Human Rights of Roma Returnees in Serbia

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Situation report

Readmission and deportation to Serbia

readmission of asylum seekers who left the Republic of Serbia in the 90's and sought asylum in Western Europe and Scandinavia

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Readmission and deportation to Serbia

readmission of asylum seekers who left the Republic of Serbia in the 90's and sought asylum in Western Europe and Scandinavia

Dejan Marković

The problem of readmission of people who sought asylum in the European Union during the 90's is not a unique one for Serbia. As in other republics of ex-Yugoslavia, a migration trend was caused by the armed conflict and socio-economic circumstances created in war conditions. The greatest number of asylum seekers came from the countries most affected by the dissolution of Yugoslavia, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

The war in the period between 1991 and 1999 caused a continuous departure of citizens from the Republic of Serbia, primarily to Western Europe and Scandinavia, followed by transatlantic countries: Canada, Australia and the USA. The motives and reasons for departure depended on the following circumstances individuals and groups found themselves in:

- war conflict in Serbia and the region, leading towards an unclear situation and outcome;
- great numbers of dead and injured;
- mass military drafts;
- extensive refugee influx;
- general legal insecurity and impossibility to access the legal system;
- occasional shortages and price leaps of particular products;
- enormous inflation of domestic currency;
- rise in all criminal activities and illegal trade related to war stricken regions.

Migrants from Serbia came to EU and Scandinavian countries in great numbers and were granted "temporary protected status", as a form of refugee-migrant protection implemented in cases of great refugee influx and when it is impossible to carry out individual procedures required for accessing the right to asylum. Bearing in mind that we have here an exceptional measure created by the states' governments in question, the temporary protection status is usually prolonged after a one year period. It should also be noted that a certain number of people from Serbia entered the before-mentioned countries legally, did not seek asylum, and stayed illegally, or both entered and stayed illegally. EU states provided them with a certain standard of social and health care during their stay. Housing, clothing, shoes, food and money received from the state (social assistance) and children's education are the elements that influenced migrants from Serbia to attempt to keep their asylum-

temporary status or another form of protection at all costs. Many of them worked in the informal economy, or made an additional income with begging or illicit trade. Some of them sent the money that was left over to Serbia to purchase houses or building plots, expecting rightly the possible forced or "voluntary" returns.

This situation lasted until 2001, that is, until 1996/97 for Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija, who in accordance with the readmission agreement with the Serbian government faced massive forced returns until the Kosovo conflict broke out in 1998. The status of temporary protection for the rest of the migrants, Roma, Bosniaks, Serbs and others, ceased with the date approved, that is, with the lapse of the reason for which the status was granted. According to the Western European and Scandinavian governments' estimate, the change of government in Serbia since October 2000 represented the moment when the reasons for granting a 'temporary protection status' as institutional protection of refugee and displaced persons - migrants from Serbia in this case - ceased to exist. Consequently, the governments made the respective decisions. Bilateral readmission agreements with the Republic of Serbia were made up, signed, ratified and protocoled, binding both sides to admit or accept their own citizens whose legal grounds for stay in another country had ceased. The enforcement of these agreements meant a huge relief to the EU member administrations. Budget expenses for migrant sustenance were lowered – thus accomplishing demands by the domestic labour unions objecting the illegal labour force and meeting right-wing demands for decreasing the number of migrants of colour, unwanted in their luxurious districts and shopping malls. It was precisely for this reason that broad authorisation for dealing with the immigrants was issued to the organs of repression, namely the police, even approving the use of electric batons.

Thus started the harsh reality of forced returns to Serbia – of Serbian citizens and persons whose last destination prior to the departure abroad was Serbian territory.
The cessation of the refugee status is announced to people most commonly upon their receiving social assistance (or welfare), together with the date until which they have to leave the state in question. The decision is delivered in written form with the possibility of appeal, which however, in the majority of cases, was resolved in a negative manner. Migrants from

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Serbia who made an appeal against the decision often gave up all their savings to pay local lawyers in a failed attempt to stay in the country.
In such a situation, various kinds of active and passive forms of resistance to the authorities had been noted – going into hiding, changing cities or counties, crossing into other EU states, or other forms of deportation evasion. One type of active resistance cruelly sanctioned consisted of physical resistance to violent arrests and being forcibly taken to the airport for the deportation. Such painful and difficult situations took place mostly during the night or early in the morning (the so-called, "dawn raids"), when the police took action against individuals or families, who after the denied appeal had not left the country within the prescribed time.

On entering the premises inhabited by the migrants, the police would give them 30 minutes to pack up and leave. All large amounts of money were taken away from them – they would be left with only 50 to 100 euros per family. All this was often witnessed by the migrants' children. Forced deportation would take place after a time spent in the migration centre, required to gather a sufficient number of people for the so-called "charter flight". Otherwise, the migrants would be driven directly to the airport, where they would wait for hours to be deported. Usually, to the frightened migrants were given tranquillizers in order to keep them calm during the flight.

At the airport, the migrants were allowed to make a phone call in order to let their relatives and friends in Serbia know about their arrival, so that transportation to the final destination could be organized. Arrival in Serbia after a long time, the deportation circumstances and an uncertain future caused additional trauma and stress, affecting both grown-ups and children. Upon their return, both those who had somewhere to come back to and those who didn't, were faced with a dilemma: to stay and adjust oneself to the "new-old" conditions or immediately try to find a way to get back to the state they had been deported from, or a state they had not yet been to. Those who had to stay, were faced with lots of problems:

* no personal papers for themselves and children born abroad;
* interrupted education and no education certificates or documentation for children;
* no means of sustenance, unresolved housing issue;

* poor health conditions and access to health care;
* impossibility of employment and gaining an income.

If within the first three months upon their arrival to Serbia, returnees did not manage to solve any of the before-mentioned issues, more than one third decided to leave Serbia again at any cost, what is also known as secondary migration.

The problem of acquiring personal documents was at first based on the fact that returnees did not have any ID with them, or an invalid one. The only document they had was a travel document/one way travel certificate which they either left at the passport control counter at the border, or gave it back to the police station in their place of residence within 48 hours upon their arrival in Serbia. In order to obtain an ID, it was not always easy to ascertain where to get the birth certificate from. The same went for citizenship certificates. Reporting a residence status was once tied to the obligation of paying the owner of the house or flat, in return for being reported at the fictive address. A special problem arose for people who were, upon their return to Serbia, temporarily accommodated at their relatives' in one part of the country, while the needed documents were issued in the other part of the country. Most difficult was to provide returnees with personal documents, who were born in Kosovo and Metohija and deported to central Serbia. Displaced birth certificate records, procedures, taxes and expenses often reduced the whole undertaking to absurdity.

Returnees who had housing, some means and social connections dealt with the comeback more easily. Those who had no houses any more, or had sold them to be able to go abroad, were in a state of special social needs. A good thing was if they could stay with relatives or friends, without being in the way. The returnees who certainly had the hardest time, were families with children and lacking any of the before-mentioned options, not to mention financial means to rent a flat or house. They slept outside, in abandoned or improvised houses and cardboard shelters. Clothing they were able to bring along was mostly seasonal, so that clothes and shoes were a problem to be taken care of as well. Returnees' diet depended on their assets, just as housing and clothing did, so those who had - had it all, while the others had nothing. Frequently the only solution for such

situations was begging in public or going from house to house. Body hygiene and care for one's bodily health especially in wintertime, both for grown-ups and children, also depended on circumstances.

A part of returnees deported according to the readmission agreement had already been ill while still living in the EU countries and prior to their return to Serbia. Upon deportation and during the flight, they were provided with medical escort from the departure airport to the airport in Serbia. Additionally, they were given adequate medical therapy, such as medicines lasting for 20-30 days upon their return to Serbia, after which they were supposed to switch to the corresponding domestic medicaments. Those who had been hospitalised were met by medical crews providing transportation to the hospitals in Serbia, while neuropsychiatric patients were taken care of by the staff of such institutions in Serbia.

It often happened that returnees would get sick immediately upon returning to Serbia, which required providing help in terms of adequate health care. In cases of emergency medical help, like primary health care, there were usually no problems. However, when it came to medical treatment, staying at the hospital, medical therapy and taking medicines, operations, fitting of prosthetic devices or tooth removal, that is, different forms of secondary and tertiary health care, the situation was quite different. Due to the specific situation, returnees didn't have IDs on them, or health cards for that matter, which greatly complicated medical and administrative staff's attitude towards them. Regardless of the regulations, difficulties in the health care sphere were also felt by returnees' children who were often denied adequate help.

Returnees' children, especially those born abroad or who left Serbia when they were very young and started schooling abroad, found themselves in a very difficult situation upon returning to Serbia. The states which deported them together with their parents didn't mind the problem with education - whether the deportation took place at the beginning, middle, third or at the end of a school year. For children, the trauma of return is especially linked to the situation of forced return, where they were awoken at night or early in the morning, scared by the police, in a situation to experience the exertion of force, the shouting and cries of parents and the police, be pushed into police cars and

even be physically separated from their parents for some time. Children who packed their books and joyfully expected the next day to meet other pupils at school, suddenly found themselves in an unfamiliar world. In the majority of cases they didn't speak Serbian, while they were familiar with their mother tongue and spoke fluently the language of the country they lived in. All their certificates and documents had been left in the state they were deported from. They shared with their parents the hardest moments of being returned to Serbia.

The majority of readmission returnees were able to work, in their most productive period in life, though mostly without compulsory education (primary school) or incomplete compulsory education. Accustomed to high social standards for migrants, with the possibility of additional, although illegal ways to make money, they had problems getting by after their arrival in Serbia. Low level of social assistance and low pay for jobs performed by unqualified or underqualified labour force were a constant motivation for them to do illicit work also in Serbia, usually illicit trade of goods, or engaging members of the family in begging. They could turn to the job market or employment agencies for help only with IDs, since they did not have any diplomas or certificates. An extremely small number of returnees had gone through a craft or job course in the states they were banished from. The only jobs they could find in those states were simple positions of dustmen or sweepers, which was in some cases a required condition to obtain social assistance.

In a practical sense, getting used to living in Serbia, that is, active reintegration of returnees was aggravated by several factors. Firstly, returnees kept secret the fact and reason for their return to Serbia for a long time, thinking that by hiding the circumstances of their deportation they would alleviate their position and eventual return to the countries they had been banished from. At the time they were unaware of the fact that it was all according to an interstate agreement. On the other hand, those employed in state and local administrations, such as register offices, health centres, centres for social work, schools and employment agencies were not familiar with the fact that readmission returnees represent a specific and considerable part of population, with its own specific set of needs. All this contributed to the accumulation of problems neither taken care of by the state, nor the community, let alone non-governmental sector.

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Year:

2006	1,109
2007	719
2008	568
2009	814
2010	1,711
2011	1,937

When it comes to states returnees come from - the largest number of returnees noted is from Germany; Switzerland and Sweden come next, and the third is Denmark. In terms of national structure repatriate population is made out of minorities from Serbia, primarily Roma - over 80%, and others: Muslim Bosniaks around 10%, and the rest together with Serbs around 10%. According to place of birth and intention of return, returnees come from municipalities from the South of Serbia, Raška county, Eastern Serbia, Banat and Bačka and Belgrade. Most of the returnees are families – over 80%, and the rest are individuals.

The data refer only to deportation by plane; the number of those deported by other means of transport was not taken into account.

Source:
Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the Republic of Serbia, 2012

Roma signing away the family animals assisted by municipal officials at the Belville deportation. Begrade, Serbia, 2012

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Vranje

training on sustainable mechanisms for reintegration of Roma returnees

Zoran Panjković

Date and Place:
February, 25, 2012,
Vranje City Council Hall

Duration of Activity:
the training was one-day activity; preparation of the training was carried out during January and February, 2012.

Participants:
14 activists engaged in Roma-related issues from south of Serbia - Pcinja region (Vranje, Presevo, Bujanovac, Surdulica, Vladicin Han, Vranjska Banja).

The representatives of the following organizations / institutions participated in the workshop:
RKC (Roma Cultural Centre) from Vranjska Banja, organization „Narajan" from Presevo, the Nacional Council of Roma Nacional Minority, organization „Rukovanje", alder(wo)men from Surdilica, Vladicin Han and Vranje, health mediator for Roma people from Vranje, pedagogy assistant for Roma children from Vranje, Italian Consorcium of Solidariti.

Aim and topic of the training:
The main aim of the training was to enable Pcinja region's Roma activists working with Roma returnees on the basis of Readmission Agreement with EU to understand sustainable mechanisms for reintegration of Roma returnees and to acquire the knowledge in the following fields: harmonization of law on asylum in EU and imposed restrictions thereof; Instruments of the restrictive control of migrations; returning of citizens of Serbia on the basis of the Agreement on Readmission - experience and practice; the state's response to the challenges of forced migration; sustainable mechanisms for the integration of returnees.

Workshop leader:
The training was led by the trainer Zoran Panjkovic, advisor in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self Government, who is an experienced trainer, engaged in legal issues in the field of Roma rights. For the purpose of this training, he also acted as a representative of the competent state institution and a legal expert, so the training's participants were enabled to hear about related activities of the Government as well as relevant legal issues. On the other hand, such choice of the trainer was important, since this was also

an opportunity for a representative of the competent state authority to get information “from the field” and from the practice which also has to be taken into account when planning and implementing the activities of the Government.

Training highlights:
The training was designed in such a way to combine several training techniques: presentation of the trainer with discussion and interactive participation of the participants and group work (solving a case study on a Roma returnee family).

As for sustainable mechanisms of integration, many participants were not familiar with them, so we learnt that the following topics covered by the training program were especially useful: issues related to the possibility of conditional registration of returnees’ children in preschool and school institutions and ways of obtaining school or other documents from abroad; distinction between the terms "validation" and "equivalence"; procedure of obtaining a foreign birth certificate in a non-prescribed form; what the role of the Republic and what the role of the local authorities are.

The participants were particularly interested in the issues on solving the problems of returnees at the local level through inter-sector cooperation, cooperation between the civil sector and local government; development of projects and suggestions about applying for funds of donors or governmental organs, especially when it comes to addressing employment and social problems of returnees.
The training was also an opportunity for activists to exchange their experiences and clarify their various dilemmas on issues on reintegration of Roma returnees, their economic and social and human rights and problems these activists encounter in the practice.
The most common participants’ questions were related to the field of the state’s response to the challenges of forced returning i.e. measures and activities envisaged by the Strategy for the Reintegration of Returnees under Readmission Agreements, and in particular the specific forms of assistance to returnees upon arrival to Serbia.

Throughout the training, participants were providing their contribution by proposing, commenting, asking questions or presenting examples from their own experience and practice in working with returnees. They also provided their ideas and proposals on improving the work with returnees, as for example networking of NGOs with similar aims for applying for funding of joint projects

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where certain issues and activities would be covered by different organizations in accordance with their particular area of work aimed at assisting Roma returnees.

During the final part of the training, participants evaluated the training orally by commenting the content and the usefulness of the training for their work. We learnt that they had been very satisfied with the training in terms of importance of information, ideas and guidelines as well as the usefulness of the information provided. According to them, the following information was the most useful for them: step-by-step procedure in the implementation of mechanisms for integration as well as information on the competency of different authorities when it comes to certain types of problems to be solved in order to assist the returnees. They were also satisfied with the training method, work atmosphere as well as the trainer.

Our conclusion is that they were apparently very motivated to gain new knowledge useful for their work and to compare their experiences with what is currently being undertaken at governmental level. They deemed it very helpful for the purpose of planning and implementing of their own project in the field. Thanks to high motivation of participants and good preparation of the training, the goal of this activity was fully accomplished.

Organization of the training:
Training was well prepared both in terms of its content and logistic & organization (venue, selection of participants, etc). REKC engaged a local organizer who helped in the organization of the event as well as targeting and inviting the participants.

Vranje Municipality supported the organization of the event by providing the City Council Hall as the training venue free of charge, deeming this event important for their local community.

Kikinda

Workshop for young Roma returnees „Youth in action - be an immigrant, be equal!“

Aleksandar Janković

Date and Place:
March 24, 2012,
Centar za strucno usavrsavanje (Center for Professional Development), Kikinda

Duration of Activity:
the training was one-day activity; preparation of the training was carried out during January and February, 2012.

Participants:
18 citizens, Roma returnees from Western Europe (North Banat region, Vojvodina), mostly young, males and females equally.

Aim and topic of the workshop;
The aim of the workshop was to motivate participants (Roma returnees) to get actively involved in local community life.

Workshop leader:
The training was led by Aleksandar Janković, experienced in the work with vulnerable groups and citizens' participation.

Training methodology:
The seminar was designed in such a way to provide interactivity and group cohesion. By working in small groups, participants (1) defined a common vision of Kikinda in which participants would like to live, (2) identified obstacles in achieving this vision, (3) planned mini -actions in the community towards achieving the vision. In addition to theoretical inputs, work in small groups and discussions, participants actively participated in several games that were aimed at introducing a thematic unit or learning new skills through experience.

Workshop highlights:
During discussion and the group work, the participants listed a large number of ideas regarding types of support they need from others as well as peer-to-peer support, such as: establishing a recycling centre for secondary raw materials; organizing a charity concert to support the most vulnerable Roma; projects about fostering and promoting the cultural heritage of the Roma; helping Roma children to overcome difficulties in learning the Serbian language.

Evaluation of the workshop:
After the workshop, the participants filled in the evaluation questionnaires, from which we learnt the following:
General impression of all participants is that the main objective of the seminar (to motivate participants for more active participation in local community life) was successfully achieved;
Participants agreed that the workshop activities were interesting, well thought out and prepared in accordance with the theme of the workshop and so as to allow them to be actively involved;
Having been asked how they felt during the workshop, the most common answers were "pleasant", "relaxed", "excellent";
None of the participants did not mention anything specific that they had learnt during the worksop, but the most common response was "...I have learned a lot of new things ..."'

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Many participants mentioned the need of organizing more similar events; There were a few interesting comments in which the participants stressed out that it was "positive to know that someone wants to help" them. The results of this evaluation show that the theme of the workshop and the selected methodology were well accepted by the participants. Besides, their answers demonstrate their willingness to continue to work on their empowerment.

The trainer and REKC team estimated that this group had a solid potential for participation in local action for improving their position and/or increasing their visibility in Kikinda. However, we believe that the initiative for a joint action must originate from outside or at least from local Roma organizations.

Organization of the training:
Training was well prepared both in terms of its content and logistic & organization (venue, selection of participants, etc). REKC engaged a local organizer, a representative of the respectable Roma organization from Kikinda "Bozji put" who helped in the organization of the event as well as targeting and inviting the participants. This organization also helped us in finding a workshop venue free of charge.

Kikinda

Training for Romani non-governmental organizations and Roma activists from the North Banat.

Zoran Panjković

Date and Place:
April, 21, 2012,
Gradski edukativni centar
(City Educational Centre), Kikinda

Duration of Activity:
the training was one-day activity; preparation of the training was carried out during March and April, 2012.

Participants:
representatives of Roma NGOs, Roma returnees

Aim and topic of the training;
The main aim of the training: on the one hand, to provide Roma activists from the area of North Banat, with relevant information for their work with returnees on the basis of the Readmission Agreement with the EU, as well as with mechanisms for returnees' sustainable reintegration; on the other hand, to educate returnees and facilitate their self-organization and presentation of their demands for solving problems of their community.

Workshop leader:
The training was led by the trainer Zoran Panjkovic, advisor in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self Government, who is an experienced trainer, engaged in legal issues in the field of Roma rights. For the purpose of this training, he also acted as a representative of the competent state institution and a legal expert, so the training's participants were enabled to hear about related activities of the Government as well as relevant legal issues. On the other hand, such choice of the trainer was important, since this was also an opportunity for a representative of the competent state authority to get information "from the field" and from the practice which also has to be taken into account when planning and implementing the activities of the Government.

The training was designed in such a way to combine several training techniques: presentation of the trainer with discussion and interactive participation of the participants and group work (solving a case study on a Roma returnee family).

Training highlights:
The most frequent participants' questions were from the personal perspective of the problems arising from the returnees' situation. Presentations of individual experiences of returnees were particularly interesting in terms of their experience during the stay in the states of Western Europe and dealing with the legal system, procedures and administration.

What participants found especially important is solving the problems of returnees in the local community through partnerships with competent institutions and organizations, since, according to them, individual engagement makes no results. Throughout the training, participants were providing their contribution by proposing, commenting, asking questions or presenting examples from their own experience and practice in working with returnees. During the group work on case studies, they showed a good level of knowledge of procedures in obtaining identity documents and access to social rights.

The participants readily accepted the idea and proposals on networking between non-governmental organizations for the purpose of applying for funding of joint projects dealing with the challenges faced by returnees.

Evaluation:
During the final part of the training, participants evaluated the training orally by commenting the content and the usefulness of the training

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for their work. We learnt that they had been very satisfied with the training in terms of importance of information, ideas and guidelines as well as the usefulness of the information provided. According to them, the following information was the most useful for them: step-by-step procedure in the implementation of mechanisms for integration as well as information on the competency of different authorities when it comes to certain types of problems to be solved in order to assist the returnees. They were also satisfied with the training method, work atmosphere as well as the trainer.

Our conclusion is that they were apparently very motivated to gain new knowledge useful for their work and to compare their experiences with what is currently being undertaken at governmental level. They deemed it very helpful for the purpose of planning and implementing of their own project in the field. Thanks to high motivation of participants and good preparation of the training, the goal of this activity was fully accomplished.

Conclusions / recommendations:

* In accordance with the participants' inputs, we made some recommendations regarding improvement of the position of Roma returnees in this region as well as the work of NGOs dealing with their issues:
* Strengthening of partnerships between these NGOs, with involvement and engagement of returnees and especially young people, is needed;
* It is necessary to form a database on returnees at the local self-government level;
* The NGO's projects in this field should be focused on acquisition of identity documents, activities related to adult education, retraining and additional training, and maintaining the level of knowledge of foreign languages spoken by the returnees' children;
* Active monitoring of the actions of state authorities regarding self-employment and employment of disadvantaged groups.

Organization of the training:
Training was well prepared both in terms of its content and logistic & organization (venue, selection of participants, etc). REKC engaged a local organizer who helped in the organization of the event as well as targeting and inviting the participants.

Kragujevac

Workshop for young Roma returnees and Roma activists from central Serbia - Šumadija

Zoran Panjković

Date and Place:
May, 26, 2012,
Sala MZ Palilula
(Hall of the Palilula Community Centre),
Kragujevac

Duration of Activity:
the workshop was one-day activity; preparation of the workshop was carried out during April and May, 2012.

Participants:
Roma coordinator of the City of Kragujevac, representatives of Roma NGOs, Roma health mediators, pedagogical assistants, Roma returnees

Aim and topic of the training;
The main aim of the training was to enable Roma activists from the central Serbia - Sumadija to understand sustainable mechanisms for reintegration of Roma returnees and to acquire the knowledg related to self-organizing and addressing the prblems of returnees.

Workshop leader:
This worshop was also led by the trainer Zoran Panjkovic, advisor in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self Government.

Training highlights:
The workshop was designed similarly as previous workshop on this topic organized within this project. The workshop combined several training techniques: presentation of the trainer with discussion and interactive participation of the participants and group work (solving a case study on a Roma returnee family). The most common participants' questions were related to the state's response to the challenges of returnees, measures and activities envisaged by the Strategy for the Reintegration of Returnees under Readmission Agreement, specifically in terms of concrete assistance to returnees upon arrival at Serbia.

Participants were not sufficiently familiar with some specifics of returnees' situation, especially regarding: the possibilities within the role of the Roma Coordinator when it comes to conditional admission of returnee children in preschool and school institutions and ways of obtaining school and other documents from abroad; distinction between the term "validation" and

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"equivalence"; procedure with foreign birth certificates in an improper form; role of republic/ role of local authorities; applying for council housing and following of the open competitions for council housing from the date of publication to the deadlines for appealing.

Participants were especially interested in the following: solving the problem of returnees at the local level through inter-sector cooperation, cooperation between the civil sector and local government; suggestions regarding development of projects and applying for funds from donors or governmental organs, especially when it comes to solving social, employment and housing problems of the returnees. Participants demonstrated high degree of motivation for the training. They agreed with recommendations and suggestions regarding improvement of the work with returnees, need for networking of NGOs, Roma Coordinator and returnees themselves for joint projects dealing with the challenges faced by returnees.

Evaluation:
During the final part of the workshop, participants evaluated the workshop orally by commenting the content and the usefulness of the training for their work. We learnt that they had been very satisfied with the workshop in terms of importance of information, ideas and guidelines as well as the usefulness of the information provided.

Information regarding procedures for exercising their rights was most useful for them, such as procedures related to right to health care and right to social housing. They were also very interested in responsibilities of different authorities when it comes to the types of problems.

Conclusions / recommendations:
In accordance with the participants' inputs, we made some recommendations regarding improvement of the position of Roma returnees in this region as well as the work of NGOs dealing with their issues:

* Strengthening of partnerships between these NGOs, with involvement and engagement of returnees and especially young people, is needed;
* Their initiatives should be aligned with activities of the Roma Coordinator;
* The initiatives/projects in this field should be focused on the protection of especially endangered groups within returnees (disabled persons), activities related to adult

education, retraining and additional training, and maintaining the level of knowledge of foreign languages spoken by the returnees' children;
* Active monitoring of the actions of state authorities regarding self-employment and employment of disadvantaged groups.

Organization of the workshop:
Training was well prepared both in terms of its content and logistic & organization (venue, selection of participants, etc). REKC engaged a local organizer who helped in the organization of the event as well as targeting and inviting the participants.

Pčinja

Workshop for young Roma returnees from Pčinja region

Aleksandar Janković

Date and Place:
June 2, 2012,
City Council Hall, Vranje

Duration of Activity:
the training was one-day activity; preparation of the training was carried out during May and June, 2012.

Participants:
Roma returnees from Western Europe

Aim and topic of the workshop:
Similarly to the workshop held in Kikinda on March 24, the aim of the workshop was to motivate participants (Roma returnees) to get actively involved in local community life.

Workshop leader:
The training was led by Aleksandar Jankovic, experienced in the work with vulnerable groups and citizens' participation.

Training methodology:
As the topic and design of the workshop held in Kikinda had a positive effect toward the same target group, the REKC team in consultation with the trainer decided to apply the same methodology for this workshop. The seminar was designed in such a way to provide interactivity and group cohesion. By working in small groups, participants

* defined a common vision of Vranje in which participants would like to live,
* identified obstacles in achieving this vision,
* planned mini-actions in the community towards achieving the vision.

Unfortunately, unlike the group of Kikinda, participants of Vranje workshop did not have resources

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Training for Romani non-governmental organizations and Roma activists

Strengthening local Roma NGOs` capacity to work with returnees from EU countries

and experience to cover part related to joint actions. Due to that, instead of the third part of the workshop, participants were provided with information on positive practices in other communities and therefore encouraged to engage toward improvement of their position. In addition to theoretical inputs, work in small groups and discussions, participants actively participated in several games that were aimed at introducing a thematic unit or learning new skills through experience.

Workshop highlights:
Participants led active discussion. They had a lot of questions, with some going out beyond the topic of the seminar; however, representatives of REKC, the local partner and trainer managed to answer most of them. The prevailing attitude of participants remained largely unchanged until the end of the workshop, and that is the belief that changes must come "from above", i.e. that they should be implemented by the state and local government, while returnees themselves are unable to do much in order to improve their position.

The most frequent topics during discussion were related to individual economic status, but also to nurturing and promotion of Roma culture and music, as well as to sport and recreation of young Roma. This was the first experience of participating in a workshop for almost all participants. However, they showed high level of motivation for acquiring new knowledge and skills, but also their need to freely talk about their bad situation and problems.

Evaluation:
Instead of completing the evaluation questionnaire, participants were asked to graphically grade their satisfaction on the target drawn on the board. We drew the conclusion on usefulness of the workshop according to the proximity of "hits" to the center of the target. Based on that, we concluded that the workshop was well accepted by the group and that it was highly rated. In addition to it, participants were asked to write what they could do to improve the situation of the Roma in Vranje. Many answers were unrealistic or pessimistic in terms of possibility of change. However, some answers were optimistic in terms of readiness for engagement and cooperation.

Conclusions / recommendations:
After the workshop, using the participants' inputs, the trainer drew some conclusions regarding the engagement of local Roma returnees for improvement of their

position. Generally, the group has a potential for taking part in local actions for improvement of the situation of Roma and improvement of visibility of this population in Vranje. However, with the exception of a few participants, no one has had any prior experience in working in an NGO or activism. Therefore, an initiative from "outside" is needed in order to facilitate their active engagement.

Several individuals expressed particular interest to engage; however, they are lacking leadership potential, resources and knowledge, needed to initiate actions. In that sense, the trainer's recommendation was that future seminars/ workshops should be targeted at individuals with leadership potential and focused on improvement of their knowledge/skills in the field of social activism, team building, communication and public relations, in order to increase their capacity to initiate local actions.

Organization of the training:
Training was well prepared both in terms of its content and logistic & organization (venue, selection of participants, etc).

REKC engaged a local organizer who helped in the organization of the event as well as targeting and inviting the participants.

Changes in the project plan difficulties / challenges:
All activities were implemented successfully, without major difficulties.

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Report on the round table

Rights of Roma returnees in Serbia

problems, needs and solutions

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Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung SEE
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Roma Educational
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MP European Parliament
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Katina Schubert
Die Linke
Berlin

Kenan Emini
Alle Bleiben
Germany

Karin Waringo
Chachipe
Luxemburg

Sami Mustafa
Roma filmmaker

Erzsebet Zaharijević
a returnee from Germany

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Report on the round table

Rights of Roma returnees in Serbia

problems, needs and solutions

Dejan Marković, REKC

Roma education creative centre (REKC), in cooperation with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe (RLS), organized a roundtable entitled "Rights of Roma returnees in Serbia - problems, needs and solutions". The roundtable, held at Hotel Palace in Belgrade on November 10 and 11, 2012, was attended by around 40 participants, representatives of the European institutions, competent authorities, politicians, international organizations, non-governmental organizations from Serbia and the European Union, local self-governments, activists and Roma returnees from Western Europe.

The intention of organizers was to bring together relevant actors from Serbia and Europe to discuss issues related to the status of Roma returnees in Serbia, but also Roma migrants to Western Europe, as well as possible solutions to their current situation in terms of respect for their human rights and socio-economic status, both at local and national level of Serbia as well as in Western European states in which Roma migrate as asylum seekers. This gathering was organized as the final event of the one-year project carried out by REKC with the support of RLS. Within this project, workshops and trainings have been organized throughout Serbia in order to empower Roma activists and Roma returnees to self-organize and actively engage in the process of solving accumulated problems of this vulnerable migrant group.

The roundtable consisted of four thematic panels dedicated to certain aspects and possible solutions of this complex problem. The participants were welcomed by representatives of REKC and RLS. *Dejan Marković* from REKC gave a brief overview of the events that led to the migration of Roma to Western Europe in the last 20 years and to their returning to Serbia after the signing of Readmission Agreement, as well as the problems faced by this vulnerable social group in the fields of education, employment, health and social care and discrimination. *Boris Kanzleiter*, Head of the Office at Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe, emphasized the importance of this topic for RLS as the left political option organization for which the Roma issue is particularly important because it is often related to the issue of racism.

He pointed to its topicality both in Serbia and Western Europe in the context of the announcement of the possibility of abolishing the visa liberalization due to the so-called „false asylum seekers“ problem. In the introduction part of the event, the participants were also addressed by ***Dušan Ignjatović***, Director of the Government Office for Human and Minority Rights. He pointed out that, in spite of the good legal framework in this area, Serbia has many problems when it comes to respecting the human rights of vulnerable groups, discrimination and racism. In this respect, he stressed the importance of passing the anti-discrimination strategy which was currently being developed, and which would need to take the problem of the Roma minority into account. When it comes to the issue of the so-called false asylum seekers and announced abolition of visa regime, Ignjatovic believes that such decision would be an "easy solution" that would not lead to a real solution to the problem while it would deepen racism in Serbia as a fertile ground for discrimination. He also pointed out the obligation of the government to lead and coordinatate efforts of various stakeholders in solving the problem and in that regard, he expressed the readiness of the Office for the participation in the process.

The first roundtable panel, moderated by ***Anna Striethorst*** from RLS Brussels, was dedicated to issues related to migration policy in the European Union and Germany.

Cornelia Ernst, member of the European Parliament, talked about the current efforts of the EU regarding Roma integration issue. She pointed out the importance of the adoption of the European Strategy for the Integration of Roma from 2011. which, although not a binding document, presented a basis for the Member States for the planning and implementation of activities for the integration of Roma in the field of education, housing, health care and employment, but also opened the possibility of using the EU funds for implementation of projects in this area. However, she says that the Strategy failed to define objectives in the fight against racism and discrimination, which is an important aspect of sustainable solution of Roma issues. She also talked about the current situation in this field in some European countries that face big problems of discrimination and socio-economic status of Roma, giving examples from the Czech Republic

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and Hungary. She says there is a need to explain to countries in Western Europe that extremely poor living conditions make Roma people seek asylum and that understanding of this situation is important in order to terminate the pressure of the EU on the Western Balkans to prohibit its citizens from leaving the country and seek asylum. She concluded her speech by listing the most important tasks for improving the situation of the Roma population, pointing out the following: greater involvement of the Roma community in the European Union and cooperation within civil society sector, particularly Roma and non-Roma organizations on the Roma issues; use of funds combating racism in Europe; enabling free and better education for children and youth and additional education for Roma adults; social care and housing programs; fight against deportation of Roma to countries where they cannot achieve dignified living conditions and guarantee of the right to freedom of movement; recognizing Roma Holocaust.

Katina Schubert, a representative of the party Die Linke from Germany, spoke about the situation and the Roma rights in this country where there is a long-standing problem of discrimination against this minority, but also unwillingness of German policy to deal with the problem of racism against Roma, which is evident in the fact that it took 67 years for the Roma victims of the Holocaust to get their memorial in Berlin. As the Roma issue has actualized with an increasing number of asylum seekers from the Western Balkans but also migrants from Western Europe countries hit by the crisis, anti-Roma mood in Germany has increased while authorities' common reaction is proposing abolition of visa liberalization for the countries where so-called false asylum seekers come from. She pointed out that if we want free Europe, this means that there must be equal living conditions for citizens throughout Europe while the said reactions mean giving up the idea of such Europe. On the other hand, she gave a positive example - engaging the citizens of Berlin and Die Linke party in helping Roma – migrants from other EU countries who have settled in the park Kreuzberg. This case was also mentioned as an example of the need to solve numerous problems of Roma immigrants in a sustainable manner as well as the need for creating an infrastructure for self-organizing of Roma in Germany.

Kenan Emini, representative of Alle Bleiben campaign, who himself went through the experience of a migrant in Germany, spoke about the problems of discrimination faced by Roma who came to Germany as asylum seekers and how his organization was fighting for their political rights. He highlighted the problem of the status of asylum seekers - many of them receive a temporary document (Duldung) that does not give them the opportunity to realize the rights in this country (limited the right to movement, work and education, etc). Emini explained the aim of the initiative All Bleiben (All stay), which was supported by a number of organizations throughout Germany and Europe, and that was to prevent discrimination and deportation of people from Germany to Kosovo and Serbia. Giving the example of Kosovo, he also pointed out that, through readmission agreements and by falsely presenting good living conditions for Roma, the issue of asylum seekers has become a "good" traded between the Western Balkans and Europe for the purpose of introduction of visa liberalization.

Karin Waringo, from the organization Chachipe from Luxembourg, spoke about the activities of her organization on the issue of readmission of Roma in the Western Balkans. Chachipe stands against the pressure exerted by the European Commission on some contries' governments to come up with measures to reduce the number of immigrants seeking asylum. She pointed out that this pressure had caused a drastic violation of human rights in the field of freedom of movement, the right to asylum, the right to equality and non-discrimination. An extreme example of such situation is in Macedonia, whose citizens, only on the basis of their skin color, had got a label in passports indicating them as potential asylum seekers. She pointed out the absurdity of the situation in which the European Union indirectly required violation of human rights by measures to reduce asylum seekers. She also spoke about the discussions taking place in the European Union regarding the validity of reasons for seeking asylum, saying that discrimination is a legitimate reason for that defined as such by UNHCR.

After the panelists' presentations, participants discussed previously issues raised, while panelists provided further explanations on matters within their competence. Participants were inspired to start

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new topics. ***Lena Petrović***, Belgrade Center for Human Rights, mentioned that the draft of the new Criminal Code contained a disputable article that would incriminate enabling visa-free regime abuses. In her opinion, its adoption would open up more space for the violation of the rights of asylum seekers. She also mentioned the problem of the inefficiency of resolving the status of persons seeking asylum in Serbia. Miljenko Dereta, a member of the Serbian Parliament, raised the issue of representation of the Roma community and to what extent the national councils represented their ethnic community. He also stressed the need for fighting discrimination by educating the majority population. ***Srdjan Kamperelić***, Social Democratic Union, also stressed the need for changing perception of the wider social community, where the role of the media is crucial. ***Vera Kurtić*** from the organization Women's Space and Roma Women Network pointed out the lack of action and genuine activism in solving the problem of displacement. She also said that the national councils of national minorities did not properly present the interests of their community. Following up on the issue of activism, ***Kenan Emini*** expressed his view that, unlike Europe, Serbia did not have a favorable democratic "climate" for real action against discrimination.

The second session, moderated by ***Dejan Marković***, was devoted to personal experiences of Roma - returning to Serbia. At the beginning of the session, the participans watched a part of the film Nakino by the author ***Sami Mustafa***. The film draws attention to the problem of Roma returnees and it is a story about two brothers who were deported from Germany to Kosovo and thus separated from family and friends.

Erzsebet and Tibor Zaharijević talked about their experience of staying as asylum seekers in Germany where their asylum application had been rejected after several years, as well as on the problems they had encountered after returning to Serbia, especially the problem of validating daughter's school diploma. Upon returning to Serbia, they founded an organization that helped Roma returning from Western Europe to Serbia, i.e. Banat. Among the problems they face in their work, Zaharijević pointed out the lack of funds for projects and insufficient involvement of Roma NGOs in solving the problem.

Lidija Mirković, Romani filmmaker, gave several examples of mass protests in Germany organized in Germany since early 1990's to early 2000's by activists supporting the people who were about to be deported from the country. She pointed out that today, although easier to obtain information on Roma issues than before, there was an intimidating situation, because it often happened that the public went silent on problems while there were more and more attacks on Roma people.

The participants in the discussion provided their opinions and comments on issues raised during the two panels. Referring to Lidija Mirković's comment on public silence, *Nikola Radić Lucati* said that even just leaving the responsibility to others was a sign of fascism and that the tacit agreement to ignore the problem should have been appropriately named and identified. He believes that the country that allows poverty based on national, racial and other basis produces refugees on economic basis which makes their application for asylum valid. *Zlatko Ristić*, who was returned to Serbia after 14-15 years of residence in Germany, talked about his bad experiences after returning, especially about issues related to language skills, education, employment, social integration. Dejan Marković said that there was a specific problem of separation from family members in cases of returning people under the Readmission Agreement. He also questioned the legal basis on which it was decided that Roma who had left SFRJ because of the war, were now returned in countries formed after the disintegration of the SFRY, while no country of the former Yugoslavia, in fact, was not the legal successor of SFRJ.

The third panel, moderated by *Vladan Jeremić* from RLS, was dedicated to the topic - migration policy in Serbia.

Žarko Korać, Serbian National Assembly Deputy Speaker, said that Serbia lacks a consistent policy toward the Roma community and its specific problems and that in a long period of time very few measures had been passed in order to improve the position of this community. According to him, one of the few positive steps are the recently adopted amendments to the Citizenship Act which for the first time allowed people without identity documents (majority of them are

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Roma) to register as citizens of Serbia. There are national councils of national minorities, while some national communities have their own parties or their representatives in political life; however, according to him, the Roma community is not well organized politically, and its political representatives poorly represent their community. In his opinion, Serbia lacks identifying the main problems related to the Roma community, and especially the following problems: first, in the field of education, where one we have to ask whether the state have provided the conditions for Roma children to go to and finish school; second, in the field of employment, where unemployment figures, a large number of unemployed Roma, are also a political issue; and third, "political exodus" of Roma and the so-called phenomenon of false asylum seekers, namely the situation where people, having no alternative for better living conditions in some regions, try to move to Western Europe. According to him, announced abolition of visa regime would lead to increase of hostility towards the Roma community. He believes that Serbia is powerless to solve the problem of the so-called false asylum seekers, while many of the proposed measures (such as confiscation of passports of potential asylum seekers) would constitute a violation of human rights.

Miljenko Dereta, MP and former executive director of the Civic Initiatives, spoke about the failure of the state to solve the problems of the Roma population. He criticized the Draft Law on Migration, which is currently in parliamentary procedure – it provides for the competency of the Commissariat for Refugees for so-called false asylum seekers and for keeping some kind of records about them. In his opionion, assigning such authority to this institution, which has been failing to address the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons for years, will not contribute to solving this problem.

He also said that the number of so called false asylum seekers in Europe was relatively small to become so important political issue, while, on the other hand, mass immigration of educated young people from this region was not found problematic, which is another indication of the growing discrimination in Europe. He also pointed out that Serbia did not have preventive and systemic approach in the field of discrimination, which was evident in the state's relation to education

where the values inconsistent with the principles of human rights were promoted.

Nebojša Selistarević, a member of the National Council of the Roma minority, spoke about the Council's jurisdictions and its engagement on the issue of so called false asylum seekers, stressing that the aim of the Council is to protect the rights and ensure freedom of movement of Roma in accordance with the Constitution and international documents. He believes that employment of Roma is a priority, because it is natural that the Roma who do not have possibility to get a job leave the country in the hope for a better life.

As for the contribution of the Council, he is not fully satisfied, but believes that the country has made some progress by passing strategic documents treating improvement of the Roma situation. Silistarević believes that engagement of the Roma themselves is important since they best understand the problems they face.

Matthew Newton, the OSCE Mission to Serbia, said that Serbia, although it had made progress in strengthening the institutional legal framework on migration, had big problems in its implementation. The problems are also related to the fact that the state does not have needed information; for example, there is no complete record on the people who returned to Serbia on the basis of the Readmission Agreement, because most of them did not addressed the state institutions. Further, he pointed out the need for strengthening the capacities at the local level, because returnees depend on this kind of support system most. Finally, he stressed the problem of insufficient engagement of civil society and Roma activists when it comes to cases of violation of the rights of Roma, saying that so far it had often been the case that international organizations react instead of them.

At the end of the first day of the round table, participants were keen to actively discuss a number of issues raised during the day. The following issues were discussed most: is the state discriminatory towards Roma and whether there are reasonable grounds for seeking asylum, and whether in the case of Serbia, economic reasons are in fact political reasons for seeking asylum; what are the arguments of Western countries for initiating the issue of so-called

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false asylum seekers; whether the Roma community is sufficiently engaged in the fight for their own rights and why it is important; why it is important that other segments of society are engaged in solving the problems of the Roma and how much the role of the international community is important; the responsibility of local governments to solve this problem, etc.

The final panel was held on the second day of the event and was devoted to issues related to institutional policy towards migrants and returnees in accordance with the Readmission Agreement. The panel moderator was *Dejan Marković*.

Zoran Panjković from the Office for Human and Minority Rights, talked about the steps undertaken by the state in this field since 2005, when the problem became current, and especially about the tasks of the Readmission Office at the Belgrade airport as well as the adoption of the Strategy on the integration of returnees. According to him, work on the integration was not successful enough which is proved bz the fact that more than 30% of returnees again return to countries of Western Europe. Pointing out that the Strategy defined the place of residence of a returnee as a place where the problems are solved, he says that local governments have a great responsibility and they have failed to deal this problem in a right way. Also, he believes that management of funds intended for the integration of returnees should be centralized and proposes establishment of a fund for the integration that would perform such duty.

Jadranka Bubalo, Department of Employment of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, presented the work of the Ministry and the National Employment Service in this field. As a part of her presentation, the Service's statistics on returnees were publicly presented for the first time. According to the data, there are only 64 unemployed people within the category of returnees, which does not correspond to the real situation. She believes that the reason for that is the lack of information that such persons have the possibility to exercise their rights as returnees by registering at the National Employment Service. She believes that the police should be involved in solving the problem by issuing a document proving their status of returnees. She also said that the National Employment Strategy,

2012-2020, recognized this category of citizens as vulnerable and less employable. Like other panelists, she emphasized the importance of active involvement of all stakeholders on solving this problem at the local level, pointing out the hitherto great contribution of the NGO sector.

Branislav Nikolić, pedagogical assistant in Kragujevac and Roma activist, spoke about his experience in work with Roma returnees in the area of education, the problems of their inclusion in the school and pre-school system, problems with obtaining identification documents and the need for greater support from the government. Zoran Pavlović, Coordinator for Roma issues within the City Department of Health, Social Policy and Social Care of Children in Kragujevac, spoke about competencies of local authorities and readmission issues at the local level. Given that this particular group needs various types of support, he stressed the need for involvement and coordination of all stakeholders in order to address this problem at the local level.
At the end of the roundtable, participants expressed their opinions, impressions, recommendations and conclusions from the event. As it was the case during the round table, the following issues were discussed most in the final part of the event: the problems of violation of human rights and the so-called false asylum seekers in Western Europe and returnees in Serbia, the issue of discrimination against Roma in Serbia and the importance of looking at the problem in this context, whether the inability of Roma to exercise their rights in Serbia and Kosovo is the basis for political asylum, the importance of the role of the international community and the importance of the role of local Roma activist, about the great role and responsibility of the state to resolve this issue in a political way.

The general conclusion is that the roundtable represents an important event for exchanging the views, mapping and getting a wider perspective on this complex issue and that it represents an important initiative for action as well as the call on the cooperation of various stakeholders who should be involved in its solution.

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