

REPORT ON THE COMPLETION OF THE PROJECT

“ON THE STATUS OF THE MINORITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA”

Under the direct auspices of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, from September 1999 to September 2000, an intensive work was carried out for the realization of the project “On the status of the minorities in the Republic of Albania”. This project was financed by the Finnish Foundation ‘KIOS’, “Finnish NGO Foundation for Human Rights”.

In order to accomplish the above project, 11 fact-finding missions were organized in various districts of the country, and specifically as follows:

1. Four fact-finding missions were organized in the Greek minority area: two in the district of Sarande and its numerous villages and communes, including the town of Delvina, and two others in the district of Gjirokaster, respectively one in Upper Dropull and the other in Lower Dropull.
2. Two observations were conducted in the region of Prespe, where the Macedonian minority lives in Albania. Special attention was paid to the nine villages along the border, where the above minority lives. Within the framework of these observations, contacts were established with organs of the local administration in the town of Korca, and certain Macedonian authorities across the border.
3. Two fact-finding missions were sent to the Montenegrin minority that lives in some small villages north of Shkoder town, close to the border with Montenegro.
4. Three other missions were organized for the Roma minority that lives in Albania. The observations were performed in the districts of Tirane, Durrës, Fier, Korce, Bilisht, Elbasan, etc.

The fact-finding teams for each mission consisted of three to five persons, among them members of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, journalists, university teachers, students, individuals from the above-mentioned minorities in Albania, etc.

In addition, regarding specific issues of these minorities, contacts were established with representatives of the Parliament and various governmental bodies. The organs of the local administration were also contacted in all the towns and villages, where the observations were conducted, as well as the representatives of

the organizations established in this country for the protection of human rights and the interests of the respective minorities.

The work teams have presented detailed written reports during all the period needed for the realization of the above project. The teams have regularly and correctly reported also on the financial costs of each fact-finding mission.

Based on the information collected from the observations, separate files have been prepared for each minority living in Albania, and various data and views of the border areas have been attached to them.

A considerable part of the information received during the observations has been published in the periodic bulletins of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, as well as in its trimestral reports. The Committee has also issued statements on the minority questions, and has published articles in different newspapers for raising the public awareness. Assistance has also been rendered for the release of two TV programs on the minority issue, etc.

In another stage, if it is judged reasonable, round tables may be organized and TV programs, where the participants may discuss about specific matters of the minorities living in Albania.

Taking into consideration the work done by the fact-finding teams, we can give a concise description of the status of minorities in Albania, as it follows:

I. GREEK MINORITY

Undoubtedly, the Greek minority constitutes the biggest minority living in Albania. Up to the beginning of 90-ies, the total number of the Greek minority people reached the figure 60-70 thousand. Recently, this figure has considerably decreased. Following the opening of the borders, the inherited backwardness and the numerous economic difficulties of the period of transition in Albania, a considerable part of the population of the southern regions of the country have succeeded in temporarily living and being employed in Greece. In this aspect, the most privileged have been the Greek minority subjects.

It is a fact that, among other things, they have been favored in being granted visas (up to 5 years), permits of stay, employment, education for their children, medical assistance, etc. This is one of the reasons for the actual decrease of the number of the Greek minority people. Our fact-finding teams have observed that in many villages where the Greek minority people live, the number of those who have temporarily left for Greece goes up to 40-70 % of the inhabitants. However, they

keep regular contacts with their relatives in Albania, and pay frequent short visits to their homes. This is specially observed on the occasions of religious holidays or general and local elections in the country. There are cases, when, with the money they have earned in Greece, they build new dwelling houses, start some small business, like opening and running hotels and restaurants along the coast, etc.

It is worth being mentioned that, despite the long period of their stay in Greece or the difficulties for keeping close contacts with their homeland, the Greek minority people never sell their houses or the other real estates they possess in Albania.

As we have already mentioned before, the observations were conducted in the districts of Sarande, Delvine, Himare and Gjirokaster (in both Upper Dropull and Lower Dropull).

Sarande

For the town of Sarande, one of the main towns where the Greek minority population has been concentrated, we may forward the following data:

Up to the year 1990 the population of the town consisted of 17 thousand inhabitants, of whom 7500 came from the Greek minority. Presently the town has got 30 thousand people. Those who have moved recently to Sarande, have come from the villages of the districts of Vlore and Gjirokaster, from the region of Kurvelesh, etc. This move has been simply due to economic reasons. Being a seaport, Sarande offers greater employment opportunities, especially in the fields of tourism and trade. Formally, the number of Greek minority people has not changed, but in fact there are not more than 3500 Greek minority people in the town. The rest of these people are temporarily working and living in Greece. As we have already mentioned, there are people who, by means of their income in Greece, have started to invest in the town of Sarande in small business, hotels, etc.

There is an 8-year school in Sarande with programs in Greek language. Because of emigration, the number of the pupils has obviously dropped. A big Orthodox Church has been built in the center of Sarande with the financial aid of Greece and the Greek minority. The district of Sarande consists of 64 villages of which 33 are inhabited by Greek minority people. 50-70 % of the population of all the villages, and especially of the Greek minority villages, have left for Greece. During the war in Kosovo, 2700 Kosovars were sheltered in Sarande. They were welcomed by the locals, and the Kosovars left Sarande with pleasant impressions. There was big fuss in the Greek media and in some circles of the Greek minority about this problem at that time, spreading the idea that the Kosovars would settle in the houses and lands of the minority people, who had emigrated in Greece.

The fact-finding teams observed also that the minority subjects are considerably represented in the structures of the local power. Thus for example, 8 members of the District Council of Sarande, which consists of a total of 24 members, come from Greek minority, including the Chairman of the Council and his deputy. One can find almost the same situation in the administration of the Municipality of Sarande. Our teams observed also that the Greek schools in the area of the Greek minority have been functioning regularly, and in some cases they have ignored even the small numbers of the pupils in some classes. Thus classes have been kept opened with special programs with only 3-4 pupils. In the mean time, many Orthodox churches have been either constructed or renovated in all the region of Greek minority. Besides, there are villages along the border with Greece like Leshnice, where six churches function.

A considerable financial assistance has been rendered by Greece and the Greek minority people themselves for the reestablishment and the functioning of these churches. The Greek government has provided aid and support for the Greek minority population in other directions, too – among other things we can mention:

- study rights and scholarships
- free medical service
- free assistance in books and other school items for the schools teaching in Greek
- A monthly salary of 50 thousand Greek drahmes for the teachers, who teach in Greek in the schools of the minority region.
- Monthly pensions of 30-40 thousand Greek drahmes for the elderly minority people (these pensions are four or five times higher than those of the Albanians).
- Assistance in infrastructure, etc.

The written media in Greek language has considerably developed in the recent years. Thus, we may mention the newspaper “2000”, the magazine “Progress”, etc.

It is a fact that after the year 1997, there were periods of time when the people in the minority areas experienced insecurity and tension, because of criminality, thefts and kidnappings. The criminal activity was relatively stronger in the minority areas not only because the state structures did not function, but also because of the opinion spread among the criminal circles that the minority people were richer and had greater incomes because of the work in Greece, etc.

However, the efficiency of the fight against criminality in the last year has brought back the confidence to law, order and peace among the Greek minority people.

The representatives of the Greek minority claim for a greater representation in the structures of the local government, police, etc. Their claim regarding local structures may be considered and improved, while in regard with their participation in police forces we were told by the Chief of Police Commissariat that it is true that there are a few minority people in the police, but it is true also that there is no formal request or application on their part.

Delvine

According to data collected by our fact-finding team in the district of Delvine, it results that it consists of 37 villages, and has got a population of 30 thousand people, out of whom 15 thousand are Greek minority people. The Greek minority population is mainly concentrated in the town of Delvine, in 18 villages that are completely inhabited by Greek minority people, and in 4 villages that have a mixed population. In the last years, more than half of the Albanian population and 2/3 of the minority population have left for Greece. Compared to 1990, the population of Delvine town has been reduced to half (from 8000 to 4000 people), while the Greek minority population has dropped from 2000 in 1990 to 500 at present. Most of the people who have left try to keep contacts with their families. The 8-year school in Delvine had about 250 pupils in 1990, while nowadays there are 100, out of whom only 20 come from Greek minority families. In all the villages where the Greek minority lives in this district, Orthodox churches have been reopened and renovated.

The population in the district of Delvine is mainly engaged in animal husbandry. Investments have been scanty.

Himara

A special observation was conducted in the town of Himare, which lies on the Albanian seacoast, between Vlore and Sarande. The Greek minority organization "OMONIA" has been asking for more than 3 years that an elementary school should be opened even in Himare, based on the idea that there is a considerable number of Greek minority people in this town, too.

The data collected by our observation team, and the many talks they had with the local people in Himare, show that the number of Greek minority people in Himare has been always small. In ancient times, the coastal town of KAONIA was situated precisely where Himare lies nowadays. In the course of our history, and especially during the Ottoman occupation, Himare has distinguished itself as a

successful center of resistance against foreign rule. That's why Himare enjoyed a special autonomous status within the Turkish Empire. Remaining isolated by the Turkish Empire, especially in the 18-th and 19-th centuries, the people of Himara established close ties and developed an intensive trade with some Greek towns. It is mentioned that from this time, in addition to their mother tongue, the locals started to learn Greek language as well.

During the regime of Ahmet Zogu in Albania (1924-1939), as part of the pressures exerted on the Albanian government for the fulfilling of certain obligations accepted by Albania, when she joined the League of Nations, an elementary school in Greek language was opened in Himare in 1936, which was closed after the Italian fascist occupation of Albania in 1939. During the communist regime (1945-1990), schools in Greek language were opened in all the areas where the Greek minority lived, but such schools were never opened in Himare, on the ground that the Greek minority did not exist there.

Actually, there are 3 thousand inhabitants in Himare, and only a very small number belong to the Greek minority. Almost half the population of Himare has moved to Greece, especially young people and children. The 8-year school of the town had about 100 pupils in 1990, while presently there are only 20 pupils in it. Lastly, it is worth being mentioned that, like in the other areas of the Greek minority in Himare, too, the Greek government gives pensions to the elderly people. Many people, who were interviewed by our team, confirmed that, owing to pragmatic reasons, they have accepted such a financial contribution, though they do not feel that they belong to the Greek minority.

The issue of Himare will remain in the agenda of the activity of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, aiming at an accurate clarification of the situation. For this, we shall be keeping in touch with local population and authorities. Special attention will be devoted to the opening of a school in Greek language there.

Gjirokaster

Another big grouping of the Greek minority is found in the district of Gjirokaster, which has been divided into the areas of Upper Dropull and Lower Dropull.

All the region of Dropull lies at the foot of a mountain, once you leave Gjirokaster heading further to the south. Almost all the villages of the Greek minority, 33 altogether, follow each other, parallel to the national road, which runs from Gjirokaster to Kakavije (a border crossing-point with Greece).

Some of the villages of Lower Dropull are: Dervican, Vanister, Sofratike, Terihat, Grapsht, Gline, etc. There are 16 villages altogether, with a population of 8100 people.

Some of the villages of Upper Dropull are: Jergucat, Bularat, Sotire, Vrisera, Kakavije, Koshovice, Ajnikolle, etc. - 17 villages altogether with a population of 8400 people.

From the administrative point of view, Dropulli is divided into two communes, both of the second category. The center of Lower Dropull is Sofratike, while the center of Upper Dropull is Jergucat.

In Dropull each village has its own kindergarten and elementary school in Greek language. There are also four 8-year schools and a secondary school in Greek. The total number of the pupils is not bigger than 1000, and that of the teachers is 160, which means

1 teacher for every 6 pupils. Ten years ago, only the school in Dervican had about 500 pupils. Following the massive movement to Greece after 1990, the number of the pupils has been drastically reduced. Because of this, some classes have been closed, and one can find there classes with only four or five pupils.

Let us take for an example the number of the students in the four grades of the secondary school in Dervican: there are 25 students in the first grade, 22 in the second grade, none in the third grade, and 6 students in the fourth grade.

The teachers for the schools of the Greek minority are trained in the University of Gjirokaster. There is a department for the Greek literature and language there, and 78 students from the Greek minority in Albania attend its courses. The above university has signed a protocol of cooperation with the University of Athens, Ionina, Patras and Salonika.

After the 90-ies, written media in Greek language has experienced an obvious development. The following newspapers and magazines are being published for the Greek minority population in the district of Gjirokaster: 'Lajko Vima', a newspaper which has been published since 1945; the weekly 'Ionis tes Omonis' (the Voice of Omonia); 'Romi osi Mi' (we are Greeks); '2000', a paper in three languages- Greek, English and Albania; 'Oaz', an illustrated magazine. The above-mentioned newspapers and magazines are distributed in all the villages gratis. In addition, 15 other newspapers and magazines come from Greece.

Radio Gjirokaster broadcasts daily programs of 45 minutes in Greek for the Greek minority (everyday from 17.00 to 17.45).

In Gjirokaster, too, the Greek government pays a monthly salary of 50 thousand Greek drahmes to all the teachers of the Greek minority, in addition to the salary that they receive from the Albanian government. A pension of 30 thousand Greek drahmes is also given by the Greek government to all the retired people of the Greek minority.

About 120 private firms do business in the region of Dropull – all of them owned by Greek minority subjects. They have been successful and are known all over the country. Among them, we may mention: Alfa Company, Fresh Company, Anonime Kakavije, Elka, Harri Lena, Tavo Jergucat, Glina, etc.

Among the concerns of the Greek minority people of Dropulli region, we would like to highlight the following:

- law and order and peace should be better guaranteed by the state.
- there must be more state investments in infrastructure, especially in water supply and roads.
- greater competence should be given to the local administration of the Commune.
- the border-crossing tax (1000 leke) should be either removed or reduced for the Greek minority subjects, because there are many people, who cross the border three or four times every week.

We feel it necessary to emphasize that, the above-mentioned issues do not exist simply because of ethnic belonging or origin, but they originate from the inherited economic poverty and the difficulties of the overextended transition period in Albania.

II. MACEDONIAN MINORITY

The Macedonian minority is concentrated in the region of Prespe. This region is situated in the south-eastern corner of Albania, at the border with Macedonia and Greece. The surface of the region of Prespe is 213.9 square kilometers. Its population is 4280 people, which means 240 people per square kilometer. The shore of Lake of Prespe is 35 km. in the Albanian territory, and the nine villages, where the Macedonian minority lives, lie along the above shore. The villages are the following: Lajthiza, Pusteci, Zaroshka, Cerja, Shulini, Gollomboqi, Gorica e Vogel, Bezmishti and Gorica e Madhe. From the administrative point of view, the nine villages of the Macedonian minority constitute the Commune of Prespe. The center of this commune is the village of Pustec.

Prespe possesses great touristic, historic, cultural and religious values. There are four churches there, belonging to the XII and XIII centuries. They have been built within a rock, and hardly to have a match in the Balkans or Europe. Such churches, which are also called the churches of the Ascetics, are found only in the Holy Mountain of Greece. They are of special artistic values as well, because of the frescoes painted in the rock.

The region of Prespe is also noted for its bio-diversity. One can find in Prespe very rare species of plants and animals.

Recently, the region of Prespe was declared a national park, and, together of the region of Minor Prespe and the Lake of Ohrid, it has been included in the programs of the World Bank and those of the German Government.

The population of the region of Prespe is mainly engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing. There has not been any big movement of the population in this region after the 90-ies, as it has been the case with the other minorities in Albania. As a rule, marriages are matched within the region. Recently, there have been some marriages across the border, in Macedonia.

There are elementary schools in the nine villages of the Macedonian minority, where lessons are taught in Macedonia. In two villages, in Gorice e Madhe and Ligenas, there are 8-year schools, while in the center of the commune there is a secondary school. The history of the Macedonian people is taught there as a separate subject. All the schools of the Macedonia minority have established twin relationships with the homologue schools in Macedonia.

All the teaching staff comes from the Macedonian minority, and they have the needed training for all the subjects.

The pupils, who accomplish the secondary school, go for higher studies to the University of Tirane or in those of Skopje and Manastir. There have been cases when they have gone to study in other European countries. Most of those who do not pursue higher studies start working in Macedonia.

There is a hospital center in Pustec, the center of the commune. Other medical centers are found in other villages. Each village has at least a mid-wife and a nurse. However, the health service is judged to be of insufficient extension and of outmoded standards. That is why in most of the cases the minority people go to Macedonia for medical treatment. In Macedonia, they are not charged for the medical service they get.

In the region of Prespe, there is also a border station and a customs house for ensuring the free movement of people, means of transport and goods. This has considerably invigorated the life of the people in the above region.

A questionnaire was organized in the field, and the question ‘ Which is the principal problem for you?’ was not answered from the personal point of view, but they raised problems of general interest, like need for state investments for roads, water supply, telephones, etc. The other question ‘Are the classes of the Macedonian language sufficient?’ was answered by all: ‘Yes’. The same answer was given when asked if they felt equal to the other people. There are not problems there regarding law and order, and minority subjects are found in the ranks of the local police.

In most of the villages Orthodox churches have been built or renovated. A big church, the church of St. Mary, is being constructed in Pustec, which is the center of the commune. In this aspect, the Macedonian Orthodox Church has rendered a considerable aid.

The local radio of Korce broadcasts news bulletins in Macedonian for the Macedonian minority in Albania; these programs are broadcast three times a week. The local TV station has also released programs devoted to the above region.

By leaving along the border with their motherland, the minority people in the region of Prespe enjoy advantages and assistance by both, the Albanian and Macedonian states.

Here are some of these:

- a. the minority people of Prespe get free visas for entering Macedonia.
- b. they pay the solidarity tax only once a month, and not for each exit.
- c. the books in Macedonian language are printed in Macedonia and are given gratis to them.
- d. all their teachers go several times a year for qualification in Macedonia..

The region of Prespe is a calm area. Even during the disturbances of the year 1997, the local community did not experience any shocking events. Criminality is low, with limited cases of thefts, rapes, drugs use, etc. Our attention was attracted by the fact that not a single student of the secondary school smoked.

However, the region of Prespe does remain an isolated area, which lacks much the infrastructure. There is not a regular telephone line. There is not a TV signal in Albanian. Three villages do not have running water. Some other villages have shortages of electricity. Unemployment is high, too.

However, some projects have been recently designed for the gradual repair of the infrastructure and the development of this region. Thus, the water supply of Zaroshke and Shulin was completed, and the work is being done for the completion of the water supply of Pustec and the repair and asphaltting of the road Pustec – Korce.

III. MONTENEGRIN MINORITY

Another minority living in the territory of the Republic of Albania is the Montenegrin minority. They live mainly in some small villages, north of Shkoder town, close to the shore of Lake of Shkoder and the border with Montenegro. This grouping is divided into two smaller sub-groups:

- a. The pure Montenegrin minority of the Orthodox belief.
- b. The Montenegrin minority of the Muslim belief (the so-called **podgorians**, who, because of their Muslim religion, might have been expelled from Montenegro in the second part of the 19-th century.

The first sub-group of the minority consists of about 2000 people, and are found mainly in the area of Vrake (the villages of Gril, Omaraj, Boric i Vogel). They have succeeded in preserving their compactness as a minority, and the language, culture and traditions of their mother country. The second sub-group, the podgorians, has already been assimilated. This community, because of their Muslim belief and their forced displacement from Montenegro, has a more regular extension in the town of Shoder and in some villages in the outskirts of the town, like Shtoj, Grude, Dobrac, Boric i Madh. In the course of the years, there have been many mixed marriages with the Albanian population.

However, spread as it is, it consists of about 6000 people. This figure results from a registration performed by the organization of the Montenegrin minority called 'Mora a Rozafa'. This figure may not be very accurate, because the voluntary registration of the people in the organization might have been encouraged by the fact that the registration as a minority subject brings them several advantages, like visas for Montenegro, trade activity, medical treatment, education, etc.(offered by the Montenegrin authorities).

According to the talks and interviews conducted by the fact-finding teams, it results that, following the beginning of the democratic processes in Albania in 1990, most of the first sub-group of the Montenegrin minority, those belonging to the Orthodox belief, moved to Montenegro. The **podgorians**, members of the

second sub-group, refused to move to Montenegro, though they were offered such a possibility by the Montenegrin authorities.

Those who went to Montenegro settled first in Zete and Sputhe, while later on, by decision of the Belgrade authorities, a considerable number were sent to Decan of Kosovo, where they were given land and new houses. After the war in Kosovo, they have gone back to Montenegro because of fear of being avenged for their collaboration in the crimes committed by the Serb paramilitary forces against the local population.

The economical difficulties as well as the tensions created in ex-Yugoslavia forced a part of the minorities which had moved from their homeland in 1990 to return to their homes. Today we can say that, out of two thousands who had left homes, there are 600 of them who have returned to their homes. Some continue to live in Montenegro (the majority) some others have left for the West. Nevertheless, in most of the cases, they keep regular contacts with their family members and their relatives and they continue to keep their houses and their properties in Albania. As it is seen from their photos of the respective files, with their income in Montenegro, they have built other new houses, small bars, etc.

As other minority groups, the situation of the Montenegrin minority in Albania is in positive parameters. Anyhow there has been a certain cooling period as well as problems during the period of war in Kosovo.

Currently, the Montenegrin minority:

- Fully enjoys the freedom to cross the borders and privileges offered by their homeland;
- They are offered medication free of charge in Montenegro
- They are awarded with scholarships for middle schools and Universities;
- They are given financial support to promote sports and artistic activities;
- They have advantages for seasonal employment especially during summer period.

Financial support is given from Montenegro and the Orthodox Church for building projects of three orthodox churches for Montenegrin minority, one of which is in the center of the city of Shkoder.

It is worth emphasizing that the Montenegrin minority in Albania in general terms is distinguished for being hard workers, correct people with the will to live in harmony with the majority. This minority has produced in addition, researchers, engineers, teachers, sportsmen and distinguished artists. Representatives with origin from this minority, have important positions in the organs of local government.

From the economical aspect the Montenegrin minority does not have special problems. Traditionally the main economic directions have been fishing and agriculture. Currently because of great unemployment, which generally exists in Albania, trade and small business have been the provision for this minority. Last year it was an increased interest for agriculture.

A special feature can be emphasized that politically the Montenegrin minority in Albania sympathizes and mainly supports the Party of the Human Rights, a party which pays attention and protects mainly the rights of the Greek minority in Albania.

In the region of the Montenegrin minority there are no specific problems for order and stability. Nevertheless the problem of paying a greater attention to the state investment or infrastructure is not a specific minority problem but characterizes the whole Albania. It should be particularly added that there has never existed a school in the Montenegrin language. This is an issue, which should be given a solution.

IV. ROMA COMMUNITY

According to certain data, about 30 thousand Roma live in the territory of Albania. We want to emphasize the word about, because there has never been a census of the Roma minority in this country.

It is thought that Roma have come to the Balkan Peninsula and later to Albania around the XX-th century. They have come mainly from Turkey, not as invaders but as horse raisers, blacksmiths, musicians, etc.

Roma settlements are spread mostly in the Central Albania, in the main cities of this zone. In the North of Albania in the main cities there are nearly none of the Roma settlements with the exception of Shkoder, a tribe in Puke as well as in Klos of Burrel..

In Central Albania they are concentrated in the following towns: Pogradec, Korçe, Bilisht, Gjirokaster, Delvine, Sarande, Vlore, Fier, Tirane, Elbasan, Durrës, Fush-Kruje, Lushnje.

Up to the sixties, Roma led a nomadic life. They moved from one region to another. This way of living created problems for the former dictatorial and totalitarian regime, because people could come out of control, though Roma were

not be the case. Thus, the state concentrated and forced Roma to work either in the state farms in the countryside, or in the garbage cleaning enterprises in the town.

In the recent years with the democratic changes it is noticed that many Roma families have moved to the other towns and cities of Albania. They are mainly concentrated in the outskirts of Tirana. Tirana as the capital of Albania offers them better chances for trade, which had been and is one of the main concerns of Roma.

Roma of Albania consist of 4 principal tribes:

- Kallbuxhile (Tirane, Elbasan, Pogradec, Korçe, Bilisht, Gjirokaster, Sarande)
- Mokcuret (Lushnje, Fier, Vlore)
- Kartofet (scattered)
- Cerqaret (nomadic)

In Albania, Roma have fanatically preserved their own language, which they speak in their surroundings. In very cases Roma can write their language because in Albania there have never been schools for Roma.

Roma are distinguished for their rich folklore as well as their art and music. Roma families are very large, they give birth to lots of children. The average of the born children is 5-6, but there are families, which have 12-17 children in the regions of Fier and Elbasan.

It is interesting to see that about 1/3 of this community are children from 0 to 10 years old, and those above the 60-ies are rare. The Roma of Albania assure people that their community does not have cases of AIDS and prostitution. According to them, this is because they see the family as a holy unit. The oldest man or the head of the tribe tries hard to keep the situation under control.

Among the concerns of Roma community, we would like to highlight the following: unemployment, bad housing and low level of education.

Very few Roma may be found among the state employed people. For this reason, they are obliged to be engaged in craftsmanship and peddling in order to provide for their families. Anyway there have been cases when specific Roma persons have reached a high standard of living each in building vilas.

Regarding their housing, it was not very worrying before the 90-ies, because the government of that time had accommodated them in separate buildings in Tirana, Fieri, Levan, Lakatund, Vlore, etc. But, as we have already mentioned before, once the Pyramid Schemes appeared, Roma people sold their houses and put their money in the above fake companies. In this way, they lost both their houses and money.

After this, they moved back to the surroundings of the towns, and built there either small houses covered with sheet-iron, or just shanties. This has considerably worsened their situation. Roma are poor people and do not send their children to school, while their education in their mother tongue is difficult to be realised.

According to polls, it results that 80% of Roma community are illiterate, 6,5% have got only elementary education, 12% 8-year education, 1,5% secondary education and only 0,02% university education.

However, two courses have been opened with the assistance of international organizations: one to Allias, in the outskirts of Tirana, and another one at Baltez of Fieri.

Regarding the status of Roma in Albania, it must be stressed that there exists an atmosphere of tolerance. They are not subject to any discriminatory treatment as a separate community, though, here and there, one can notice certain expressions of racial prejudice towards them.

From the legal point of view, the Albanian state considers this community equal to the others recognizing them all the rights found in the Constitution and in its legal acts. Lately the Assembly of the Republic of Albania approved a special status to the minorities. Roma of Albania are included too. But, anyway, Roma problem does constitute a problem of a community with a very low standard of living, and often at the margin of the Albanian society. Of special concern is the very low level of their education. In a word, the status of Roma in Albania bears the same problems, which appear in a regional scale.