

**Center for Documentation and Information  
on Minorities in Europe - Southeast Europe (CEDIME-SE)**

**MINORITIES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE**

**Roma of Albania**

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## **MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS**

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**State:**

Albania

**Name (in English, in the dominant language and –if different- in the minority’s language):**

Roma, Romanies, Gypsies. Their name in the Albanian language is Rom (official) and Arixhi, Gabel, Magjup, Kurbat (derogative), and in the minority language their name is Rrom (sg.) and Rroma (pl.)

**Is there any form of recognition of the minority?**

Roma are officially recognized through the Romani NGOs that have a judicial status in Albania (Kanev, 1999). Nevertheless, Roma are not recognized publicly as a distinct minority, unlike the Greeks and the Macedonians who are recognized due to a situation inherited from communism. Only ethnic communities with existing kin-states were recognized, which was not the case of the Roma, who have no kin-state (Courthiades, 2000).

**Category (national, ethnic, linguistic or religious) ascribed by the minority and, if different, by the state:**

There are several Romani tribes in Albania: Meckars [also Meckari/Meckara], Kabuzis, Kurtofs [also Kurtofis] and Cergars [also Cergara/Cergari] (ERRC Report, 1997: 7). “Cergara” is the name of two different tribes, the “Shkodrans” and the “Besaqe Roma” (Courthiades, 2000).

**Territory they inhabit:**

Roma live all over the country, but the biggest communities are concentrated in and around Tirana, the towns of Fier, Gjirokaster and Berat, and around the town of Korce (ERRC Report, 1997:8).

**Population:**

According to different estimates, Roma number between 1,300 and 120,000 people, out of the total population of 3.4 million in Albania (ERRC, 1997:7, Center for International Development, Chicago, 1995).

**Name of the language spoken by the minority (in English, in the minority and -if different- in the dominant language):**

Romani and Albanian

**Is there any form of recognition of the language(s)?**

No

**Dominant language of the territory they inhabit:**

Albanian

**Occasional or daily use of the minority language:**

Daily use

**Access to education corresponding to the needs of the minority:**

Roma have the right to education in the Albanian municipality schools, but they have no mother-tongue education in those schools.

**Religions practiced:**

Mainly Muslim with some recent conversions to Christian Orthodoxy.

**Is there any form of recognition of the religion(s)?**

*de facto* yes but not *de jure*.

**Communities having the same characteristics in other territories/countries**

Roma live mainly in Europe and especially in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. There are almost 7 to 8,5 million Roma throughout the whole continent. The majority of them lives in the Eastern part (Minority Rights Group International, 1995). Migrating eastwards from India, some Romani tribes settled in Western Europe and others reached the American continent.

**Population of these communities in other territories/countries:**

Estimates for the Roma populations in Southeast Europe based on (Liegois, 1997, Courthiades 2000, European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) 1997, Minority Rights Group International (MRGI) 1997, MRG-Greece 2000):

- **Bosnia-Herzegovina** - 40,000-100,000
- **Bulgaria** - 313,396 (census 1992); 600,000-700,000 (estimates by specialists)
- **Croatia** - 18,000-40,000
- **Cyprus** - 500-1,000
- **Greece** - MRG-Greece approximates 350,000; official Greek sources, the number fluctuates between 150,000-200,000
- **Macedonia** - 1994 population census 43,732 Roma and 3169 Egyptiani (Friedman, 1998:2); unofficial estimates 200,000-260,000 including refugees from Kosovo whose number has not yet been determined yet.
- **Romania** - 1.800,000-2.000,000
- **Slovenia** - 8-10,000 including 5,000 Roma refugees from FRY.
- **Federal Republic of Yugoslavia** – 450,000-500,000
- **Turkey** – 300,000-500,000

## PRESENTATION

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

#### 1.1. *Important historical developments*

The Roma have been living in Albania for more than 600 years (Kolsti, 1991). They arrived from Asia shortly before the Ottoman Turks in the middle of the fifteenth century. They started from India, traveled towards the direction of Persia, Syria, Iraq and through Armenia into the Western Byzantine territories, then through the Balkans into Europe. Their origins are known not because of clear-cut historical evidences, but mostly from linguistic analysis of the development of the Romani language, and also because of comparative physical anthropology surveys (Fraser, 1992:41-45).

In a 1938 article in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Margaret Hasluck suggested another version of the origins of the Albanian nomad Roma -- they came from Spain. Without citing any specific date, she wrote that they lived in Spain where “they followed the King of that country to wars with Italy. There they behaved so badly that the king forbade them to return to Spain and also cursed them saying: May you never take root anywhere” (Hasluck, 1938:50).

The Jevgs are a group of people in Albania who claim to have an identity other than Romani, but are widely considered by the majority as “Majup” – a name the majority uses to describe also the Roma (Courthiades, 2000). Jevgs are described as the descendants from the Coptic migrants who came from Egypt in the fourth century (ERRC Report, 1997:10). Another version suggests that they were Egyptian slaves who escaped from Greece to Albania in a period of Egyptian intervention in the Greek revolution, in A.D. 1825-7 (Hasluck, 1938:49). The “Egyptian” roots are an object of dispute in Albania. According to ERRC, contemporary Roma activists contest these roots (ERRC Report, 1997:10). According to Marcel Courthiades, their origins are contested only by some Yugoslavs being interested to deny the Jevgs an identity of their own in order to increase the general number of the Roma.

In the Ottoman time, many Roma had converted to Islam for safety reasons, as many ethnic Albanians did or were forced to do so. Nevertheless, the former were not treated on an equal basis with the other Muslims in their millet, but as “second class” people. The official Ottoman policy levied the cizie tax on the Roma along with all other non-Muslim subjects of the empire. The Muslim Roma were no exception from this rule, since they were considered as schismatics straying from the Muslim law on many points connected to rite and morals. By the 17th century, the financial pressure on the Roma, as well as on other subjects of the empire, increased. It reached such a state that Sultan Mehmed IV exacted a tax from dead Gypsies until live ones were found to replace them. Some rulers made sporadic attempts to “reeducate” Gypsies in their “public order” activities (Fraser, 1992:174-175). In addition, there are claims that Roma were not accepted inside the mosques, and as a consequence – inside the Muslim cemeteries (Kolsti, 1991:51). There are opposing arguments claiming the invalidity of the above, the Roma were accepted in the mosques and buried as all other people; such arguments are usually based on some “Albanian myths” on the subject (Courthiades, 2000).

It is widely claimed that in the four Albanian *villayets* – Shkodra, Kosovo, Janina and Monastir – Roma shared the faith of other nomad people such as the Arumanians. Roma inhabited in caravan camps in the vicinity of Albanian settlements (Kovacs, 1996:18). However, counter-arguments exist that these interpretations are mostly based on stereotypes about the Roma since this particular group of Roma were never nomads (Courthiades, 2000). During the Ottoman time, Roma enjoyed a relatively peaceful cohabitation with the rest of the ethnically different groups. This sense of equality was based on the fact that Roma were only one of the many oppressed minorities (Kovacs, 1996:18). “Vlachs, Gypsies and Albanians alike were ethnic minorities in the periphery of a crumbling empire” (Kolsti, 1991:51-52). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the four Ottoman villayets, administered by Albanian Muslims, became a refuge for Roma families that had either adopted Islam and, therefore, fled from persecution in areas recently liberated from Ottoman control, or of those who had escaped from slavery, particularly from the Romanian principalities (ibid. 51).

After the establishment of the Albanian independent republic in 1912 and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the life of many Albanians and Albanian Roma living outside the boundaries of the republic became harsher. They faced persecution, due to their Muslim faith, by the Slavic majorities in inter-war Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Kosovo, as they were identified as the collaborators of the Turks. Albanian Roma living within the boundaries of the Albanian state faced a relatively benign treatment (ibid:52-52). However, the Jevgs were often being treated with contempt. (Courthiades, 2000). Their situation did not change much since they kept their traditional occupational roles, and the religious discrimination against them continued. The large social gaps between the Roma and the non-Roma remained. Roma continued to live in segregated neighborhoods and there were practically no intermarriages between Roma and non-Roma (Kolsti,1991:53-54).

During the Second world war, Albania was under Italian rule within the territories of “Greater Albania.” Albanian Roma were not persecuted or deported to death camps, unlike the Roma in many countries in Eastern Europe. However, Albanian Roma participated in the war and many of them were fighting in the Albanian military (Kolsti, 1991:53-54). Until the German occupation of the Greater Albania in 1943, neither the Italians nor the Albanian nationalist persecuted the Albanian Roma because of their increasingly problematic international political situation. The German army’s occupation of Albania lasted no longer than one year, there was insufficient time and capacity to pursue a policy of deportation or extermination of the Roma (Kovacs, 1996:19). Moreover, Roma were supportive of pro-German (Italian) forces, like all other Albanian and Slavic Muslims in Greater Albania. They all shared a common enemy, the Serbs, under whose rule they suffered significantly decades ago (Kolsti, 1991: 53-54). However, the Roma’s primary motivation of action was their own survival (Courthiades, 2000).

Albania emerged out of the Second World War without territorial losses compared to the pre-war Albania. After the war, the communist leader Enver Hoxha borrowed the policy of assimilation and the idea of a homogeneous Albanian nation from the Albanian nationalists of the pre-war period (Kovacs, 1996: 20). Hoxha imposed a strict Stalinist regime, attempting to homogenize Albania’s population through banning all religious practices and suppressing all cultural differences. It was again

during the communist time that the Roma, along with the whole Albanian population, were forbidden to travel abroad, not even to the other former communist countries (Fonseca, 1995: 87). Although the Roma enjoyed certain benefits from the regime, like employment and the general notion of “security for tomorrow”, they were not treated on an equal basis with the majority. For example, there was an unsuccessful attempt in the 1960s’ by Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu to ban Roma from entering the Albanian towns (Kurtiade, 1995: 10).

With the collapse of communism, and the start of economic and political transition to democracy, the Roma were the first to become unemployed and to go rapidly to the bottom of the society. Roma, in line with the general post-communist mentality, feel nostalgic about their lost security and think that they had enjoyed better life style during communism (ERRC Report, 1997:9).

## **1.2. Economic and demographic data:**

### **(a) Economic data:**

The word “rom” has a phonetic correspondence to the Sanskrit word “domba”, which means “man of low cast living by singing and music”. In the past, along with being good musicians, the Roma were also involved in horse-breeding. With the fading away of nomadism among the Roma, their traditional professions such as tinsmithing or blacksmithing, ceased to be the main source of their livelihood (Fraser, 1995:25).

During the communist time, both Romani men and women were obliged to work according to the policy of full employment of the state. Roma were employed as non-skilled workers in some low-level public activities (Fonseca, 1995:88). In the villages, most of them worked in the agriculture and in the mines, while in the larger cities, they worked on constructions and in the public services (Kovacs, 1996:20).

Like in other East-European countries, Roma in Albania were the big losers of the economic and political changes of 1989-1990. Being undereducated and unskilled, their position in the society changed drastically – while being fully employed during communism, their participation in the mainstream economy diminished to a quasi total unemployment after 1990. As a result of that, the new generations of Romani children are unable to go to school due to the inability of their families to afford their children’s education (Kovacs, 1996:21), with only a small number of individual exceptions (Courthiades, 2000).

Roma in Albania are especially appreciated as musicians today, but they are also involved in small business and palmistry (Kurtiade, 1995:10). The four Roma tribes – Meckars, Kurtofs, Kabuzis and Cergars -- have their own particular professions, more or less distinctive from one another (Albanian Human Rights Group, 1997). The *Meckar* tribe, which has been sedentary for many centuries, is involved mainly in agriculture and live stock breeding (Courthiades, 1990s:31-32). The *Kurtofs* are inclined to small-scale trading and handicrafts, while the *Kabuzis* are mainly musicians and artisans. The *Cergars* men are travelers and traders and their women are usually fortune-tellers (Kovacs, 1996:18).

The economic situation of the Roma in Albania at present resembles that of the Roma in other Central and East European countries in various ways. They are poor and the rate of unemployment is several times higher than that of the non-Roma. The housing conditions are very bad. However, what is different in Albania is that the country is poorer than any other countries in Europe in the first place. Therefore, the poverty of the Roma vis-à-vis the majority is relatively smaller than that of their ethnic brethren in countries with better developed economies (Kovacs, 1996:5).

***(b) Demographic data:***

Albanian Roma were first registered during a census of 1522-23 when around 1,270 people were estimated to live in the noted 374 camp-fires (Bojanovic, cited by Courthiades, 1990s:30). The name of the Roma is mentioned in old Albanian texts dated 1635 (Bardhi, cited by Courthiades, *ibid*). In 1930, according to a popular estimate, there were 20,000 Roma in the whole country (Hasluck, 1938:50). In 1980, *La documentation française* estimated that there are 62,000 Roma. This figure is based on English sources. Today it is estimated that the growth rate of the Romani population is 3% (Courthiades, 1990s:30) and that it is higher than that of Albanians.

At present, Roma number between 1,300 and 120,000 according to different estimates. The big discrepancy between the two figures is due to the fact that no official census in Albania has ever mentioned the Roma (Courthiades: 1990s:30). Thus, during the last 1989 census, Roma came into the category of “others” together with the Vlachs and other small minorities. Obviously, many of the Roma remained “hidden” in the figure of other ethnic groups registered in that particular census: Albanians, Greeks, Macedonians, Serbs and Montenegrins (ERRC Report, 1997:7).

The Minority Rights Group International estimated the number of Roma at between 90,000 and 100,000 people (Minority Rights Group International, 1995). Scholars, such as Poulton, Brunner and Bugajski, claimed that Roma number at 10,000, 60,000 and 10,000 respectively. The US Department of State claimed that they are 100,000, while Roma sources claimed that there are between 80,000 and 120,000 Roma (ERRC Report, 1996: 89). The Minorities at Risk Project of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland claimed in 1995 that there are between 10,000 and 120,000 Roma living in Albania.

Roma live in almost all areas of the country. However, the strongest communities are situated mainly in central and southeast Albania: Tirana, Durres and Berat. According to a 1997 European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) Report, Roma live either in the big towns, mainly in separate headquarters, on the towns outskirts or in villages close to the respective towns. Roma live in four districts of Tirana, the largest of which is the “Kinostudio” neighborhood. At least 5,000 Roma live in four quarters of Tirana. In separate town neighborhoods live also Roma in the southern towns of Delvine and Gjirokaster -- 800 people and 2,000 people respectively. Approximately 1200 Roma live in Fueshe-Kruje, 25 kilometers north-west of Tirana. In Berat, 200-300 Roma live in the suburbs, but in recent years, some of them moved to the large urban community of Elbasan. There are other big Roma communities around the town of Fier. Almost half of them (2,000-2,200) live in the town and in its suburbs, while the other half is based in the neighboring village of Levan (2,400). Rural communities are to be found in some villages around the southeastern town of Korce (ERRC Report, 1997:7-8).

### **1.3. Defense of identity and/or of language, and/or of religion.**

Roma have defended their identity wherever they have settled. Proof of that is their persistence to avoid being assimilated and they often refuse to integrate into the society or to change their way of nomadic life. Historically, the defense of their identity was rather passive than active -- the rule for the preservation of the group was to avoid any active relationship with the majority. The main reason is that Roma are stateless people and thus do not have any, even tacit support, by a kin-state, unlike national minorities such as the Albanians and the Turks.

Traditionally, Albanian Roma have preserved their identity through the instinctive cleaving to the tribe. First and foremost, they have strictly regulated their relations with the *gadjo* (see more in 2.1.1). Second, they have adhered to secrecy, disguise and misrepresentation, on keeping customs and ambitions hidden and on burying the past. There is a harsh, unwritten, law prohibiting the emancipation of the individuals in the expense of the preservation of the group. Attempts to break those rules lead to the expulsion of the respective person from the group, what could have serious negative lifelong repercussions for him or her (Fonseca, 1995:85-97). However, other Roma specialists argue that in Albania, Roma emancipation never led to the exclusion of the individual from the group (Courthiades, 2000).

According to Courthiades, the lack of strong racial persecution of Roma in Albania, unlike in other countries, has created no need for self-defense. Thus, the Albanian Roma have not been organized in any kind of organized movement [until the end of the Cold War]. (Courthiades, 1990s:34). However, the relatively peaceful cohabitation between Roma and non-Roma is rooted mainly in the lack of social interaction between them (Kovacs, 1996:7) and not so much in the lack of need for self-defense.

It is only now that the Roma are beginning to insist on their minority rights (Courthiades, 1990s:34). The political representation of the Roma is still very weak in Albania. There is no member of the parliament that declares himself as Roma. There are no Roma in the public administration and the judicial bodies of the country (Kovacs, 1996: 23-24).

The Roma in Albania, unlike the Roma in Macedonia, do not have political representation in the form of political party. The Unity Party for Human Rights (UPHR), formed in 1992 after the Greek-minority based party OMONIA was declared illegal, depicted itself as representing the interests of all minorities in Albania (Kolsti, 1991). UPHR's Romani candidate for the 1996 elections Esat Batriu told ERRC that the party had a program addressing Roma issues, especially concerning the official recognition of the Roma minority and the preservation of the Romani language and culture. However, in practice, UPHR's activities are based again predominantly within the Greek community (Bugajski, 1995), thus it cannot be ruled out that including Romani issues in their program was used in order to de-ethnicize their party (Courthiades, 2000). The continual political marginalization of the Roma within the party is due to the lack of actual power within the Roma community itself and the vulnerability of the group as a whole. UPHR's chair Vasil Melo said in a Human Rights Project Interview, that Roma have very few demands, stick to their traditions and do not claim to study their mother-tongue in school (ERRC Report, 1997: 69-72).



Nevertheless, after 1990 three non-governmental organizations were established to represent the Roma on the national level: the Democratic Union of Roma in Albania Amaro Dives [Our Day], Rromani Baxt [Romani Chance] and Amaro Drom [Our Way]. Amaro Dives, founded in 1991, was close to the Democratic Party [ruling Albania between 1992-1997]. However, it did not introduce programs responding to the needs of the Roma minority – either due to the lack of power or the lack of willingness -- although it made efforts to inaugurate projects for the improvement of infrastructure in Romani neighborhoods and in organizing Romani language schools (Kovacs, 1996:23-24, Courthiades, 2000).

*Rromani Baxt*, founded also in 1991, has been a member of an international network of Romani organizations with local members in France and Poland. Its program is quite complex – it consists of the efforts to develop Romani culture through promoting language schools, Romani music and culture to the national and international public. It is headed by Marcel Courthiades, an internationally known expert in the Romani language. The organization aims also at the development of basic infrastructural projects designed for the improvement of the living conditions in some Romani neighborhoods (Kovacs, 1996:24). On certain occasions, this organization provided food and medicines to some Roma in Albania, it also helped some Roma and Albanians in Kosovo (Courthiades, 2000).

*Amaro Drom* is the third national Romani organization. It also works on developmental and cultural projects concerning the Roma. It focuses on the problems of Roma on the local level (Kovacs, 1996:25) through its branches in Tirana, Elbasan, Korce, Fier, Berat and Durres. During the Kosovo crisis of March-June 1999, “Amaro Drom” helped around 260 Romani refugee families from Kosovo through giving them shelter in Albania. The organization collected foreign financial and material aid and distributed it among the Romani refugees (*Ylli I Karvanit*, 27/1999:8).

Romani organizations in general feel threatened to articulate the need of the Roma for official recognition. There are many reasons behind that behavior. Roma leaders are afraid that the present indifference of the authorities towards the Roma could transform into a violent rejection, if they stress too much on Romani rights. Roma leaders are aware of the persisting negative stereotypes against their people, so their strategy is to [first] empower the Roma with a strong identity and raise their consciousness. Thus, they adopt a “cooperative” rather than a “confrontational” stance towards the authorities. According to the President of *Amaro Dives* Guraliu Mejdani, “the government does not discriminate against Roma. Roma are integrated in the society to such an extent as that we can gain nothing from confrontation.” In addition, it is difficult to Romani leaders to articulate themselves well in legalistic terms. Moreover, Roma in Albania have also a very opportunistic attitude towards their own situation. Many of them accept their second-class treatment by the authorities and the discrimination against them by the majority as “normal” (Kovacs, 1996:16, 23-24, 26-27).

Roma defend their culture beyond the NGO level through maintaining cultural activities. For example, there is a Romani musical group called “Romani Dives” which plays Romani music of Albania, Albanian music – both traditional and contemporary – and Balkan and oriental music. It is run by the composer Alaban Furtuna who also operates the independent studio “Tirana 2000” and who makes

compact discs of that music. This group goes regularly on tour outside Albania, mostly to western European countries (Courthiades, 2000).

## 2. ETHNIC OR NATIONAL IDENTITY

### 2.1. *Describing identity*

#### 2.1.1. Cultural characteristic(s) differentiating it from the dominant group

Despite their thousand years of migration and encountering of different peoples on their way, Roma managed to preserve their identity, first and foremost, through strictly adhering to a regulation of their relationship with the *gadjo*, the non-Roma. In Albania, Fonseca encountered some example of this relationship. Roma in the “Kinostudio” did *not intermarry* with the *gadjo*.

A “real” Roma identity depends on blood-connections, as well as on some cultural factors such as the preservation of the Romani language, or Romanes as it is called by some (see further in the section about language). Also it is based on the development of solidarity and compassion for the Roma (Courthiades, 2000). The respective person is considered as *gadjo*, if s/he is not of Romani origin – is not born Romani and has not retained Romani as his or her mother tongue (Fonseca, 1995: 92). However, while the notion of “blood purity” is very strong in the Carpatean area and among the Kalderash Roma, this is not the case in the Balkans, where blood reference is also weighted by an evaluation of the personal behavior. If a Rom does not demonstrate solidarity to the Roma, s/he is usually viewed as *gadjo*, but a *gadjo* socialized in a Romani family is viewed as a “Rom.” The identification of half-breed Roma depends on some situations. Courthiades gives the example of a business-man in the “Kinostudio”, who is a half-breed Rom, and is viewed as a “Rom” all the time except in some cases when he is perceived as incorrect in business. Then, he is called “*gadjo*” (Courthiades, 2000).

Other cultural differences between the Albanian Roma and the *gadjo* today involve some habits, which are again a product of the Romani *patriarchal social structure*. Men-women relationship is strictly regulated like the relationship with the “*gadjo*”. Women are considered as being inferior to the men – as is also the case among Albanians – but Romani women are even considered as *marime* when they are married and thus sexually active (Fonseca, 1995:92). Unlike the majority of Albanians, Gypsy girls marry when they are 14-15 years old and dedicate their lives mainly to bearing and growing of their children. Roma morality is much more puritan than that of Albanians, but unlike the latter, it does not show any indications of change over time. Many Roma men marry several times throughout their lives, only the first wedding is impressively prepared, and the subsequent marriages are more informally celebrated. Unlike the Albanians, it is still common among Roma that first marriages are “matched” by the older relatives. Roma remarriage rate is higher than that of Albanians, but far lower than that of the Jevgs. Adultery is almost exceptional among Romani women, but common among men who are often involved with Jevg or Albanian women (Courthiades,1990s:33-34).

Another cultural difference involves the *notion of privacy*. Everything, including the personal life, belongs to the community. If somebody is let to staying “alone”, this means that he/she has done something wrong, and thus, he/she has to bear his shame (Fonseca, 1995:89).

The *way of clothing* is another cultural difference. While the Meckara tribe has abandoned its traditional clothing in the period immediately after World War II, the Kurtofs, especially the women, wear very colorful cloths in line with their tradition. Women wear trousers under a long dress and cover their heads with a scarf (Courthiades,1990s:31).

### **2.1.2. Development of the minority’s awareness of being different**

Roma are supposed to have arrived with the consciousness of being culturally different in Albania, since they are not an indigenous population. In 2.1.1. we have explained their major cultural differences with the majority. During communism, the Roma in Albania were not organized in any sort of movement. It has been only after 1989 that they started insisting on their minority rights and asserting the value of their mother tongue (Courthiades,1990s:34).

### **2.1.3. Identifying this difference as ethnic or national**

Roma have not been counted as a separate ethnic group in Albanian censuses traditionally. Also during the last census of 1989, they were counted under the category of “others” (ERRC, 1997:7) despite the fact that some Roma, especially from Korce, expressed the desire to declare themselves as Roma (Courthiades,1990s:30). The latter attitude is indicative of rudiments of a Romani “ethnic” identity as well as the fact that after 1991 several organizations emerged to defend Romani culture and rights. One of them, the Democratic Union of Romanis in Albania “Amaro Dives/Our Day” stipulates in its statutes that it is “a social and cultural organization” established with the main purpose “to recognize and affirm the national identity of the Roma, their traditions, characteristic language and their common Indian origin” (Courthiades, 1990s:34). Initially, the statute was designed as to include also the “political” dimensions of the organization, but this wording was rejected by the court (Courthiades, 2000), which considered the official registration.

However, Claude Cahn, researcher on Albanian Roma in the ERRC in Budapest, argues that one cannot consider the Roma as an ethnic minority, since the Roma generally consider themselves as groups having plural identities. Their identity is so diverse that they cannot agree to a common idea of their relationship to the Albanians (Cahn, 1999).

## **2.2. *Historical development of an ethnic or a national identity***

### **2.2.1. *The minority’s resistance to or acceptance of assimilation***

There is no reliable information on the behavior of the Roma against or in favor of assimilation, since until 1989 there was no independent sociological or demographic research on the Roma and there were no real official initiatives to collect information on them (Kovacs, 1996:5-6). However, from the general information on the minority policies in Albania, one can infer about the assimilation imposed on the Roma.

The policy of the communist dictatorship of Enver Hodzha was to unify the Albanian nation, molding the two rivaling sub-groups, the Gëgs and the Tosks, as well as all ethnic minorities, into one unitary Albanian nation. The official argument of the communist regime concerning the minority rights was that “in Albania minorities are not discriminated against because they enjoyed the same rights as other Albanian citizens” (Hall, 1994, cited by the Kovacs, 1996:10). The Hodzha regime did not allow any independent ethnically based political organizations to operate in Albania. It put severe restrictions on the cultural and religious expression, especially after 1967 Hodzha declared Albania to be the first atheist state in the world. In 1975, the government prohibited “inappropriate” names. Non-Muslim Albanians, Greeks and members of other ethnic minorities with religiously “offensive” surnames were supposed to change them to “acceptable” ones in order to eliminate “alien influences.” Roma family names referring to the Roma origin were changed (*Law on the First and Last Names* of 1975 and ERRC-interview with the Albanian Rom Pellumb Fortuna of 1996, cited by Kovacs, 1996:10-11). The assimilationist attitude of the Albanian state was extremely strong concerning the Greek minority and weaker towards the Macedonian minority. Also the Roma suffered from official and societal discrimination (Kovacs, 1996:11).

Albania *de facto* denied the existence of ethnic minorities within its borders until 1989. As a result of the democratization process after 1989 and because of the struggle of the Greek minority for its rights and the international pressure exerted on Albania, official politics towards the ethnic minorities in Albania changed (Kovacs, 1996:13). The legal situation improved in several aspects, although the predominant nationalistic attitude towards them still prevails (see 5.2.).

### **2.2.2. The minority’s resistance to or acceptance of integration**

During the communist regime, Roma in Albania experienced economic and educational integration into the society as a side-effect of the general policies of the state to introduce full employment and obligatory primary education. Thus, the Roma for the first time shared common social institutions like schools and working places with the rest of the society. (Kovacs, 1996:16). Nevertheless, they remained disintegrated in many other aspects (see 2.2.1.).

After the collapse of communism, the situation of the Roma significantly deteriorated. Roma were the first to become unemployed. At present, they live in segregated neighborhoods and intermarriages with the Albanians are rare. During the last five years, the absenteeism among Roma children at the school level has been growing significantly. The Roma are not represented in the legislature nor are they officially recognized as a distinct minority. Despite those facts, in Albania, the government, the average citizens and the Roma leaders share an opinion that the Roma have been integrated into the Albanian society. But the fact that Roma do not generally suffer from direct discrimination or open racial violence, gives justification to the government and the majority society to deny the problems of the Roma. For the Roma leaders, it is very difficult to express themselves in legal terms and to prove that the Roma are victims of discrimination (Kovacs, 1996:16).

Another factor contributing to the lack of integration of the Roma is due to the social organization in Albania. It is based on kinship relations and traditional clan-solidarity rather than on institutions. As a consequence, the citizens do not all receive the same rights. For that reason, the Roma are usually at the bottom of the society who lack powerful connections and they could not effectively push for their rights (Kovacs, 1996:6).

### **2.2.3. Awareness of having an ethnic or a national identity**

see 2.1.3 Historically how the Roma identity developed in Albania

### **2.2.4. Level of homogeneity in the minority's identity**

There are two major identity groups -- the Roma, who are supposed to come from India, and the Jevgs, who are supposed to come from Egypt. The linking factor between those two groups is that they are considered to be "Gypsy" by the majority (Cahn, 1998).

In some regions of Albania, the Albanian population does not make any distinction between the Roma and the Jevgs. In line with that attitude, the Albanian dictionaries translate the English word "Gypsy" as "Jevg", in order to avoid terms, such as "Arxhi" ("bear tamer") and "Gabel" ("stranger"), which are considered to be inaccurate or even offensive to the Roma. According to Courthiades, the dictionaries make a factual mistake, since not all Roma are Jevgs. Nevertheless, only the word "Jevg" is used in the literary language and not the offensive terms. In addition, all Albanians would include both groups ("Gypsy" and "Jevgs") under the term "dora e zeze" ("black hand") while they would designate Albanians, Greeks, Slavs and other minorities with another term -- "dora e bardhe" ["white hand"], (Courthiades, 1990s:30-31, Courthiades, 2000).

The Jevgs is a group with uncertain origins and social structure, numbering at no more than 10,000 people and living mostly in Tirana and less in other Albanian towns such as Peqin and Permet (ibid: 32). As a group, they very much resemble the "Egyptians" living in Macedonia and Kosovo. They project a separate identity from the Romani, but are considered "Gypsies" by their respective majorities. Like the Jevgs, also the "Egyptians" speak Albanian and no Romani.

Both Roma and Jevgs make a sharp distinction between themselves. There is seldom intermarriage or contact of any significant kind between them (US Department of State Report, 1993:695). On the one hand, Roma strongly deny a common identity with the Jevgs. It considers the Jevgs as being rich and even of having some millionaires among them (ERRC Report, 1997:12). One of the millionaires, Maksude Kasemi, was of Jevg origin. He was involved in the pyramid investment schemes, which dramatically collapsed in early 1997 and had drawn the whole Albanian society into a turmoil. Jevgs are ironically called "sir" in Romani slang, meaning "garlic" (Courthiades,1990s:31). They are even considered *gadjo* by the Roma, since they intermarry with Albanians and other ethnic groups and speak Albanian, and not Romani.

On the other hand, Jevgs distinguish themselves from the Roma, too. To call a Jevg a "Tsigan" (Gypsy) is the worst possible insult (Courthiades citing Stuart Mann,

1990s:31). Moreover, Jevgs try to conform with the majority, but they are caught by the typical problems of an assimilating minority – the Albanians considered the Jevgs different and not equal. A statement of Behar Sadiku, president of the Jevg Association in Tirana, concerning the Jevg’s treatment in the educational system is indicative for this attitude (Courthiades, 2000). He complained that in the Albanian schools the majority treats the Jevgs like the Roma, and often calls them “blacks”. He also appreciated the attitude of those “kids whose parents are good”, since they “don’t make any difference between our [Jevg] kids and themselves” (ERRC Report, 1997:68).

The Roma is further sub-divided into four groups: the Meckars, Kabuzis, Kurtofs and Cergars (Shkodrans and Besaqe Roma). Their traditions, geographical distribution, linguistic and occupational characteristics are somewhat different. The *Meckars* speak Romani with Albanian loanwords, work usually as agricultural workers and entertainers and live in Myzeqe, Tirana, Berat and Durres. They are the first ones that reached Albania. The *Kurtofs* speak Romani, do their living on small commerce and live north from Fier, mainly in small villages. The *Kabuzis* speak Romani, work as musicians and artisans and live in the Korce, Tirana and Elbasan. They came much later than the Meckars in Albania. The *Cergars* are traditionally travelers and traders, while their women are fortunetellers (ERRC-interview with Courthiades cited in Kovacs, 1996:18). The two different tribes called “Cegrari” have different origins. The *Shkodrans* is a small group living in Tirana, which came to Albania through the Romanian principalities, Serbia, Kosovo and the Albanian town of Shkodra. Unlike in earlier periods, they do not tend to assimilate to Albanians through intermarriages, but they consolidate their separate “Shkodran” identity. The *Besaqe Roma* migrated in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from Turkey through Macedonia, and settled down in Permet, Peqin and recently in Tirana. They belong to the oldest migration of the Roma in the Balkans (Courthiades, 2000).

### **2.3. Actual political and social conditions**

#### **2.3.1. Relations with the state**

In Albania, the government, the average citizens and some Roma leaders share an opinion that the Roma are an integral part of the Albanian society. However, there are many facts and incidents that are in a sharp contradiction with that general attitude (Kovacs, 1996:16).

First, some Romani organizations have been given a judicial status (Kanev, 1999). However, the Roma in Albania are not registered in censuses, nor are they publicly recognized as a distinct minority.

Moreover, Roma are being discriminated by the state through some practices of its different institutions: police, municipal authorities, military and school, although not directly from the law, which criminalizes practice “violating the equality of citizens” (the Albanian Penal Code cited by the ERRC Report, 1997:58).

The main problem in 1996 was the arbitrary *police* harassment against the Roma in various forms such as beatings in public and in detention, and extortion (IHF, Section on Albania, 1997:12). There is a popular belief that the Roma are rich, since many of

them are known to work seasonally in Greece and have savings in hard currency. This makes the police officers often misuse their positions and extort money from the Roma population. Groups of local police officers often enter Roma settlements and force the population to pay, otherwise they would be beaten (ERRC, 1997:22). The same happened after the visits to Roma families by an ERRC fact-finding mission in 1996 (IHF, Section on Albania, 1997:12). In other cases, police officers arrested some Roma men, although in practice they have no legal ground to do so, thereafter, forced them to pay in order to be released (ERRC Report, 1997:22).

However, there are more severe problems that Roma face *vis-à-vis* the police. Police in Albania very often uses physical force during operations. Roma, interviewed by the ERRC, claim uniformly that the police uses force against them in order to get money from their families. In some cases, Roma complained that police officers entered their houses without warrants and confiscated property randomly (Kovacs, 1996:34,38). There are cases when the police arrested relatives of some Roma who cannot be located by the police. Their relatives are held in custody for some time, even up to a year. In addition to that, there were two cases of police killings. In July 1992, a 31-year-old Jevg was beaten to death by the police in Korce. In 1994, an off-duty police officers shot dead a 22-year-old Rom in the Roma community of Zinzxhiri on the outskirts of the southern town of Gjirokaster (ERRC Report, 1997:22).

Police has shown a low potency to prevent murders among Romani families based on the resurfacing tradition of the “blood feud” (vendetta). The “blood feud” is an old custom in Albania which was institutionalized in the Middle Ages, but was abolished by Enver Hoxha during communism. After the changes of 1990-1991, as the state control became weaker over the citizens, several vendetta cases were observed among Romani families. The Albanian legal system is not able to guarantee justice for the citizens, the police is inefficient and the courts are in many cases biased. Ordinary citizens are more likely to take the law in their own hands (Kovacs, 1996:36).

Municipal authorities discriminate against the Roma through their arbitrary practices with regard to the providing of social services, social welfare payments, provision of municipal infrastructure and health care (ERRC Report, 1997: 58-61). For example, the lack of water supply of Roma in the town of Delvine was justified (by a representative of the municipal authorities) with the words that “you must live in tents, like nomads and take water from the river, like you have always done”. Another example: the electricity of the whole Halilaj neighborhood of Fushe-Kruje was discontinued due to the failure of some Romani families to pay their electricity bills. All over Albania, Roma settlements lack basic infrastructure and public services (ibid: 58-60).

A third example shows that municipal authorities also discriminate tacitly. For example, after its registration, the Roma kindergarten (see 6.4.) was attacked by the local authorities dealing with sanitary inspection on the ground that the “standard conditions are not met in the kindergarten building.” However, the authorities ignored the fact that the sanitary conditions were even worse in the Albanian state school. According to Courthiades, this is a good example of a discrimination based on practical issues (Courthiades, 2000).

Roma in Albania also face other social problems. They claim to have been discriminated against with regard to the medical health care, since they had to pay bribes in order to receive medical treatment and they were not receiving social benefits which they were entitled to. Other social problems stem from the chaotic privatization and restitution. Many Roma have claimed that they have been evicted by ethnic Albanians from their homes. Sometimes, they suffered eviction three to four times in succession. During its fact-finding mission in 1996 in Tirana, Elbasan, Morava and Berat, the Albanian Helsinki Committee received complaints of the Roma about the total indifference on the side of the authorities vis-à-vis their social problems (IHF Report, Section on Albania, 1997:13).

In the military, Roma are being considered unfit for heavy tasks. The occurrence of such treatment is arbitrary. In some troublesome cases, Roma are subjected to physical abuse, and are not given the same sense of “justice” as the other soldiers by their military officers (ibid:61-62). If Roma want to be exempted from the army, they have to pay a bribe of 2000 – 3000 US\$ (Courthiades, 2000).

Roma also face discrimination in the schools. Some Roma parents complain that their children are being beaten by non-Roma children and they are being discriminated even by the teachers. Roma parents report that both teachers and students often call their children “dirty gypsy” or “stupid gypsy”, and the teachers use physical punishment against them. These “measures” are not always applied towards the non-Romani children. Thus, parents are often reluctant to send their children to school. However, the low level of attendance of Romani children in the municipal schools is not only due to that kind of treatment, but also due to the fact that the schools are often far away from the Roma settlements. This increases the risk of their children being abducted. There are already some cases that Romani children being kidnapped on their way to or from school (ERRC Report, 1997: 64-68).

Roma also face discriminatory treatment in the job market. Unlike the Jevgs who have achieved great success in music, dancing and also some administrative jobs, Roma are not found in administration, the army or in “top” professions such as doctors, architects (Courthiades,1990s:31). The unemployment rate in 1996 was officially 18 percent in Albania. The unemployment among Roma usually reaches 80-90 percent (Kovacs, 1996:39).

### **2.3.2. Relations with the dominant ethnic/national group in society**

#### *Designation:*

Roma and Jevgs are considered “Gypsy” by the members of the majority in Albania. (see in 2.2.4). There are some terms that Albanians use to call Roma in different parts of the country. According to Courthiades these are:

- “*Gabel*”, a word of a Mediterranean root (possibly coming through Latin), meaning “stranger” or “foreigner”;
- “*Magjup*”, related to the etymology of the word “Egypt”, used to designate Roma and Jevgs especially in northern Albania and Kosovo;
- “*Arixhi*”, meaning, “bear tamer” and being used predominantly in the southern dialect (closer forms are Arixheshe and Arixhofke);



- “*Katal*”, an odd word used in northern dialects, most probably of Turkish or Arabic origin;
- “*Kurbat*”, meaning “emigration” and traceable back to Arabic through Turkish and Persian. The term is used in Korçe.
- “*Qifto*”, deriving from the Greek “*Gifto*”, used in Gjirokaster in southern Albania.
- “*Cergetar*” or “*Cergar*”, meaning “tent dweller”. The word derives from Turkish.

The above mentioned terms are offensive, but the term “*Kurbat*” is least offensive of all since it conveys a romantic nuance (Courthiades, 2000).

The international term “*Cigan*” is rarely used in the daily discourse. It can be found exclusively in scientific literature or to designate Hungarian Gypsy music.

The old and also new term “*Rrom*” because it was used publicly first in the late 1980s. (Courthiades, 1990s:30).

Unlike the dictionaries, the majority makes a difference between the “true” Roma and the Jevgs (Courthiades, citing Stuart Mann, 1990s:30).

#### *Discrimination:*

According to the international Romani language expert Marcel Courthiades, Roma do not face any open discrimination in Albania. It is contradictory to the expectations of many foreigners coming to Albania who expect to see open discrimination towards the Roma, comparable to that of the Blacks in America in the 1950s. Discrimination against the Roma is quite subtle (Courthiades, 2000). However, in some cases relations between Roma and non-Roma are quite friendly in the rural, traditional and “non-profit” life. On the other hand, the “gadjo” is more reluctant to accept the Roma in the urban, modern and profit-making society. Roma are not recipients of an “enemy image” in general (Courthiades, 1995:14). The overwhelming majority of the country’s intelligentsia is well-disposed towards the Roma, and working class Albanians (peasants, lorry-drivers, factory workers) find Roma as “friendly, cheerful and trustworthy” (Courthiades, 1990s:34).

While Roma in Albania do not suffer from a direct racial aggression from the public authorities or from the non-Roma citizens, they suffer from the official refusal of the majority to recognize their culture and traditions, although everybody in Albania is aware of the existence of a specific Romani culture and tradition (Kovacs, 1996:28, Courthiades, 2000). Moreover, Roma interviewed by the ERRC in 1996 claimed that although the Albanians do not express verbally, but they act as if the Roma were inferior. Albanians view Roma as poor, dirty, stupid, noisy and involve in theft. They are often tacitly discriminated in the job market facing rejection because they are unskilled or undereducated (ERRC Report, 1997:57).

According to Courthiades, discrimination against the Roma is pursued also through a number of fine manipulations. On the one hand, this occurs by attempts to make Roma activists jeopardize the activity of their organizations. In many cases, some illiterate Roma are taken randomly or due to some “friendship” leanings and put into positions which allows others to manipulate them. On the other hand, it is common that the integration of Roma into the political life of the country is accompanied by the

interests of the “gadjo” to pay lip-service to democracy. They claim that the Roma are being incorporated into the democratic system without granting them substantial rights going beyond the formal level. Third, organizations claiming to be “friends of the Gypsies” in some other cases also manipulate the Romani cause. They sometimes deny the existence of a Romani nation as a whole or they give the Roma some false promises (Courthiades, 2000).

Despite the general trend of current research claiming that the Albanian Roma do not face xenophobia-motivated acts initiated by the majority, there have been some exceptions. In the town of Berat, Roma were reported to face random street attacks and harassment by ethnic Albanians. There were reports of missing Roma girls and young women (ERRC Report, 1997:52). However, it must be noted that not only Roma, but Albanians in general, and the rural people in particular, suffer from these problems in Albania (Courthiades, 2000). Most notably, in July 1996, a 15-year-old Rom was attacked on the outskirts of Tirana by a group of young Albanian men. He was severely beaten, then doused with benzine and set on fire. Serious burns on his body led to his death in Tirana’s main hospital (IHF Report on Albania, 1997:12-13). However, there are allegations claimed that he was not harassed only because of his Romani origin, but because of a money-relationship with the respective Albanians (Courthiades, 2000).

The lack of social interaction between the majority and the minority created a number of stereotypes among the Albanians. Some interviews with Albanians in 1996 are indicative of those stereotypes. First, majority representatives claimed that the “Roma are not discriminated against”, but that they “just don’t look after themselves.” This attitude is showed by their dropping out from school, not working, avoiding visits to the doctor and spending money on “stupid things.” Second, Albanians claimed that the “Roma are morally inferior to us,” since they are “not stable in their family and have no rules.” Third, they claimed that the “Roma are not integrated into the Albanian society,” since they could not use the flats that the state gave them, “they put fire inside, so the state gave those flats to other people.” However, when the question came to the rights of the Roma, the argument on their “integration” into the society turned with 180 degree. In this case, Roma are thought of being “fully integrated”, as that it is only a fashion that they “follow the Greeks and the Macedonians” when expressing their need for more rights. Thus, they are supposed to be running the risk to become “disintegrated” from the society. Fourth, there is a widespread stereotype that “Roma are all bosses,” since they are involved in small business and some think that they live better than the ethnic Albanians. This stereotype leads to the thinking that Roma do not have serious economic and social problems, they just pretend to have them (Kovacs, 1996:31). Other examples of stereotypes are that the Roma are “nomadic” and “have no graves” (Courthiades, 2000).

However, many of those stereotypes change when the Albanians are asked not about the Roma in general, but about some Roma they know in particular. In such situations, Albanians often respond that the Gypsies they know are “nice, have graves and are not like the others.” This is indicative of the fact that personal acquaintance of the Roma usually changes the general view about the entire group (Courthiades, 2000).

Stereotypes are often spread through the media. The Albanian press has an ambiguous attitude towards the Roma. On the one hand, many articles portray them as a social group which has only become civilized recently and is not yet well integrated into the society. The integration is presented by their attempts to have life far from the tents pitched on river banks. On the other hand, there are articles which talk about the difficult economic situation of the Roma, and again refer to their life in the “tents” (Balkan Neighbors, 1997/5:8, Balkan Neighbors, 1998/7:13).

Few articles discuss the objectives of Roma organizations and issues of the Roma’s historical and cultural identity that provide the possibilities for a better understanding of the Roma culture. Most articles, however, point to crimes among the Roma inspired by motives that are presented as ridiculous. For example, they have futile quarrels and that they kill each other for the sake of a word (ibid). Mainstream electronic media has also become a powerful instrument of disseminating stereotypes against the Roma. As Marcel Courthiades explained to us, television and popular cinema have been able to transmit the distorted and often false images about the Roma much more quickly and efficiently. These images become integrated into the public consciousness and are reproduced in the everyday contacts with that community. Journalist and producers are rarely interested to touch upon the complexity of the Roma traditions and culture in order to provide the public with positive rather than contradictory if not negative images about the Roma (Courthiades, 2000).

However, in spite of the negative and controversial stereotypes and the big social distance separating the Roma from the rest of the society, Albania is still supposed to be one of the most peaceful places for Roma in Europe. Nevertheless, the prejudices and the social and economic exclusion lead to their marginalization, it increased their delinquency which in turn reinforce negative stereotypes about them (Courthiades, 1995:14).

### **2.3.3. Relations with other minorities, if any**

The Greek minority in southern Albania calls Roma “Artzes” using that term in addition to its own terms for designation: “Giftos” and “Tsigganos”. The Unity Party for Human Rights (UPHR), formed in 1992 after the Greek-minority based party OMONIA was declared illegal, is meant to represent the interests of all minorities in Albania, including the Roma. However, its activities are predominantly based within the Greek community (Bugajski,1995). It is possible that the party’s interest for the Roma was only shown to provide the party with an appearance of a multi-ethnic character (Courthiades, 2000), see 1.3.

### **2.3.4. Relations between the regions inhabited by the minority and the central authorities**

Albania has been a highly centralized state since communist time. According to the Albanian Helsinki Committee, there has been no clear break with the centralized policies of the past even up to the present, notwithstanding the fact that a local administration is functioning in Albania. That is no exaggeration. AHC claimed in 1997 that “ordinary citizens hardly know that there is a self-governing administration” and that the old mentality and methods still prevail among the low and top management. Almost everything is concentrated in the hands of the central

government (AHC, 1997, <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/english/reports/ahc-activities-oct-dec97.html>).

The new 1998 Albanian Constitution stipulated in Article 13 that the local government is “founded upon the basis of the principle of decentralization of power and is exerted according to the principle of local autonomy” (Albanian Constitution, 1998, <http://www.urich.edu/~jpjones/confinder/Alb-oct21.htm>). However, it is highly impossible that the decentralization practices change the shape of the power relations in the Albanian society very quickly.

There is no particular information available on the relationship between the Roma in Albania and the central and local authorities. However, judging from the general situation in the country and from the fact that there is a lack of political organization among the Roma, one can infer that the regions inhabited by the Roma generally do not enjoy any affirmative action policies by the state.

### **3. LANGUAGE**

#### ***3.1. Describing the language***

##### **3.1.1. Linguistic family**

The Romani language belongs to the North Indo-Aryan (Indic) languages and is close to Hindi, Punjabi and the Dardic languages (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1992, Vol. 28:162, Soravia, 1984, <http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/language.htm>). Other claims that Romani is far more close to Awarthi and Sadri than to the Punjabi language (Courthiades, 2000). Romani is spoken on all five continents on Earth. From the evidences of comparative linguistics, it is evident that Romani was separated from the related North Indian languages in about AD 1000 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1992, Vol. 28:162).

##### **3.1.2. Dialects and unity; linguistic awareness**

Modern Romani language dialects have been classified by the Slovenian scholar Franz von Miklosich according to their European originals. There are 13 dialects in total: Greek, Romanian, Hungarian, Czecho-Slovak, German, Polish, Russian, Finnish, Scandinavian, Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Welsh and Spanish (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1992, Vol. 28:162). According to other estimates, there are more than 60 Romani dialects spoken in Europe (Fraser, 1995:12).

A third classification divides the Roma in 8 major groups: 1) the Danubian group (Kalderash, Lovara, Curara, etc.), spoken by at least two-thirds of the world's three million Romani population; 2) the western Balkan group (Istrians, Slovenes, Hrvates, Arlija etc; 3) the Sinto group (Eftavagarija, Kranarja, Krasarja, Slovaks, etc); 4) Rom groups of central and southern Italy; 5) British (Welsh, now extinct, today only the Anglo-Romani survived which is a mixture of English and Romani), 6) Finnish; 7) Greco-Turk (although their existance as a separate group is disputed) and 8) Iberian (at present represented by Calo, the Hispano-Romani dialects of the Gitanos) (Soravia, 1985).

Another research of the variety of the Romani dialects refers to the language “stratification.” The first stratum was formed with the arrival of the first Roma in the Balkans, some of whom stayed there, but others dispersed initially to the north-west and thereafter to the south-west. The Balkan, Carpatian, Polish and Baltic dialects belong to the first “stratum” as well as the dialects of the Gitanos, the Sinti/Manush Roma of Germany and the Gypsies of the British islands. The second stratum was formed again in the Balkans, but did not reach other places beyond its boundaries. The new dialects showed already some morpho-lexical differences from the first stratum. The third stratum was again formed in the Balkans, but reached Russia, Sweden, France, North- and South America and other places. Changes of phonological nature occurred in it as compared to the second stratum (Liegeois, 1998:45-46).

Romani is a language closely related to the modern Indo-European languages originating from northern India (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1992, Micropaedia:162). The language of the Albanian Roma belongs to the so-called first and second strata of Romani (Courthiades,1990s:31), which are spoken respectively by the *Gurbet* and by the *Balkan* group. While in Yugoslavia, Roma of the first group are called “Gurbet,” in Albania they are referred to as to “Shkodrani” (people who live in Shkodra) or “Cergari” (meaning “tent dwellers”). The Balkan group is comprised of the tribes of the Kurtofs, Meckars and Kabuzis (ibid, Courthiades, 2000).

### **3.1.3. Instruments of knowledge: description of the language and norms(history of the written form and of its standardization)**

There are four major dialects spoken by the four Roma tribes. The *Gurbet* group is a rather small group and shows some signs of linguistic assimilation by the *Balkan* group. Stuart Mann in the 1930s collected the vocabulary of the Gurbet group (around 2000 words) and identified one Romanian loan-word, the comparative particle “maj” [meaning “more”]. Other studies have identified a number of other features. The extensive de-yotisation of noun endings and the frequent de-yotisation of the past tense is typical of the *Gurbet* dialect as compared to the Balkan group (Courthiades,1990s:31). (De-yotisation is a linguistic phenomenon by which the vowel “y”, used before other vowels, disappears and the vowel is spoken in a “hard” way. Courthiades gives the following example: the Romani word meaning “brides” in English is pronounced by the Gurbet dialect group as bora, whereas the Balkan group pronunciation is boria).

The Balkan group: The language of the *Kurtofs* is Romani, but older members of the group speak Greek. The *Kabuzis* have a dialect which is linguistically very close to the Florina and Thessaloniki dialects of Romani. It is very archaic and possibly one of the languages closest to the proto-Romani. It is supposed to be spoken by the Roma when they had arrived in the Balkans: the inflected form in the final -s is not dropped. As an evidence it is pointed out that, there are more borrowings of entire Turkish verb paradigms, a phenomenon known in Greek Romani but not in other dialects of Albania (Courthiades,1990s:31, Courthiades, 2000).

The language of the *Meckars* is full of Albanian words and borrowings from a number of dialects characteristic of different regions. Some of the Albanian borrowings have changed their meaning within Romani, and the other borrowings witness that the Meckars tribe has traveled a lot in Albania before having ultimately settled down

(ibid). The language of the Meckars tribe is more consolidated than those of the other tribes. The linguistic development is connected to the tribes' way of life. While the Meckars tribe was sedentary and managed to retain its culture in its own societies, the rest were nomadic and were constantly exposed to the cultural influence of the other ethnic groups (Albanian Human Rights Group, 1997).

The Romani spoken in Albania exists only in a spoken form (Albanian Human Rights Group, 1997), although there is a universal standardization of Romani made by an International Romani congress in 1991 (Cahn 1998). The Romani spoken in Albania is closer to the Bulgarian and Macedonian Roma dialects, although there are no major differences in understanding between all those dialects and other dialects of Eastern Europe (Cahn, 1998).

The dividing line between Romani and Albanian is blurred when compared with that between Greek and Albanian. Albanian words are often used in Romani to express different views of reality and allowing for a range of very subtle allusions and implications (Courthiades,1990s:33).

### **3.2. *The history of the language***

#### **3.2.1. Origins**

The Romani language is related to the North Indo-Aryan (Indic) languages and is spoken by Roma on all five continents. From the evidence of comparative linguistics, it is evident that Romani separated from the North Indian languages in about AD 1000. The Slovenian scholar Franz von Miklosich has classified the dialects of Romani according to their European originals into 13 dialects: Greek, Romanian, Hungarian, Czech-Slovak, German, Polish, Russian, Finnish, Scandinavian, Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Welsh and Spanish. The dialects evolved during the stay of the Roma in the respective regions. Many borrowings in the vocabulary were made from the native languages, and some phonetic and grammatical features were changed (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia, 1992:162).

The vocalic (vowel) and the consonant system of all Romani dialects are derived from Sanskrit. Romani possesses a grammatical system which is close to that of the modern North Indian languages. The Romani vocabulary best reflects the wanderings of the speakers. The main sources of loanwords come from Iranian, Armenian, Greek, Romanian, Hungarian and the Slavic languages (ibid).

#### **3.2.2. Evolution**

Hasluck wrote in the 1930s that there was a big difference in the way nomad and sedentary Roma spoke Albanian. Nomads spoke with a lot of foreign idioms and words derived from other languages, and sedentary spoke the dialect where they were born and bred. Roma spoke Romani, fluently Albanian, as well as the language of their immediate neighbors -- Greek in the Southwest, Bulgarian in the Southeast and Serbian in the North (Hasluck, 1938:54-55).

#### **3.2.3. Cultural production in the language (literature, oral tradition)**

n/a

### **3.3. Actual sociolinguistic data**

n/a

#### **3.3.1. Territory in which the language is used**

The Shkodran (*Gurbet*) group lived originally in Shkodra in northern Albania and was closely associated with the Roma in neighboring Kosovo and Montenegro. Today, this small group is to be found mostly in central and east-central Albania, in Tirana, and to a lesser degree in Durres. The members of the *Balkan* group are much more numerous and are divided into further subgroups. These are the Kurtofs, Meckars and Kabuzis tribes. The small group of the Kurtofs live in the south and can rarely be met further north than Fier in east-central Albania. The Meckars, who comprise almost one third of the whole Romani population in Albania have been settled for a long time in the Plain of Myzeqe (in the villages of Morava, Levan, Mbrostar, Lapadha, Baltez etc). Apart from the shared name, there seems to be no other connection between them and the Meckari of Yugoslavia and Greece. Finally, a big concentration of Kabuzis is to be found in the towns of Korce, Elbasan, Berat and Tirana (Courthiades,1990s:31, Courthiades, 2000).

#### **3.3.2. Number of persons using this language (in territory and amongemigrants)**

Jevgs speak Albanian with some peculiar phrases and a couple of words taken from Albanian: mando (“bread”), shella (“money”) etc. (Courthiades,1990s:31). Some Roma gave up their language, especially when living in concentrated non-Romani settlements. Sometimes, they use a whole set of expressions in a mixed language. However, the overwhelming majority uses Romani privately and in public (Kurtiade, 1995:11).

### **3.4. Freedom of expression in the minority language**

There are no prohibitions today to speak Romani privately or publicly. However, Romani is not yet a publicly recognized language and there are no print or electronic media in Romani in Albania.

#### **3.4.1. Level of acceptance or resistance to the minority’s language**

In the 1930s, Roma did not hesitate to speak their language in front of the *gadjo* (Hasluck, 1938:54). In this respect, Roma proved to be much more capable than the Macedonians and even the Greeks in Albania, as far as the maintaining of their language is concerned (Kurtiade, 1995:11).

At present, Romani is spoken privately and publicly. The switch-over to Albanian is automatic as soon as Albanian or an Jevg enters the conversation, mostly for reasons of courtesy. Romani is used in private correspondence, although in Albanian script. Both languages are used privately in telephone conversations, but Albanian is used in telephone contacts with public officials. Romani is used more in a face-to-face contact than in script or on the telephone (Courthiades, 1990s:33).

However, at present, Albanian Roma project ambiguous attitudes towards their own language. They range from ostentatious contempt to fierce pride of it, whereas the first

attitude is more common (Courthiades, 1990s:33). Nevertheless, since 1990 Romani has gained a better image (Courthiades, 2000).

### **3.4.2. Ways in which the state protects or impedes the use of the minority language**

The Albanian state impedes the use of Romani through the lack of cultural recognition of the Roma and through the thereof following lack of education in Romani and the lack of print and electronic media in that language.

## **4. RELIGION**

There are three major religions in Albania: Sunni Islam, Christian Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The majority of Albanian citizens are of secular orientation after decades of rigidly imposed atheism (US Department of State Report on Human Rights Developments, 1998: 945-946). In 1967, the communist government proclaimed Albania to be the first atheist state. It abrogated all laws dealing with church-state relations and destroyed the vestiges of religion. More than 2,100 mosques, churches, monasteries and other institutions have been destroyed or turned into museums, and clerics have been imprisoned and even executed (US Department of State, 1991:1085).

Historically, the three religions have coexisted due to the common religious foundation on which they are built. This is unique in the Balkans, although some other countries share the same feature. This system is based on the traditional folk beliefs which have been superimposed onto the religious dogmas of the concerned religions. These folk beliefs have profoundly changed the essence of both Christianity and Islam due to five factors (Lakshman-Lepain, 1996:10):

The *concept of the divine* is understood by Albanians as above religion and is openly projected by the sentence "God is one". The *concept of death* is deprived of the notion of the spirituality of religion and is dominated by pagan beliefs. *Ancient cosmological notions* enrich the common foundation of all three religions: dogmas are dominated by popular beliefs in the power of nature, in superstition and magic. Albanian religiosity has a strongly *syncretist element* existing between Christians and Muslims, among the different Muslim sects and among Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Finally, Albanian religiosity has its fundamentals in the *Ottoman "millet" system*, which recognized the existence and the rights of large Catholic and Orthodox population on the same footing as the Sunni Muslims (Lakshman-Lepain, 1996:10-11).

Roma in Albania are predominantly Muslim, but there are few Orthodox ones. Roma in Albania do not strictly adhere to their faith. This is inherited from Hoxha's "anti-religious" policies during communist time, but is also due to another factor. Fonseca explained: "Their [Roma in "Kinostudio"] spiritual life consisted of a mixture of animism, deism, fear of ghostly ancestors, and imported religion -- in the [Albanian] case, Islam...The Gypsies have beliefs, but they do not come from an "unseen power", but from the group", since the family and the tribe ties are extremely strong (Fonseca, 1995:92). Therefore, that adherence to the "religion within the tribe" explains the fact that Roma, in general, convert very easily to the religion of the majority, and thus project a kind of "religious mimicry".



According to Cahn, Roma have a “synchronistic approach” towards religion. They select practices that are most compatible with their own beliefs and practices from every religion. That is why the Muslim religion seems to be the easiest one to assimilate into because it is compatible with the previous identity of the Roma (Cahn, 1999).

In the 1930s, the sedentary Gypsies did have a religion, and their religion is much nearer to Albanians. However, the nomads had no God and they neither went to church, nor to the mosque (Hasluck, 1938: 58). According to Kolsti, in the 1920s, Muslim Roma were not appreciated inside the mosque and the burial grounds. According to Courthiades, nonetheless, the Roma did not refused to enter these places (Kolsti, 1991, Courthiades, 2000). However, the Roma Christians, members of the Albanian Orthodox Church, were baptized and married and continued to worship next to the iconostasis, i.e. on an equal basis with the other Orthodox Christians (Kolsti, 1991).

#### **4.1. Identifying a religious minority**

#### **4.2. Religious freedom enjoyed**

The three old religions, Sunni Islam, Christian Orthodoxy and Catholicism, are de facto recognized, since their three representatives constitute the State Secretariat of Religions, a body which is under the direct supervision of the Council of Ministers. Paradoxically, however, the three old religions have not been recognized as judicial bodies in any official text unlike some of the other religions, which are recognized de jure as associations under the Law on Associations (Lakshman-Lepain, 1996:12-13).

#### **4.3. Relations with the dominant religious community and the other communities**

n/a

#### **4.4. Ways in which the state protects or impedes minority religious activities.**

n/a

### **5. GENERAL LEGAL STATUS**

#### **5.1. Past**

Roma in Albania have been an officially unrecognized minority. The official argument of the communist regime concerning the minority rights was “that in Albania minorities are not discriminated against because they enjoy the same rights as the Albanian citizens.” This attitude still has an important impact on the public opinion about the minority rights situation in Albania (Kovacs, 1996:10). Until 1989, only the Greek and the Macedonian minorities were officially recognized, since they had kin-states outside Albania’s borders, unlike the Roma (Courthiades, 2000).

As a result of the political changes of 1990/1991, with the struggle of the Greek minority for recognition of its rights, and the international pressure put on the Albanian state in connection to that, official Albanian politics towards the recognized

ethnic minorities has improved as compared to that during the communist time (Kovacs, 1996:12). In 1991, the Albanian Parliament passed the Law on the Major Constitutional Provisions which --in a very inefficient manner-- regulated the constitutional affairs of the state. It was amended in the form of 4 Constitution Drafts of 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1998 which finally led to the adoption of the 1998 Constitution by a referendum (<http://www.urich.edu/~jppjones/confinder/alban.htm>). (see 5.2.)

Article 4 of the Law on the Major Constitutional Provisions stated that Albania “recognizes and guarantees the fundamental human rights and freedoms, those of national minorities, admitted in the international documents.” Article 7 explicitly guaranteed that the state would also “observe the freedom of religious belief” as well. Since many of the principles of the minority rights are formulated in international legislation, the basic law with its article 8 stipulated that “the legislation of the Republic of Albania considers, recognizes, and observes the principles and norms of the international law generally accepted” (Albania, Law on the Major Constitutional Provisions, <http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/al00000.html> ).

However, Courthiades gives an alternative view to the above-mentioned arguments claiming that the situation of the minorities in Albania has not really changed after 1990. He claims that Art. 4 of the Major Constitutional Provisions already existed in the communist legislation, although it was written in different wording. The Greeks even had mother-tongue education during communism in about 20 schools. Thus, he claims that it is part of the post-communist regimes’ interest to present the achievements in the sphere of minority rights as new ones rather than as a continuation of previous periods (Courthiades, 2000).

## **5.2. Present**

Roma in Albania are an officially recognized minority. Local Romani NGOs such as “Amaro Dives”, “Amaro Drom” and “Rromani Baxt” that emerged in the 1990s gained a judicial status, i.e. their statutes referring to the work for the emancipation of the Romani people have been officially registered (Kanev, 1999). However, Roma in Albania do not enjoy a public recognition as a national minority at present. During the last population census of 1989, they were not counted separately, unlike the Greeks and Macedonians (ERRC Report, 1997:7).

In Albania, the Constitution is ranked above the international legislation. Article 4 of the 1998 Constitution declares that it is the “highest law in Albania”, while article 5 stipulates that Albania “applies international law that is binding upon it”.

At present, Albania is part of the basic international treaties concerning human and minority rights. In 1991, it has ratified the UN International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. This universal treaty guarantees ethnic, national and religious minorities the rights to organize on a cultural, religious and linguistic basis, among other civil and political rights (Burgenthal and Alexandrov, 1997:34). In 1996 Albania has ratified the Council of Europe’s Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its protocols 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 11, providing for the respect of minority rights on an individual basis. During the same year, it has also ratified the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment and its protocols 1 and 2. In September 1999, it

has ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which already has some minority-specific clauses, such as education in the minority-language in the state-schools and minority-language transmissions in the public media. Nevertheless, Albania has not yet signed and ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which was opened for signature among the members of the Council of Europe since November 1992 (Council of Europe, 1999, <http://www.coe.fr/eng/legaltxt/ratstates/eratalb.htm>).

Nevertheless, the new Albanian Constitution addresses more principles concerning human and minority rights than the basic law drafts of the 1990s. Article 3 states that the coexistence and understanding of Albanians of the minorities is the basis of the state. It is among principles such as “the independence of the state and the integrity of its territory, the dignity of the individual, the human rights and freedoms, social justice, constitutional order, pluralism, national identity and inheritance and religious coexistence.” The same article stipulates that the state has “the duty of respecting and protecting them” [all those principles] (Albanian Constitution, 1998, <http://www.urich.edu/~jbjones/confinder/Alb-oct21.htm>).

Article 9 concerns the question of the formation of parties. Concerning the creation of parties on a national basis, this article does not allow, nor prohibits such an activity, if they are established on “democratic principles.” The existence of parties is prohibited in the cases when those parties have “programs and activity of which are based on totalitarian methods, which incite and support racial, religious, regional or ethnic hatred, which use violence to take power or influence state policies, as well as those with a secret character” (ibid).

It is worth noting that the Constitution makes an explicit reference to an international document, which is not a usual practice in the constitutions of the Balkan states. Article 17 stipulates that the limitations of the laws and rights can be done “by law for a public interest or for the protection of the rights of others.” However, it “may not infringe the essence of the rights and freedoms and in no case may exceed the limitations provided for in the European Convention on Human Rights” (ibid).

Article 18 (2) guarantees the equality of all before the law and prohibits the discrimination “for reasons such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political, religious or philosophical beliefs, economic condition, education, social status, or ancestry.” Nevertheless, the same article (3) opens a door for limitations saying that “no one may be discriminated against for reasons mentioned in paragraph 2 if reasonable and objective legal grounds do not exist” (ibid). Those limitations are stipulated in the European Charter on Human Rights and concern mostly limitations of rights in time of war.

Article 20 guarantees to national minorities “the exercise in full equality before the law their human rights and freedoms.” They also have the right to “freely express, without prohibition or compulsion, their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic belonging”, as well as to “to preserve and develop it, to study and to be taught in their mother tongue, as well as unite in organizations and societies for the protection of their interests and identity” (ibid).

However, the fact that the Albanian Constitution has human rights clauses, and that Albania is a party to a number of international treaties protecting human rights does

not have any significance if those rights are not implemented in practice (see issues of abuse of the rights of the Roma in 2.3.1). Moreover, the changes after 1990 affected the minorities in Albania on a different scale. While in the long-run the Greek minority received the opportunity for mother-tongue education in more than 20 schools with 175 classes, the rights of the Roma were and continue to be far from recognized in practice (Kovacs, 1996:12). The fact that they are not recognized nominally as a specific national minority creates further problems, such as the inability to train teachers to teach in the Romani language (Courthiades, 2000).

## **6. AVAILABILITY OF EDUCATION FOR THE MINORITY**

### **6.1. Brief history of the education system in relation to the minority**

During the time of communism, Romani children, along with all children in the country were obliged to attend the primary school. Before the fall of communism, most of the Romani children went regularly to school (ERRC Draft Report, 1996:45).

At present, in line with the Law on Education, all children in Albania of the age of 6 are obliged to attend mandatory education, which lasts not less than 8 years. However, many Roma children, in practice, drop out from school before the end of this period. According to a 1996 ERRC-interview with Behar Sadiku, a primary school teacher, about 60 percent of the Romani pupils leave the school before the end of the year. Most of the children drop out of the school after the third or the fourth class. About 40 percent finish the 4 classes of elementary school and only 40 percent finish all the 8 classes of the primary school and about 3 percent finish the eight compulsory classes (Kovacs, 1996:41).

Roma parents point out two reasons for that behavior: either their children are discriminated in the schools, or schools are too far from the Roma settlements, especially in the rural areas (ERRC Report, 1997: 64-65). One should also take into account another reason for the high drop out rate. Roma have a “traditional” culture, which, for example, girls are married in their early teens.

There are no published statistics available on the educational level of the Roma. According to an article in *Gazetta Shqiptare* (17-11-1997), out of the 2,708 Roma living in Tirana, 80.2% are illiterate, 6.5% are with elementary or primary education, 1.2% with secondary education and just one percent with university education.

### **6.2. Availability of teaching material for the minority**

n/a

### **6.3. Official position**

The illiteracy among Roma is very high, but there is no special state policy to eradicate the problem.

### **6.4. Activist’ initiatives**

There are some activists initiatives, which aim at raising the literacy on the one hand, and at preserving the Romani culture, on the other. The three Roma organizations in

Albania, “Amaro Dives” (Our Day), “Amaro Drom” (Our Way) and “Rromani Baxt” (Romani Chance) try to organize cultural development projects, also involving additional education in Romani.

The school of Baltaz was built in 1995 to combat the high drop-out rate among the Romani children. In the Romani-language classes, the children are supposed to use their language in a written and an oral form. In 1996, a Romani teacher explained that the school has 27 pupils aged from 8 to 16 years old. They met twice a week for two hours to have language classes and to learn more about the Romani history and culture. This school belonged to the cluster of “private” schools in Albania, which have an official license by the Ministry of Education, but do not receive support from public funds (Kovacs, 1996:45). However, in 1997 the school collapsed due to financial problems (Kovacs, 1999, Courthiades, 2000).

Another activists’ initiative is the “Xurdelin” kindergarten in Tirana. It is run by an NGO called “Rromani Baxt” and the kindergarten is still operating. It was inaugurated in 1995 with around 30 children attending classes for the preschool level. It also offers courses of English, French and word-processing for Romani pupils at the school-level as well as to adults. This kindergarten is run by Roma, has Romani teachers and is open to everybody, about 10 percent of all the children are non-Roma (Courthiades, 2000).

The structures of the Open Society Institute –an international organization network sponsored by the American philanthropist George Soros– developed several programs related to the Romani education. The Budapest-based Institute on Educational Policy has several programs on minority education and minority rights. Moreover, the Roma Regional Participation Program is involved in developing community centers and educational activities in most countries of Eastern Europe, including Albania. The Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative is another Budapest-based program, which is a pilot initiative aimed at the training of locally elected Roma leaders with basic knowledge in public administration (Kovacs, 1999). In 1997-8, the Tirana-based Open Society Foundation through its Albanian Education Development Project developed a program sponsoring Roma children to pair with a Roma or non-Roma teacher in order to achieve better results in primary school.

## **6.5. Present situation at different levels**

### **6.5.1. Nursery school and primary education**

Based on the unofficial estimates of the Romani expert Marcel Courthiades and the primary-school teacher Behar Sadiku, the kindergarten attendance of Roma in Albania is zero. The elementary school attendance (first to fourth grade) is 40 percent of all Romani children who initially enrolled, and 3 percent in the primary school (through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade). Official statistics points out that 59 percent of the Albanian children attend kindergartens and 100 percent of them attend the elementary and the primary schools (Kovacs, 1996:42).

### **6.5.2. Secondary education**

According to unofficial estimates, the high school attendance of the Roma in Albania is close to zero, while that of Albanian children is 72 percent (Kovacs, 1996:42).

### **6.5.3. Higher education and research**

The enrolment in higher education among Albanian Roma is rare. There are some who register in the polytechnic schools, where they attend classes for social workers; very few of them study outside Albania. According to Marcel Courthiades, Romani children do not receive scholarships from national and international NGOs to further their education inside Albania. Thus, in most cases the ones study abroad never return to work within their communities (Courthiades, 2000).

## **7. COMMUNICATION AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA**

### **7.1. Legal situation**

n/a

### **7.2. Press**

In Albania, there are two Roma newspapers: *Ditet Tona* (or *Amaro Dives* in Romani), and *Yilli I Karavanit* (or *The Star of the Caravan* in Romani), both are published in Albanian (Yassarov, 1998). “Ditet Tona” is run by the “Amaro Dives” NGO which was close to the Democratic Party of Sali Berisha. The newspaper is issued every two months in four pages (Courthiades, 2000). *Yilli I Karavanit* is the organ of the “Amaro Drom” NGO and is also issued in four pages. According to the Albanian Human Rights group, due to financial difficulties, both newspapers do not issue very regularly. Courthiades, on the other hand, claims that “Ditet Tona” experiences no serious financial problems.

### **7.3. Radio**

The state-own radio and television stations, except in sporadic cases, outcast the Roma from their programs. There is no program in Romani in the electronic media (Albanian Human Rights Group, 1997).

### **7.4. Television**

There is no TV in Romani in Albania.

### **7.5. Internet**

There are no web-sites of the Albanian Roma available at present. “Rromani Baxt” used to have a web-site, but due to the lack of enough technical facilities, the web-site was stopped in November 1999 (Courthiades, 2000).

## **8. CONCLUSION**

Roma in Albania have been officially recognized. Several NGOs work for the promotion of Romani culture have obtained judicial status. However, Roma are not counted as a separate ethnic group in census, nor are they publicly recognized as a minority distinct from the Albanian people.

The Roma in Albania consist of the Kabuzis, Meckars, Kurtofs and Cergars tribes – Shkodrani and Besaqe Roma. There is another ethnic group of allegedly Egyptian origin, the Jevgs, which are considered as “Gypsies” by the majority and the non-

Roma minorities. Roma in general live in the outskirts of urban settlements around the big towns such as Tirana, Gjirokaster, Elbasan, or in villages spread throughout the whole country.

Roma are known for their skills as musicians, and a number of them still use those skills as a source of living. However, the majority of Roma are unemployed. Some Roma work as seasonal workers in Greece. Others use the new trade opportunities opened since 1989 and work on their private business. Nonetheless, one of the major concerns of the Roma is to find their way to earn a minimal living in Albania.

The few researchers of the Albanian Roma agree on the issue that Roma are not treated on an equal basis with the majority. They do not have the right to education in their mother-tongue Romani in the public schools, nor do they enjoy affirmative action by the state to go to universities. They have two newspapers, issued in Albanian, which are published irregularly, due to the lack of financial resources. They do not have any electronic media or Internet-resources. Roma also have weak political representation, they are represented through a party devoted mainly to the Greek minority, and through the three main Romani NGO's, which are also very weak.

There is a prevalent trend from the few researchers of the Albanian Roma to claim that Roma are not a serious target of xenophobic acts, unlike the Roma in other East European countries. It is argued that they are only tacitly taken as "inferior" and that they are often discriminated in the job market due to their lack of serious education. Roma are also passively discriminated by the municipal authorities, which neglect their social needs. They are discriminated in the military, where they are not trusted for performing military services. They face maltreatment by the police which in some cases tries to extort money from them. However, there are few examples of serious beatings of the Roma by the majority or by the police along with the general trend of police brutality in Albania.

Thus, it remains questionable whether Roma are indeed treated better in Albania than their ethnic brethren abroad, or just that issues of human rights abuse never come to the surface and never discussed publicly. Moreover, it seems that the majority of Roma in Albania have accepted the *status quo* of their situation as something "normal", and their activists have adopted a rather "co-operative" than "confrontational" attitude towards the authorities. There is also a general lack of knowledge or serious will on the side of the Roma elite to use legislative measures to improve the situation of the Roma. There is no significant commitment of the Albanian state to improve the situation of the Roma either.

## **ADDRESSES**

### **1. Cultural institutions and/or organizations founded by the minority**

- Rromani Baxt Albania  
Rruga, "Halil Bega", Nr. 18  
AL-1010 Tirana  
Albania  
Tel: 0355.42 – 65197,  
Fax: 0335.42 – 68324

Email: [rromanibaxt@albaniaonline.net](mailto:rromanibaxt@albaniaonline.net) (on general matters)  
Or [furtuna@albaniaonline.net](mailto:furtuna@albaniaonline.net) (for the “Xurdelin” Kindergarten and the music group).

**2. Minority institutions and/or associations concerning education**

*n/a*

**3. Political parties and/or associations founded by the minority**

*n/a*

**4. Minority media**

***Radio Stations***

*n/a*

***Newspapers***

• *Ylly i Karavanit*

Skender Veliu, Board Director

Address: Rr.e. Kavakes, prane shtepise

Botuese “Naim Frasheri”, Kati e trete

Tirana, Albania

Tel: 00355 42 48925,

Fax: 00355 42 48925

***Magazines***

*n/a*

***Television Stations***

*n/a*

***Internet Web Sites***

*n/a*

***Publishing Houses***

*n/a*

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**MAIN LITERARY WORKS OF DIFFERENT PERIODS**

n/a

**AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL**

n/a