



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
MISSION IN KOSOVO

**Remarks of Ambassador Werner Wnendt,
Head of OSCE Mission in Kosovo,**

On civil registration of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities

Ferizaj / Uroševac, 25 June 2007

The OSCE Mission made an analysis of civil registration of persons belonging to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. It is based on interviews conducted by OSCE Municipal Teams throughout Kosovo and looks at how instructions aimed at facilitating the registration requests submitted by applicants from these communities are carried out. The report can be found at http://www.osce.org/kosovo/item_1_25281.html.

Ladies and gentlemen, municipal authorities, distinguished representatives of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, thank you very much for coming here.

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo has always considered its support to communities, in general, and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in particular as one of its priorities.

I am therefore very pleased to visit Ferizaj/Uroševac, a municipality that numerous members of the Ashkali, Roma and Egyptian communities call "home", and to present to you the OSCE report on "Civil Registration of Persons Belonging to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities".

We decided to research this issue as civil registration is a fundamental prerequisite for the access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is undisputable that everyone has the right to be recognised everywhere as a person before the law.

This is an issue of particular relevance to these communities and to Kosovo. It is estimated that 20 to 40 percent of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians living in Kosovo are not registered as habitual residents and have no civil status registration.

Yet without proper civil registration, a considerable number of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, including those which might be involuntarily repatriated to Kosovo, face serious re-integration obstacles and have no or only limited access to municipal services, as well as to adequate education, employment and other re-integration opportunities.

This was recognized as an issue by the government in May 2006, and it explicitly instructed municipalities "to ensure that pending registration requests for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians are completed in the next six months".

To support the implementation of the government recommendations as well as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees civil registration campaign targeting members of these communities, the Mission monitored the practices of 28 Municipalities and three Pilot Municipal Units in December 2006 and January 20.

As this report reveals, it is necessary that the PISG acknowledge the importance and relevance of this problem for the future of Kosovo. A major step would be to develop a policy supporting the identification of unregistered persons and processing of their applications within these communities.

Such a policy should recognise that the involved persons are particularly vulnerable, as they often have no written documents to prove their identity and eligibility. Some measures can therefore be taken: the use of witness procedures should be extended; the temporary exemption of applicants from administrative fees should be considered; and the registration of persons with documents issued by parallel structures should be thought about.

In addition, as is highlighted in the report, the collection of monthly statistics on applications submitted and solved cases should become a common practice; public awareness activities on the importance of civil registration should be intensified; outreach activities targeting the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities should be multiplied and co-operation with these communities strengthened.

Let me also underscore the importance of adopting a gender-sensitive approach which assists mothers in registering home-born children. The recruitment of qualified Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians within the relevant municipal authorities will also increase the capacity of the involved institutions to reach out to these vulnerable communities.

It is clear from our report, that breaking the cycle of exclusion from civil registration is a complex and difficult process that requires the engagement and co-operation of several central and municipal institutions.

It requires that the specific situation of the vulnerable members of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo, who do not exist before the law due to the lack of civil registration, is taken into account and addressed.