt then abandoned, as the sheikh left and so did other Romani individuals too much implicated in the conflict in favor of the Serbs, and started to prepare their departure in their turn. Only a few elders remained in the Mahàla. Noting the vulnerability of the Roms and the ignorance of the KFOR forces recently arrived, some groups of Albanian burglars came from all over Kosovo as well as from Northern Albania, stealing everything they found on the spot and destroying the buildings for recuperating the bricks. The few persons who had remained in their homes were brutalized and even killed. For instance, sheikh Aziz was burned alive in the mosque where his father, sheikh Qerim, was buried and two old Romani women were raped. Three – four days after they exodus, a few Roms tried to organize themselves and to return to their homes, but the KFOR representatives submitted their request to a minimum of 100 people returned. This figure could not be reached, as the Roms were then already dispersed in Serbia, Monte-Negro and other Eastern European countries.

Geographical distribution

Currently, at the end of 2006, the Rromani population from Mitrovica is scattered as follows:

- in camps near Mitrovica
- in Southern Serbia
- in Macedonia
- in Montenegro
- in other post-Yugoslav states
- in Italy
- in France
- in Germany
- in Benelux
- in Austria and Switzerland
- in Sweden
- in other European countries
- over-sea.

These figures are an approximation, since no official data are available, there are everyday changes and we try to improve them every time we have access to more precise indications.

Aspirations of the families

As one could expect, the various situations differ deeply from one another but as a whole, one can delineate among these refugees similar aspirations:

- a good part of them would like to return to Mitrovica, provided that not only physical security, but also correct conditions of life (lodging, employment, health, education etc...) are granted; in this respect, one should underline that an objective guarantee of these basic rights is not sufficient, as long as the concerned persons are not convinced subjectively of its reality. Rroms refugees in Kosovo itself and surrounding areas are particularly ready to return. In some cases, return is not a wish, especially in current conditions, but it is realized by force, as for Rroms based in Germany.
- some families have integrated foreign societies (this is especially the case in France) and wish to be maintained in their host country; this situation could be realizable, since there is so far no limit in time to they stay in France (see above the agreement with M. Valliant, former French home minister).
- many families hesitate, since they long for their native homeland, they face various obstacles to integration in a cold, unfriendly, sophisticated and in their eyes artificial western society, but the current situation in Mitrovica does not present strong arguments for return. Most probably the next generation of these families will prefer to stay in Western Europe.

Lack of information and references for a well-considered decision

As a matter of fact, it is very difficult for them to take a decision, since there is more disinformation than genuine information about present day's Kosovo. Information is very scanty and quite often unreliable. In addition it is subject to fluctuations often dictated by the personal interests of some political activists, who made a business for example of selling "proofs of persecution" (pictures, videos etc...) to asylum seekers.

The cadastre

When they left Mitrovica, the Serbian forces took with them the cadastres of the various districts, which are scattered now in Serbia main towns. The cadastre for Mitrovica is currently in Kruševac but it is outdated, since the plans date back to the period 1951-1954. Nevertheless, more recent aerial photographs are available in Mitrovica. These last are not actual neither, as the war interrupted the process of identification they were integrated in, but they could be updated. In order to achieve this, we need these photographs to be completed after consultation with the ancient inhabitants of the Mahlàva living currently in Diaspora. This consultation should be made by a competent commission, mandated by Mitrovica's municipality and UNMIK. In the same time, this commission's work could provide valuable data for better conceiving the reconstruction of the Mahlàva, in accordance with the wishes and plans of its ancient inhabitants who are living currently abroad.

E) Our approach and vision

Any free choice needs to be based in a good knowledge of the pros and contras.

It is our purpose to collect reliable data about the whole issue of the Rromani population of Mitrovica (dispersion, needs, wishes, opportunities etc...) and to circulate in real time reliable indications about these people and the Mahàla in Mitrovica, in a wider context every time needed.

Our project is unconnected to the future status of Kosovo

As already mentioned, we want to elaborate a project which could be carried out for the good of the Mitrovica Rroms, irrespectively of the future status of Kosovo. We want to demonstrate that we can live in any administrative surrounding, in good terms with persons, developing our traditional and newly acquired values and respecting the public order of the State, as we have always done in History.

However, in all kinds of options which could be taken as a result of international consultations and deliberations, we demand the following:

- the Rroms have to be recognized as one of the four constitutive nations of the Kosovo entity, on a foot of full equality with the Albanians, the Serbs and the Turks.
- linguistic and cultural rights have to be respected by Law and practice in all spheres where they are relevant, as provided for in the constitutional framework of Kosovo, adopted by Kosovo Parliament in 2004; for the purpose of the use of Rromani in public administration, a two fold initiative has to be taken : a small group of students can be sent to Inalco university in Paris in order to open eventually a chair of Rromani studies in Kosovo, while in the mean time, summer schools can provide Rromani public administrators with trainings

enabling them to use Rromani as an official language. This can be completed by online explanations.

- beyond linguistic and cultural matters, we insist on a full respect of all our heritage, including political aspiration to peace (what implies a refusal of ethnic and nationalistic ambition against other entities), urbanistic organization of spaces inhabited by a significant number of Rroms (what implies a specific rhythm of life and areas of conviviality, with priority to social intercourses against individual ambitions), respect of family structures and especially of the intergenerational ties, very strong among Rroms, etc...

We intend therefore to take advantage of this reconstruction of our Mahàla:

- to keep and restore of the positive of the past;
- to analyze negative aspects and endeavor to improve or change them;
- to bring elements of modernity, as well material as social, into the newly rebuilt neighborhood.

We are deeply convinced that under such conditions, and if we have a regular access to needed means, we can make of our area an example of good practices which could be profitable all over Europe within 15 or 20 years.

As a correlative, we declare on our behalf that Mitrovica Rromani families refuse to support such or such option in a collective way, and they consider that any political declaration of support by Rromani individuals commits exclusively his/her person.

F) Main features of our method

Information

This will be a crucial issue in our project, provided that we have access to the tools which will enable us to do so: a small center with mail supplies, low cost printing devices etc...

Systematic contact and exchanges with local authorities and elders of Rromani families

This will be carried out without ulterior motives and irrespectively of the political belonging of these spokespersons. Systematic lobby will be done also with local media in order to forward to the readership real information about Kosovo Rroms and delete as much as possible fabrications that have been circulated in the recent years, often originating from Western journalists, but unfortunately forwarded by the local press.

Focus will be put on the families' role

The family has been so far the major nucleus of the Rromani society (as likely of non-Rromani society in the area) and a great role can be trust to family solidarity in order to set up efficient networks of Europe-wide cooperation.

Commission of investigation

It is extremely important to set up as soon as possible a commission of investigation, which will be in charge of answering the following questions:

- a) the properties, their boarders, the neighbors and the owner(s)' possible plans of return
- b) the family current composition and the location of other members of the family
- c) the current chief of family
- d) the new borns, the deceased, the place of burial
- e) health situation
- f) the administrative status of the persons in the countries they live currently
- h) the integration in the host country : employment, schooling, trainings etc.

The list of the questions is subject to modification after the first meeting of the commission, who will bring together Roms from Northern Mitrovica and in Diaspora.

Respect of a human rhythm, without any hurry

The disaster of 1999 has brought deep wounds in our society, now scattered all over Europe. Nothing has been done to heal these wound or at least relieve the pains and attempt to find a solution. The first shy endeavors appear now and one should not expect that such a complex situation can be solved overnight, just because international bodies have decided to raise a deadline or such or such campaign will be over. It was possible to bring at least partial solutions already at the beginning of the decade. This has not been done due to various reasons indicated above; we cannot risk jeopardizing the reconstruction of our homeland Mahàla just because administration has suddenly set up a schedule out of its mind – or for political reasons.

Correction of the errors of the past

The errors mentioned above have to be left behind, even if some decisions could be uncomfortable – but it is the future of a whole population at stake, not the pride or carrier of a civil servant. A well-prepared campaign about the Roms' place all over Kosovo society will be carried out in parallel with house reconstruction. As mentioned above it is very much needed to circulate a realistic image of our nation in Kosovo media (and in fact everywhere in Europe), not only through declarations and documentary films, but also in attractive programs like quiz, fictions, TV-novels, etc...

2006

First meeting in France with Roms from the Diaspora and from Northern Mitrovica + drafting of the questionnaire, in consultation with technical experts of Mitrovica's municipality

Our first discussions with the Roms susceptible to participate in this meeting show that it should take place in Western Europe. Given the considerable percentage of

the Roms from Mitrovica hosted in France, we propose that the meeting take place in Strasbourg, what would ease the participation of other Roms in surrounding countries.

2006 – January 2007

Establishment of formalized contacts with the Roms, the Albanian authorities, UNMIK, OSCE and with representatives of Serbian community

Definition of the mandate and of the functioning rules of the commission

February 2007

Information of the community in diaspora on the existence and role of the commission + fixation of the massive meetings in key towns of Europe.

March – June 2007

Field inquiry on individual/family basis, followed by a meeting with local authorities and international organisations, where the first findings of the commission will be presented

June – July 2007

Aproximative evaluation of the number of families wishing to return

Proposal of construction projects in Mitrovica, with local architects

September 2007

Start of the constructions, in the same time with the installation of the administrative centres in the Mahàla

2008

Progressive return of the families in the Mahala, as the construction process (in terms of both buildings and social structures) progresses. The commission will follow this process and contribute to its success, especially by the means of mediation

H) The main dangers we risk to face are

Populism and demagogy

When leaders wallow with the victims in misery and defeatism in order to raise their authority and power, at the expenses of the society, instead of taking steps to improve their situation. Sometimes such leaders come from rich countries and fish recognition among populations in distress to comfort their political carrier at the European level.

Such leaders' visits, at the expenses of funds which should be used for other tasks, remind more a one-man-show than real and efficient commitment; they bring confusion in the victims' perception of European policy and deprive them of trust not only in European or international commitment but in any form of political life. Meanwhile people who really work do not receive a cent and have to back themselves all their activity's expenses.

The best evidence that such leaders are not interested in improving the situation for which they act as crucial players is that they do not communicate at all with genuine players and that no follow-up is even foreseen.

However, reports about such useless visits seem to satisfy most offices on Kosovo and they are organized every time there is a deadline for fund expenses or consultation session. It is useless to add that this kind of ethno-tourism is covered by the OSCE, the UNMIK, the CoE and similar bodies. This shows that in-depth work is neglected to the advantage of formalism.

Confusion and lack of transparence

Contradictory information is also a great danger which has delayed quite often communication between players, who are scattered, as we should remind, all over Europe. There is no coordination and articulation between all of us, although it is necessary to have a logical chronology of deeds. In most cases, deed A must precede deed B etc... or deed B can be in force only after approval of deed A. Most of the time, the chain is broken due to the fact that there is no certainty about the achievement of one of the links. As a result there is no transparency and no communication with existing commissions, even if they have been supported by high level political authorities. It looks like all this is done in vain, just to pretend "something is being done for the Gypsies".

Corruption

When speaking of corruption, we do not mean only misappropriation of funds but also manipulation of opinion for individual benefit. A specific form of corruption, hidden behind "financial constraints", consists in sharing in a very anti-productive way the funds for activity: while billions are spent for everyday functioning, we are told "only one person may participate because we do not have sufficient financing" or "you are welcome at such and such meeting (at the other end of Europe) provided you pay for your travel and accommodation". Curiously enough, people who set forth concrete measures, on the basis of a long lasting experience, are treated this way, while self-appointed leaders, with no other output during years than empty declarations (if they were in an enterprise, they would have been fired years ago), are financed on a regular basis. One could withdraw the conclusion that the international organizations are not interested at all in the fate of our people, that they prefer persons who do not change anything than efficient players and that they are afraid of any improvement of a situation they deliberately want to keep in *statu quo ante*.

Such an impression could be confirmed in the conversation one of us had with a CIA man two years ago in Budapest, who said "do not bother trying to fix the Rroms' situation in Kosovo, the hour has not yet come. It will be next year, when John Lantos goes there; an appearance of improvement will be needed to show that unlike the situation in Iraq, the U.S. have brought peace and welfare, but it will not be the way you try to do".

Another form of corruption can be identified among local Rromani NGOs, where leaders say openly “we tell the Ashkali they are Rroms in order to inflate our number and receive more funds but when we get the money we will tell them they are Egyptians and they are not concerned by our subventions”. Such naive utterances are common place views in many places of the Balkan, but it should not be taken for acceptable by authorities.

False representation

Fairy tales about our history and the history of other groups bring also useless tensions between us. The Rroms’ Indian origin, from the former imperial city of Kannauj, should not be treated on the same level as pure fairy tales invented by Churches in the past centuries for opportunistic purpose. Similarly, there is no point to claim that Ashkalis and Egyptians are from India, while their Egyptian origin is very likely. Dispute about origins among illiterate persons will never bring anything else than new occasions of conflict. They should rely on the studies of academic researchers and accept their conclusions, just like Albanian and Serbs accept such conclusions, leaving polemics to authorized circles. What is important at the grass-root level, is to develop a feeling of brotherhood not only among Rroms and Ashkali-Egyptians, but also with all the other populations of our area, in order to promote a new citizen of Kosovo, first committed to make his homeland blossom for the good of all the society and after that developing his/her ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage, sharing the best of it with all his/her fellow citizens.

Negligence, arrogance

Quite often, we are invited to meetings in Kosovo 24 hours before its opening, sometimes without the exact place and agenda being indicated, and accordingly it is impossible to fix the reservation, money provision and other formalities. When we complain that it is impossible to react over night and that we are afraid it is but a trick to avoid our participation, although if formally invitations have been sent, we have sometimes to face the real arrogance of civil servants, paid for staying in an office or participating in conferences, who speak with the language of prepotency. Being involved in peace-keeping missions or other humanitarian aid campaigns does not entitle anybody to treat others as low-ranking pawns.

Many big (and smaller) NGOs have found a new weapon to avoid new tasks: they just do not answer any question, suggestion or proposal, as if there were overcrowded by planet-wide labor. Silence is a very easy but also very damaging weapon, which may be interpreted as both negligence and arrogance. Some of them have found a compromise: automatic machines answering electronically that “the mail was not relevant to our activity” or that “actions of this kind do not belong to our current practice”. Postponing *sine die* requests of meeting with executives is also part of this avoidant strategy.

Wrong identification of the problems

The post-war situation in Kosovo did not erase the economical and social mechanisms characteristic of any human society. Therefore, ascribing to ethnic conflicts or resentment phenomena which in fact have their roots in classical economic and social problem might bring to some extent a kind of victim’s self-satisfaction but will by no means solve the problems. Special attention has to be paid to an objective

analysis of the social relationships in Mitrovica, beyond the discourse devoted to war complains.

Amateurism

It is true that quite often in democracy, a long time of hard work has to elapse before some results are achieved and this is not of the taste of many players, who demand immediate visible results. In fact, genuine improvement results often of boring small and lackluster actions and efficient measures in terms of democratic education have to be taken in order to teach people distinguish short term amateur fake successes and long term rebuilding of the city and confidence.

Unfortunately amateurism and ethno-tourist show a monopoly of local NGOs but we could observe several times such behaviour at the level of the European Rromani Forum. Indeed, although a good position paper has been circulated from this entity, concrete action as a follow-up is missing. Instead, sterile meta-discussions on professionalism take place, paradoxally between incompetent people, and block initiatives.

Another difficulty is the fast circulation of the international personnel on the spot. This phenomenon hinders progress of the initiatives, since very often, the international civil servants quit their position a few time after they get to know the situation and are replaced by new ones who need again a time of adaptation. In the same time, in each renewal, the contacts have to restart.

Racism disguised as anti-racism

There is a very pernicious form of racism: when the establishment agrees to cooperate with incompetent, non-representative and sometimes dishonest Rroms and/or Rromani NGOs, just relying of the fact that X is "a Roma himself" as they say in their cant. As a matter of fact, such organizations prefer this kind of cooperation in order to keep a paternalistic hand upon the Rroms, avoid possible problems which could arise for them from a real action lead by responsible Rroms or Rromani NGOs and keep afar Rroms who could question the dependence situation. Behind their alleged naivety, these structures are usually quite aware of what they are doing and only severely inexperienced or biased people can follow this position.

The sum of all these problems with the wrong perception of Kosovo traditional culture, as analyzed in the first part of this paper account for the delay with which reconstruction begins to be elaborated, at least on the paper. If combated systematically, they will lave an open gateway to an efficient work in Kosovo for the good of the entire local society and stability in the Balkan. If neglected, ignored or underestimated, they will keep the detrimental present situation for years and years.

1) The project itself

The enquiry

Prior to any decision or planning of the area, we need to know exactly, though a kind of class action, the intention of the families regarding their own future: do they intend to remain in the host country or to return to Mitrovica. For this purpose, a very detailed survey has to be carried out and commitments of the families have to be gathered in written.

It will be carried out by a group of persons, for which we propose the following names (persons chosen after their neutrality in the conflict, lack of family feud and generally speaking benefiting of great respect among all communities):

Sheikh Enver Bajrami currently based in Bielefeld (Germany)

Ganija Rušiti currently based in Unna (Germany)

Muhamet Salihi, in Wesseling (Germany)

Enver Sahiti Ass. "Rromano Phralipe", in Besançon (France)

Januz Maljoku, in Troyes (France)

Saimir Mile, jurist, based in Paris (France)

dr Marcel Courthiade, professor, Paris (France)

dr Ramadan Kajtazi, Belgrade (Serbia)

Sahiti Sedat ex-mayor's worker of "Rasadnik"-mahala Mitrovica now in France

Zoran Ibrahim, Teacher in Mitrovica's school, now in France

Sheikh Adnan Nuredini based in Besançon (France)

The work in the archives and cadastre

It is absolutely necessary to clear up as soon as possible the cadastral situation of the Mahláva area, in order to avoid eventual conflicts between the members of the community. As already suggested by the city-council of Mitrovica, it will be necessary to divide the possible candidates to house reconstruction into four categories:

- a. those in possession of full property documentation
- b. those whose properties were known by the cadastre, but were not legalized
- c. those who had not declared their properties to the municipality/cadastre for legalisation
- d. those who lived in the houses entrusted by emigrants owners

The circulation of information about the real situation on the spot

- A. The following points have to be insisted on as widely as possible among Kosovo inhabitants of all ethnic background:
 - the Rroms are not responsible for slaughtering any people, spontaneously or forced by others: no occurrence has ever been evidenced so far.
 - they have nor been responsible either for a number of other crimes, as illustrated by the hereby included series of drawings.
 - in rare cases (which have to be identified; a figure as to be calculated – according to our information, they were 8 persons in Mitrovica, a city with appr. 8.000 Rromani inhabitants) a handful of Rroms carried properties looted from abandoned houses on behalf of non-Rromani looters, this for various reasons which have to be identified themselves.
 - one has to figure out if proceedings against these persons will be productive for the sake of good common life in the future.

- the only Roms who really looted abandoned houses during the absence of the Albanian owners were coming from southern Serbia and some Albanians of so-called “eastern Kosovo” (Bujanovc and the area) also participated in the operations of looting and vandalism, the way Albanian highlanders from neighboring Albania did the same in the southern part of Kosovo.
 - most accusations against Roms arose from a misunderstanding of an interview in Qafa e Morinës by the French journalist Hervé Brusini and this error was circulated further by unaware Italian press, while some Albanian media used it for mercantile sensation.
 - the position of some Roms was sometimes ambiguous (with Serbian forces) but not criminal, since some intercourses were not really motivated by bad intentions, rather by a kind a blind allegiance to what was viewed as loyalty to Tito’s heritage. One should emphasize that this situation did not come overnight (then people could have responded more frankly) but progressively.
 - in some cases, Roms appear as childishly servile to the internationals, viewed as systematically pro-Serb: a Rrom, a civil servant at the city hall of Prizren, declared that “the Albanians are cunning” to a Russian-speaking Italian representative, unaware that this person would repeat this statement at the first occasion to Albanians – a non-sense but dangerous statement, since one could ask: who is not cunning among the various people?
- B. The cases of mutual assistance between people of various ethnic backgrounds during the darkest days of the conflict have to be made visible and used in education, especially cases of solidarity between women of different identities.
- C. The present day situation has to be described regularly, including positive steps in negotiations between Rromani organizations and the various local authorities. Among others, it is important to say – and possibly to show, that everybody can speak Rromani in any place in Kosovo, without any problem. It is also important to evidence that the Rromani children can attend not only Serbian school, but also Albanian school without any problem.
- D. Art and music have to be used widely to create events where peoples of various origins, especially youngsters, will meet each other again.

An analysis of “fear”

It is important to combat alleged fear of the Roms

- fear maintained by the lack of communication between Roms and Albanians
- no dialogue
- no progress
- psychosis keeps growing (or would keep growing still 2 years ago, or at least was maintained at a “good” level)

Fear is not an absolute argumentation; fear may be also a political construction of destructive character.

The school and intercultural premises in Mitrovica

The municipality of Mitrovica agrees to adapt the building of the ancient agricultural enterprise as a school for Mahàla’s children. This decision is very welcomed by the Roms of Mitrovica. However, it would be necessary that in this same building, a part to be used as an intercultural centre, especially for the youth and the women.

The school curriculum

It has to comply with the recommendations and programs issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, including a good part of Rromani linguistic presence. The following schemes can be proposed but we consider that only scheme A is realistic in the perspective of a society where Rromani has an equal room as other languages of the entity (in each proposal, left column is Rromani, right column is majority languages, namely Albanian and Serbian):

	A			B			C	
managing parents on language and culture heritage	+			+	+		+	+
majority L&C		+			+			+
other L&C	+	+		+	+			+
understanding of the world (nature and society)	+	+			+			+
active citizenship	+	+			+			+
occupational training	+	+			+			+

Summer schools, extra school activities, week-ends, distance education (including through T.V. programs) have to be organized in complement to school education.

I) Our demand is comparatively modest

Travels and conferences

A budget for travels between Kosovo and Diaspora sites is needed during all the period of elaboration of this project. It included 4 to 6 travels yearly for 2 persons of the steering committee in Paris and 1 to 2 travels for the heads of families who will be consulted in order to make the project acceptable by the families.

Summer schools and other extra school activities

At least 3 or 4 weeks of summer schools every year during the 5 first years of the program will be necessary, preferably on the spot, in order to familiarize the young potential returnees with the conditions of life in Mitrovica, while providing them with useful knowledge in Rromani and active citizenship especially.

Similarly, excursions to other Rromani settlements in the Balkan can be of great effect for the children's self-esteem, as well as correspondence (including through web-cam) with other young Rroms in the world.

Media lobby

This part of the program is momentous since it will accompany and mirror for the wide readership in Kosovo all the positive steps taken by the negotiations and reconstruction itself; it will include a well devised strategy of inter-ethnic reconciliation and a small group of 2 to 4 persons, speaking as well Rromani as Albanian, Serbian and English will be needed on a regular basis for this purpose. A specific training will be probably needed for them at the beginning of their action.

Publications

It will be very important to start the publication of educational material in Rromani for the future curriculum and extra school programs. Printing will be trust afterwards to Kosovo implants after approbation by the Ministry of Education and Science. Material about the Ashkali/Egyptian minority will also be developed in Albanian and Serbian languages.

Standing consultation with this Ministry and with the school book expert group at INALCO (acting for dozens of minority languages all over the world, under prof. Genevève Zarate's headship) will be granted to the preparatory team of the school and extra school publications.

Political support to achieve recognition of Rromani as a European language and the Rroms as a European Minority with no compact territory

Not only funds are necessary, but also political support at all the levels where it can be of some profit for the restoration of intercultural life, including the European (CoE, OSCE, EU etc...) and world wide (UNO and similar) levels. Special attention will be drawn to exchanges with governments of countries where important Rromani communities live, including countries where a very positive pilot action has resulted very benefic during the last decade in this field.

Aid for the involvement of elder Rroms with a good command of Rromani

Many activities can be done with elder Rroms, for example research of collective memory and local history through Rromani language exchanges with them.

Health aid for the Rroms settled in the polluted areas of Trepça

The sanitary conditions of many Rroms living in Trepça of scavenging lead are quite appalling and a specific aid for them is very much needed. The recent evacuation does not seem to address the problem, since the new location is also polluted. This topic, as well as the concrete steps to be taken for ensuring an appropriate health aid could be discussed in the meetings of the commission.

J) Conclusion

As a conclusion, the problem of Mitrovica's Rromani Mahàla being a multidimensional one, it should be tackled as such, in a multidimensional approach. The reconstruction of the Mahàla is not just an urbanism project, even though this dimension is crucial. The reconstruction of the buildings is to be accompanied with measures of peace building, taken *lato sensu*. Just as the reconstruction of the houses and other buildings requires the participation of the inhabitants, the reconstruction of a harmonious social atmosphere requires the participation of all stakeholders. The commission proposed in this paper, while concentrating in the properties' topic, will also act as a mediator in the wider process of a sustainable return of the Rroms who wish to restart their life in their town. Last, but not least, this experience is supposed to be duplicated in other areas of Kosovo.