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Briefing paper about the “Gazela” resettlement process

Background: Reconstruction of the “Gazela” Bridge over Danube River on the Pan European Highway_corridor X laying in the downtown Belgrade, is planned to be done due to need to revitalize bridge which is in poor technical condition. Project comprises the reconstruction of the approaching roads (to be financed from the side of the EBRD in amount of the 35 million EUR), the reconstruction of the bridge itself (to be financed from the EIB loan in same amount), and resettlement of the slum settlement from the both sides of the Bridge (more than 200 families). EBRD provided the technical assistance to city of Belgrade for the preparation of the Resettlement action plan (RAP)

Project for the first time appeared in EBRD pipeline in October 2006. The project is signed with the Serbian government in September 2007. Project is recently approved by Serbian Parliament. Technically it is possible to state that the resettlement is in the full responsibility of the city of Belgrade, however the settlement is in near vicinity of the both ends of the Bridge and EIB delegated preparation and implementation of the RAP to the EBRD therefore the EBRD is bearing at least moral responsibility as important and positive member of the “team” that is supposed to create positive showcase for the inclusion and transition of the Roma population in the track of normal and perspective life.

From the beginning the process of preparation of RAP was exposed to the different complicated issues that made it impossible to be sought as the consultative, transparent and sustainable.

CEKOR has repeatedly raised the issues related to the process for last two years. Recently CEKOR made site visits to the Gazela community and to the “proposed” host community in Ovca suburban settlement on the East side of the Danube River. Visit was done from the 6- 10th of October this year. The findings where more than negative having in mind that the preparation

of the RAP took near two years and numerous experiences with a failures of previous attempts to resettle this settlement:

We will try to organize issues in the line with the EBRDs own outline RAP document:

- **Minimalization of need for resettlement** was not ever considered as part of solution: a) at least three persons- mothers of families in “Gazela” settlement expressed that they originally where in favor of staying in the current location (under better living conditions).
- **Huge confusion is surrounding even simplest plans for how many people will be actually resettled**, how many people will take part in housing in proposed site in Ovca.
- **No- project related specific mechanisms for the addressing conflict have being developed:** it is now more than obvious that the conflicts are product of non consultation neither in resettling nor in host community-ies. Non inclusive and non transparent approach. The Host community was informed about the resettlement by the chance, from the media and other non formal channels, which eventually lead to the protests, refusal of the plans as in previous failed cases of the planned resettlement.
- **Affected population was never involved in participatory way** in defining the sites and their advantages and disadvantages, especially not in the explicit way.
- **Affected population from both sides was not involved in developing of acceptable strategy for resettlement.** At least 30- 40 families in “Gazela” expressed opinion that is better to be resettled in smaller groups in different parts of the city. Host community is in favor of accepting smaller group of resettling people, however host community hasn’t being consulted, asked, there was no official response to any of their inputs etc.
- **Resettling community never explicitly accepted sites:** They never visited proposed sites, never have met the host community, their only information are the stories and computer animation of the proposed solution.
- **No Feasibility studies and EIA nor SEA where conducted.** The resettlement project are requiering full in debth EIA and SEA according to OD.4.30. This is case not only for the solution that is now on the table but also *for the supposed alternative solutions* which never where developed and offered to affected populations. The urbanistic planning conducted in deep secrecy more than year and half ago with all the secretariats signing it is showing that the Belgrade structures where fully aware how they can avoid any public scrutiny. Practically Belgrade city used the back doors to avoid assessment by developing this ‘formal’ planning method without really developing project with all the necessary infrastructural plans, social, environmental and economical assessments etc.
- **Procurements where done in the way to avoid public scrutiny.** Accountability of these processes is more than obscure. Neither projects nor the studies where awarded in open processes, procurement for the houses is done in direct negotiations.
- **Host community never was consulted about the RAP.**
- **Training for the affected population where provided but to obscure extents.** It is clear that the huge part of the population haven’t took part in planning of their future economic activity, and also that only rather small part took part in any kind of training for improvement or establishing of any economically viable skills.
- **Impoverishment as one of the main issues is addressed only in formal and vague way:** “everyone in community will work and pay for its bills” (discipline is often not

enough). Sustainability of working opportunity should be the Alpha and Omega of any plans for establishing of economic activity for affected population.

- **Strategy for establishment of economic activity is more than confusing**, and we have feeling not existing (or it is not developed in depth and seriously). No member of affected population started work in the official companies. Company specially established for the collection of the recyclable from the Roma hasn't being established (not clear are those money for this purpose disbursed or not)
- **Still not clear what kind of activity is offered to affected population to be established after resettlement** (recycling backyards or not, only sleeping and living in houses or also using them as bases for collecting of recyclables...)
- **Social infrastructure in host community is not capable to receive new comers.** Massive investments in school, health care facility, investment in human/ soft part of infrastructure also should be done before the program of building new house begins.
- **Infrastructure is far from being satisfactory developed for the new houses.** Sewage water treatment, clean water access, under ground water management not solved. Road to Ovca in bad condition. Public transport in poor condition.
- From different close/ near standing officials and experts we got the opinion that the **directly involved city office of Belgrade city has not satisfying capacity for the managing of program of this scale.**
- **One of the weakest points is the external (independent) audit, monitoring and evaluation.** Reporting on the process is more than scarce and practically not existing. Eventually this will lead to under development of the necessary institutional framework for the future work on inclusion of Roma, thus also leading to the factual failure of the EBRD and other institutions to establish good showcase/ piloting project for the future. This is also in our opinion leading to the potential corruption and misuse of the resources, and to the future non accountable and non transparent use of the resources for the inclusion in Roma in Belgrade and in Serbia.
- **We want to flag out that the dynamics of the implementation of program despite being important is not precise** and there is practically no evidence that the promoters of the program are fully aware that described infrastructural developments are unavoidable preconditions for the beginning of any works on houses. Same preconditioned status should be given to the employment or establishing of some of the other economic activities!

Recommendations

- **Revision of the whole process**
- **Development of RAP as real and serious document, respecting all the steps and requirements of it, and not having it only as one more document in the folder.**
- **EIA and SEA assessments for proposed solution**
- **Public consultations with the Ovca (and other potential sites for resettlement) community where city of Belgrade, EBRD, EIB and responsible Serbian government officials should take part**
- **In depth development of the alternative scenarios**
- **Prior to any housing building developing of the infrastructure and “social” infrastructure**
- **Establishing of the economic activity for affected population prior to resettlement (work in public utility companies, establishment of recycling company or else which was proposed)**
- **Identification Documents should be provided to whole community**
- **Trainings should be provided for whole affected community**
- **Establishing of the grievance mechanisms for this and future projects of this kind**
- **Dynamic plan with the expenditures plans should be developed and published**
- **Regular reporting should be provided and publicly available**