COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 6 April 2004

GROUP OF SPECIALISTS ON ROMA, GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS (MG-S-ROM)

Provisional opinion of the MG-S-ROM concerning Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1633 (2003) 1 on Forced Return of Roma from the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, to Serbia and Montenegro from Council of Europe member states

In its Decision No. CM/Del/Dec(2002)864/3.1, the Committee of Ministers decided to communicate the above recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly to the Group of Specialists on Roma, Gypsies and Travellers (MG-S-ROM) for information and possible comments.

The Group of Specialists on Roma, Gypsies and Travellers (MG-S-ROM) at its 17th meeting in Strasbourg on 29-30 March 2004, examined Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1633 (2003) 1 and submits the following provisional opinion.

The Group of Specialists on Roma, Gypsies and Travellers (MG-S-ROM):

- took note of the report "*Roma returnees to Serbia and Montenegro", whose responsibility?*" and the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1633 (2003)1, and CAHAR's draft opinion;

- emphasized the need for continuing to update information on the situation in Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo, and situation of the Roma concerned in countries that proposed to return Roma to Serbia and Montenegro;

- while recognizing the generosity of a number of member states in offering refuge when people were fleeing the ravages of the war in former Yugoslavia, reiterated the need to ensure that the human rights of all potential returnees are fully protected;

- agreed that, for the time being, and in the light of recent outbreak of violence in Kosovo province, there should be no forced returns of Roma originating from Kosovo either to Kosovo or to Serbia and Montenegro proper;
- recognised that continuous in-flaw of forced returns may worsen the already precarious situation of many Roma in Serbia and Montenegro and, in particular, contribute to the acute crisis facing many Roma IDPs in settlements;

- agreed that, in the current situation in Serbia and Montenegro proper, it was essential for international donors to contribute substantial funds to the setting-up and implementation of effective reintegration programmes for returning Roma;

- emphasized the need of funding, through possible contributions by Council of Europe member states, of the new wider governmental strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of Roma.