



## **Policies Toward Sustainable Integration Discussed by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians of Kosovo with the Kosovo Government and the International Community**

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### **Press Release**

*For Immediate Release*

On October 22, 2008, the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) held an international roundtable to discuss challenges and prospects of sustainable integration of Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in host countries and in Kosovo itself. The event was held at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna and was organized by PER with the support of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The meeting gathered representatives of European governments, international organizations, Kosovo government representatives and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.

The topics debated during the roundtable included: prospects for integration of these communities in host countries, the return process to Kosovo, living conditions for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo, and conditions for integration of returnees in Kosovo.

Following major conclusions have emerged from the discussions:

- The policies of forced returns by the host countries are ineffective and unsustainable as many of those returned by force leave the country shortly after their return;
- Voluntary and informed return, as argued by some participants, can be sustainable, provided that it is well coordinated with the Kosovo authorities;
- Romani participants were against forced return, pointing to the evident fact that presently there are no conditions in place in Kosovo to ensure sustainable livelihood;
- Kosovo authorities generally acknowledged that they have limited resources to provide for successful reintegration of returnees, especially in large numbers;
- Participants acknowledged some improvements in Kosovo with regard to these communities, but not to the extent necessary for UNHCR to change its position regarding the protection of these groups; there are still safety-related concerns maintaining the recommendation against forced returns.

A more detailed report will be available soon on PER's website.

*PER is an international non-governmental organization with offices and representations in Central and Southeastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that works towards improving ethnic relations in the region. PER has a long history of engagement in facilitating interethnic dialogue in the Balkans. PER has been working on issues important for the Romani communities in Europe for almost two decades.*