

Brussels, 17.2.2009
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Dear Honourable Member of Parliament,

Thank you for your letter addressed to my colleague Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, dated 14 January 2009.

The Commission fully shares your concern as regards the issue of lead contamination in the Roma camps in Northern Mitrovica and is actively working to contribute to a solution. The current situation is unacceptable and must be brought to an end urgently.

The Commission is determined to do its utmost to help find an adequate and sustainable solution. This would necessarily involve the relocation of the people concerned, the provision of medical treatment and/or support to the development of economic activities. Close cooperation between the authorities, the internally displaced persons themselves, and international agencies is therefore essential.

The Commission and other donors stand ready to provide a significant financial contribution to a durable solution. Funding is not the primary problem, however. The political side of the problem is more complicated. It requires the full commitment from all stakeholders to be resolved, as well as careful preparation and coordination between local and international partners involved. Consultations are ongoing to this effect, with the Commission playing a pro-active facilitating role.

As you will be aware, the Roma camps have been run under the auspices of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). However, UNMIK's role has changed following the events that took place in Kosovo in the first half of 2008 and its subsequent reconfiguration. As a result, the camps now fall under the responsibility of the government of Kosovo. However, the government's effective authority in the area where the camps are located is limited.

Mr Gay Mitchell
Member of the European Parliament
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The Commission has repeatedly raised the issue with the authorities. Its latest Progress Report on Kosovo issued last November, for example, confirmed that "housing conditions remain critical and endanger life in some areas". In December, the Commission discussed the issue with the government within the framework of the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process, at which occasion the authorities confirmed their intention to engage with the local Roma leaders to find satisfactory solutions.

The Commission has also provided financial assistance. Under the CARDS programme, it helped eleven Roma families from the camp at Cesmin Lug to return to the Roma Mahalla at Mitrovica, their place of origin. The €1.2 million CARDS project was implemented between December 2005 and November 2007 and involved housing reconstruction, the provision of food, legal assistance, basic household appliances, firewood, medical assistance, income generation grants, infrastructure and community development assistance. Beneficiaries also participated in sport and education activities carried out under a related CARDS 2005 project. Further financial assistance under the IPA programme is under discussion.

Meanwhile, the Commission will continue its active, direct involvement in efforts to find a sustainable solution.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. D. D.', written in a cursive style.