

## ROMA IN THE SREDOREK SETTLEMENT

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### 1. The Population of Macedonia: Ethnic Diversity and Interethnic Relations

The Republic of Macedonia is a multiethnic country. Its population of 2.2 million is composed of a variety of national and ethnic groups, the most numerous being Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Roma, Serbs and Vlachs. All citizens of Macedonia are equal under the law. The constitution and its accompanying laws provide for the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities of minority groups. This includes state support for education in minority languages, the official use of ethnic minority languages in areas where ethnic minorities are a majority of the population, support for minority media and so on.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 presents the changes since 1953 of the ethnic structure of the Macedonian population. The number of the majority group, Macedonians, is on the increase and the percentage of Albanians in the overall population is also rising rapidly. On the other hand, the number of Turks and Serbs is decreasing. It must be said that these data do not include the Roma population.

*Table 1. Population of Macedonia by Year*

	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991	1994
Macedonians	860,699	1,000,854	1,142,357	1,279,323	1,328,187	1,378,687
Albanians	162,524	83,108	279,871	377,208	441,987	478,967
Turks	203,928	131,481	108,552	86,591	77,080	81,615
Serbs	35,112	42,728	46,465	44,468	42,476	39,865
Others	42,241	47,832	64,645	121,546	143,935	96,058

*Source:* the official web page of the Macedonian Cultural and Historical Center (<http://fag.macedonia.org>).

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the constitutional system of Macedonia, major institutions and political parties at the national level, legal regulation of minority rights, the character of local government, see the texts of Mirjana Najcevska and Židas Daskalovski in this volume.

Ethnic tensions are present in Macedonian society, despite its constitutional framework, which guarantees equality to all national groups, and despite the fact that the government is committed to a policy of the peaceful integration of all ethnic groups into society. The principal source of these tensions can be identified as a heritage of mutual distrust and prejudice among ethnic groups. The tensions are evident between the Macedonian majority and minorities, as well as between the minorities themselves.

Representatives of the ethnic Albanian community, by far the largest minority group (23% of the population according to the most recent government statistics of 1994), are the most vocal in charging discrimination. The tension is especially evident in western Macedonia, where an extremely critical issue involved the addition of Albanian-language university education. After years of dangerous unrest, tension was recently alleviated due to the efforts of both Macedonian and Albanian political parties.

Ethnic Turks make up about 4% of the population. The main Turkish political movement is the Democratic Alliance of Turks in Macedonia. There are Turkish radio and TV programs and newspapers. The Turks also complain of governmental, social and cultural discrimination. Their complaints center on Turkish-language education and media. Education in Turkish has become very popular since 1998; subsequently, the lack of educational courses and institutions in Turkish began to be especially criticized.

Ethnic Serbs, who comprise 2% of the total population, also complain of discrimination. The participation of this group in Macedonian society is evident in its broadcasting on national television and on a private, local TV station in Skopje. In terms of Serbian-language education, there are classes for Serbian children in their mother tongue. However, in the last five years this kind of education for Serbs has declined in popularity, except in villages around Skopje and Kumanovo. For example, the Serbian class at Vuk Karadzic primary school in Kumanovo had a problem with enrolling a sufficient number of students. In response to this and similar situations, the government stated that the expense of this kind of education would be prohibitively high without greater student participation.

There are also a number of Macedonian Muslims (Torbesh) and Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) in the country. Bosniaks are a minority group in Macedonia. Their native land is Bosnia-Herzegovina and their native language is Bosnian. In 1998 a group of Bosniaks established a political party to address Bosniak interests in Macedonia. This fledgling political party produced a candidate for the Macedonian parliamentary elections of November 1998. However, Bosniaks do not yet have a political voice.

The raising of public awareness and related activities on the part of the government and most international organizations in Macedonia focuses mainly on the relations between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Very few organizations have paid sufficient attention to the difficult problems between Albanians and Roma or Albanians and Turks. Only during the last two years have governmental and nongovernmental organizations identified problems between minorities in Macedonian society. On the basis of these insights, international organizations have been willing to promote programs for interethnic tolerance in a few Macedonian cities (Tetovo, Skopje, Gostivar, Kumanovo and cities in western Macedonia). The Open Society Institute Macedonia, King Badouin Foundation (Belgium) and the American NGO "Search for Common Ground" were among the first to initiate these kinds of programs.

## 2. Roma in Macedonia: The Complexities of a Community

### 2.1. *Introductory Remarks on the Roma*

In the eyes of most superficial observers, Roma are travellers without a permanent home, they are devoted to music and they make their living by selling various goods on a rather irregular basis. This perception is, unfortunately, attended by ugly prejudices. More often than not, Roma are seen as uneducated, dark-skinned, poor, prone to thievery and so on. It is true that Roma are, in many regards, not like other groups and differ culturally from those alongside whom they make their homes. However, in order to understand these differences, prejudices have to be abandoned, and attention given to the comprehensive study of this group.

Studies that already exist, mainly in the fields of ethnology and anthropology, indicate that the Roma originally came from India. According to some estimates, today there are more than twelve million Roma living outside India. However, this is only an approximate figure, as Roma can be found in almost every region of the world, making it impossible to conduct a comprehensive census or establish a reliable figure. In addition to these statistical obstacles, many Roma themselves refrain from admitting their true ethnic origins, for both economic and social reasons.

In 1971, at the First International Roma Congress in London, one of the topics was the name of the Roma; at that time they were referred to as Gypsies, a term which is not uncommon even today. The conclusion was reached to use as the official name Roma, which means “men” in Romany.

For centuries there was little or no awareness of issues relevant to the Roma community. In recent years, however, the Roma issue has been increasingly monitored by both governmental and nongovernmental international organizations.

### 2.2. *Macedonian Roma: Their Identity and Main Problems*

Historically, the Roma in Macedonia can be traced to the first Roma group to enter Europe. Parts of this group stopped in Yugoslavia, remaining as settlers, while others continued to western Europe. At the beginning, most Roma were concentrated in villages. Only later did some small groups start to look for jobs and housing in towns. It was in urban or suburban environments where they would most often encounter the hostile prejudices of the local population.

As has been mentioned, the official proportion of Roma in the total population of Macedonia is 2.2%. However, in reality this figure is probably higher. The Roma population is marked by internal divisions. The most important Roma groups are Arlie or Erлие, Dzambazi or Gurbeti, Kovaci or Arabadjie, Maljoci, Gavutne and others. The differences between these groups have to do with language and religion as well as social and economic status.

Most Roma are unemployed and the Macedonian state has attempted to help them through social welfare programs. The welfare programs are limited to a per capita, monthly allowance. Still, the amount does not suffice to cover the minimum expenses necessary for normal life.

The underprivileged social status of the Roma in Macedonia forces them to accept any kind of work as a means of earning a living. They often sell various articles, food and clothing in public markets. Some Roma work in public institutions. A typical example is institutions that are responsible for the clearing urban areas of waste.

### *2.2.1. The Roma and Their Language.*

In general, Macedonian Roma speak Romany, their mother tongue. However, there are places in western Macedonia, such as Tetovo, Gostivar and Debar, where Roma do not speak Romany. During the course of history, through many migrations, they almost totally lost the Romany language and, today, speak Albanian and Turkish languages. Roma who live in the eastern parts of Macedonia mostly speak Turkish and Romany. In the same area, especially in the towns of Stip and Kocani, there are groups of Roma who claim to be Turks.

The phenomenon of Roma declaring themselves to be members of other nationalities can also be found in the southern part of Macedonia. Most of the Roma from Ohrid and neighboring areas style themselves as Egyptians.

### *2.2.2. The Roma and Religion.*

Only in recent years has the issue of religion become important in Roma identity. A majority of Roma in Macedonia consider themselves followers of Islam and have their own organizations and religious communities. A smaller number of them are Orthodox Christians. The relationship between these two religious groups is marked by mutual distrust and a lack of respect. In the opinion of Muslim Roma, Orthodox Christian Roma are not true Roma at all. A recent religious movement in general Roma society is the Jehovah's Witnesses. Roma who adhere to this faith come from western European countries, especially Germany and Belgium. However, this religion has not gained much support from any significant number of Macedonian Roma.

### *2.2.3. Roma Communities and Settlements.*

Most outsiders who come to Macedonia with an interest in Roma issues appreciate a visit to Shuto Orizari (Shutka),<sup>2</sup> one of the biggest Roma communities in Macedonia. Three years ago this community was declared a municipality by the Macedonian government; today, the mayor of Shuto Orizari is Roma.

In general, all cities and towns in Macedonia have Roma settlements of some kind. Most of these settlements, as is true in other countries, face problems typically associated with poverty. Very often there is no water supply system and most houses are unfit for normal civilized living. Most Roma who live in such settlements are unemployed and many of them do not receive adequate medical care.

### *2.2.4. Human Rights and the Roma Community.*

The majority of the findings of foreign researchers and nongovernmental organizations agree that the situation for Roma in Macedonia is a relatively positive one. Macedonia is

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of Shuto Orizari see the contribution of Zhidas Daskalovski in this volume.

considered a country in which Roma are not exposed to the level of discrimination Roma regularly receive in other countries.

Still, the picture is complicated. Most domestic and international organizations dealing with human rights issues have observed cases where the fundamental human rights of members of the Roma community were violated.<sup>3</sup> Aspects of the interethnic situation are also problematic, particularly the relations between Albanians and Roma after the Kosovo crisis. Another a source of concern is the treatment of Roma in public places—on the streets, in clubs, etc.—as warranted by a series of difficulties. For example, entry to nightclubs is very difficult for young Roma, which is disadvantageous for their generation's social integration.

The problem of discrimination also applies to employment matters, but the question of statelessness still tops the list of Roma issues. There have been numerous cases where Roma were unable to obtain Macedonian citizenship. Various examples of the maltreatment of Roma can also be found when Roma apply for help from governmental institutions.

#### 2.2.5. *Education and Roma Identity.*

In 1996 an optional educational program in the Romany language was implemented at four elementary schools. The most serious obstacle to the achievement of better results in this process was the insufficient number of Roma teachers, a statistic which reflects the generally low degree of education among Macedonian Roma. The percentage of Roma with a university degree is extremely low. This problem is complicated further by the fact that many educated Roma, by virtue of being educated, no longer want to declare themselves as Roma. Most researchers argue that this phenomenon can be described as the direct consequence of social discrimination against Roma; educated members of the denigrated group may perceive the renunciation of their ethnic identity as a way to achieve “normal” status in society.

#### 2.2.6. *The Political Life of the Roma.*

The Roma community of Macedonia participates in political life mainly through the three Roma political parties. The number of parties is high considering the parties do not greatly differ in ideology or mission. The following is a list of Macedonian Roma political parties.

– PCERM, *Partija za Celosna Emancipacija na Romite* (Party for the Full Emancipation of Roma in Macedonia). This is the oldest Roma party in Macedonia.

– SRM, *Sojuz na Romite* (Union of Roma in Macedonia). The president of the party, Mr. Amdi Bajram, is a deputy in the present parliament.

– PRM, *Partija na Romite* (Party of Roma in Macedonia). The president of the party is the mayor of Shuto Orizari, the largest Roma community in Macedonia, or perhaps, as the residents of Shutka prefer to say, in the world.

<sup>3</sup> The problems of Roma rights in Macedonia have been systematically and thoroughly observed by the European Roma Rights Center in Budapest. In July 1998 the center published *Pleasant Fiction*, a detailed and reliable report on the status of human rights of Roma in Macedonia.

### 2.2.7. *Romany Media*

As a part of the political changes of 1990, the media arrangement of Macedonia was substantially altered. Roma were able to establish TV and radio stations as well as Romany-language newspapers. These efforts have faced frequent financial difficulties, some too severe to overcome.

Today, in Macedonia there is Romany-language programming on state television (MTV), on TV Zora, a local station in Kumanovo, as well as on two privately owned Romany stations, TV BTR and TV Shutel in Skopje. There are also several radio stations which broadcast programs in Romany. There are not many trained Roma journalists; however, some journalists have participated in numerous training sessions organized and sponsored by various international media foundations.

## 2.3. Roma Community Center (DROM) Kumanovo

A group of young Roma set out to establish an organization to help alleviate the plight of Roma in Kumanovo. This partly was undertaken by establishing contact with the Roma Participation Program of the Open Society Institute in Budapest, Hungary. The result of this communication was the establishment of the Roma Community Center DROM.

DROM was established in September 1997, in Kumanovo. The mission of the organization is to:

- create space for constructive and peaceful dialogue between minorities in Macedonia;
- present Roma issues nationally and internationally;
- work toward the emancipation of Roma in all aspects of life and society;
- foster cooperation between Roma and Gadje (non-Roma) for the future of Roma.

The first steps toward the realization of the goals of the mission were:

- organizing lectures or training sessions to enable Roma to obtain Macedonian citizenship;
- nationally publicizing the issues of Kumanovo Roma;
- organizing Roma in political elections more effectively;
- providing assistance for young Roma from Kumanovo;
- undertaking joint projects with other Roma and non-Roma organizations.

Of the many Roma-centered projects, one of the most successful has been that of the Kumanovo municipality. The aim of this case study is to offer a detailed description of the project.

## 3. Putting Ideas into Practice:

### Infrastructure in the Roma Settlement of Sredorek

The project represents one of the boldest steps for DROM, as it chose the municipal authorities, i.e., the local government of Kumanovo, for its partner. The importance of the project and the reason it is elaborated below is due to precisely this aspect.

The aim of the project was the development of Roma settlements and their inclusion into Kumanovo's main development plan by constructing an entire water and sewage system and telephone network. The locality of Sredorek, one of the largest Roma settlements in Kumanovo, was the site which was chosen to implement the project.

### 3.1. *The Legend of Sredorek.*

The Sredorek settlement was founded under the auspices of an idea—which was received with much inquisitiveness at the time—of Kumanovo Roma and Roma who wanted to move to Kumanovo. Nobody in the settlement can say when this event happened, although the founding is described in a legend well known among the older generations.

Roma traditionally formed settlements by rivers, whether traveling or seeking permanent accommodation. Following this tradition, Sredorek is bordered by rivers on two sides, by the Kumanovka and Konjarka, both channels for wastewater. The rivers very often flood the settlement after heavy rains.

Sredorek is situated close to the Kumanovo bus station.

### 3.2. *Sredorek today*

Today Sredorek houses around 3,500 Roma. All age groups are represented and children are the most numerous of them. There are very few Roma over fifty years of age.

The phenomenon of age among Roma is a compelling area for analysis and discussion. All nongovernmental organizations interested in Roma have studied or debated the topic. Their final conclusion cites living conditions in Roma settlements as a frequent negative influence on their life expectancy. Such conditions include inadequately sized houses, no water supply, the high number of children, high unemployment and so on. It has also been acknowledged that Roma age quickly. This is especially the case for Roma women as they are responsible for most of the daily upkeep of their homes, including childcare and other duties which are included in their role.

All the Roma in Sredorek, regardless of their age, live in poverty. Like most Roma settlements, Sredorek is characterized by the following:

- an environment with a prevalence of substandard living conditions (no water supply or sewage system);
- frequent contagious diseases and epidemics;
- a population that is exclusively Roma;
- widespread poverty, unemployment and lack of education;
- being discriminated against and considered a ghetto.

Until mid-1998 Sredorek did not have a water supply system. Residents of the settlement had to fetch water from public fountains. This was detrimental to the health of the settlement. There is no health center in the settlement and inhabitants must seek assistance at the downtown medical center in Kumanovo.

A major concern in Sredorek is chronic unemployment, sometimes reaching a level close to 100%. Naturally, accompanying this disheartening statistic is poverty. The low standard of living in the settlement is illustrated by the following prevailing attitude: "It was very good for us when we sought asylum in Germany, but now we are in our own country and we have no bread." The unemployed sometimes take on seasonal jobs such as fruit picking, but those who are not hired or are physically unfit must await state assistance.

It is commonly believed that the Roma are an uneducated group, yet very few people ask why this is so. The Sredorek Roma, especially the youngest ones, are being insufficiently educated. In order to attend classes, young Roma go to the closest school ("October 11"), three kilometers from the settlement. Often Roma children face discrimination by the teaching staff itself, not to mention that of their peers and schoolmates. Scholastic achievement for Roma children in state schools is a troublesome and even a shameful matter, though its causes make it easily understandable. It is very rare to hear that Roma students from Sredorek receive good marks at school.

At first sight, Sredorek seems like a tiny town. It has several shops, which sell a variety of goods. They open for business at eight in the morning and close at the same time in the evening.

Recently, due to the activities of DROM, some of Sredorek's streets were paved and a water supply system and sewage system were installed. Almost all Roma households have access to them.

A DROM initiative to make Sredorek and its community a top municipality priority has been increasingly successful. For example, a man from the settlement has become a deputy in the national commission for the town of Kumanovo. In the beginning of 1999, Sredorek obtained the administrative status of a local community. A humanitarian organization, and close partner to DROM, was also founded in the settlement. Foreign delegations and nongovernmental organizations often visit Sredorek. However, as of the present moment, there has been little headway in terms of concrete improvements.

### 3.3. *Partners—DROM and the Municipality*

DROM chose the Sredorek settlement for the following reasons. As one of the oldest settlements in Kumanovo, Sredorek's current problems are long-standing and effect the entire population, young and old. The youngest are unmotivated to participate in the educational system and their socially disadvantaged position is directly related to this problem. It is widely held that the children's problems reflect the problems of their parents and, therefore, children may present a picture of their family situation. Great attention should also be given to the adults' problems. In most families parents are either unemployed or unqualified for any work. The problems they face seem to be a natural outgrowth of this situation, in addition to the problems related to living conditions.

After monitoring the situation in the Sredorek settlement at length, DROM compiled a list of various problems, needs and possible projects. The monitoring was carried out via direct visits to Roma families, open discussions on various themes and field trips. In conversation with settlement inhabitants it became apparent that certain problems should be given priority. These included:

- the improvement of living conditions and infrastructure;
- alleviating the effects of poverty;
- working to diminish unemployment.

From these, DROM chose infrastructure development as its initial goal for the improvement of Sredorek and decided its first step would be installing one or two public fountains. However, the fact that donor foundations rarely sponsor this type of project was an obstacle. Fortunately, the idea received a positive response when it was presented to the Roma Participation Program of the Open Society Institute in Budapest, which decided to support this project and finance the fountains planned for Sredorek. It was also necessary for DROM to inform the local government and mayor and to obtain the necessary permits. While applying for permits, DROM also lobbied the municipality for additional funds for the project. Eventually, the municipality contributed both funds and moral support.

When I asked Ahmet Jašarovski, president of DROM Kumanovo, about the sponsorship of the Roma Participation Program of the Open Society Institute in Budapest and the local government of the town of Kumanovo, he replied:

The local government of Kumanovo had very rarely showed any interest for building or financing any projects in Roma settlements. Because of this we wanted to make the municipality aware of the current problems in Sredorek and inform them about how much work needs to be done. We were thinking about how to make it consider infrastructure, electricity, telephone lines and other structures that are important for a Roma or any other settlement. The second reason is that we hoped to motivate the local government to create a budget item that would finance projects of nongovernmental organizations in the future. Thirdly, we wanted to make the local government think about Roma settlements in Kumanovo in the long term. The last of our aims was to include the Roma settlement at Sredorek, which has existed since the time the Turks were in Macedonia, into the urban plan of the town.

### 3.4. *The Implementation of the Project*

After two months of negotiations and lobbying with the local government, DROM began its expanded project in October 1999. The aim of the project was to build an entire water supply, sewage system and telephone network in the Roma settlement of Sredorek. By this, DROM hoped to provide the settlement with most of the necessary conditions for normal life. The project benefited fifty-three families with insufficient utilities.

The project began with digging in order to link the water supply system from the main manhole, which is outside the settlement, to another main manhole inside the settlement, which would branch off to settlement households. Work was simultaneously being done on the installation of telephone lines. A lot of digging was done by the public water supply company and local Roma were responsible for digging in places that were inaccessible for the company's machines. After the water supply pipeline was finished, the public water supply company took part in extending the pipeline all the way to

individual houses and installing water meters. However, this was at a cost of 12,000 denars or 400 German marks for each household that had a new water meter. When the public water supply company set these terms, DROM reacted negatively and intervened because people in the settlement did not have the means to cover such an expense. The sum was reduced by half, payable over six months. The local residents showed their appreciation of the DROM initiative by the fact that all the men and women able to do physical work took part in the project, thereby broadening the scope of the project in its inclusion of human resources.

As is the case with most sizable projects, the improvement of Sredorek was accompanied by difficulties. For example, the reduced sum charged for the water meters was still beyond the means of some families. DROM solved this problem by having a water meter installed on the settlement's main pipeline connection. The entire amount of water used in the settlement would be deducted from the amount shown on the main pipeline water meter and the difference in cost would be divided among the families without water meters. This solution managed to include disadvantaged families.

The project of DROM Kumanovo, designed to help Roma living in a large settlement, was supported by the Roma Participation Program of the Open Society Institute in Budapest and the local government of the town of Kumanovo.

The entire project had a budget of 80,000 USD, 1,500 of which was donated by the Roma Participation Program of the Open Society Institute in Budapest. This sum was used for the purchase of 540 meters of pipeline, cut-outs, etc. The rest of the funding, 78,500 USD, was put up by the local government of Kumanovo. Financial support from the local government paid for the following expenses:

- ditch digging;
- pipeline installation;
- paying workers;
- paying for mechanical equipment, etc.

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

1. To get firsthand information and a summary of the work of DROM, I spoke once more with the DROM representative and asked him, "What was the DROM experience like in the work that went into the implementation of this project as far as the local government was concerned?"

Ahmet Jašarovski replied:

DROM truly was able to learn a lot while implementing the project. It was really a big problem for us just to approach the local government in Kumanovo. We carefully considered this step, how the local government would accept our cooperation proposal. Also, we really have to thank the mayor and the understanding he showed in working with us. From this experience, we can say that you should approach the local government regardless of whether you think they will accept your proposal or not. Doing this can benefit any organization by making the local government aware of the organization and its ideas.

Through the project we learned that if a Roma settlement, or any other settlement, is facing the problem of unlicensed construction, it can be solved by approaching the local government, and if you are fortunate enough to have your plan accepted by the local government you should make an effort to implement the project as thoroughly as possible. Be sure that such a project will be a long-term activity, or that it is expensive, so that the local government will be obliged to legally recognize the area after a couple of years. No local government would want to destroy something it paid for.

DROM decided it was necessary to work with the local government and we felt the same thing from the local government; that in some cases they are looking for partners to help solve their problems. We can see that our cooperation was successful in that we continued working with them on other aspects of Roma life in Kumanovo.

Cooperating with the local government has been very productive for us and the bureaucracy that goes into the realization of projects has not taken much time.

2. From the success of the project, it can be concluded that its activities were of great importance for both Roma and non-Roma alike. The activities were characterized by several positive aspects. Among them were:

- raising and promoting the issues of the Roma;
- inspiring Roma to find ways to meet their needs;
- raising public awareness about the problems of Roma;
- motivating people to make long-term goals;
- finding ways institutions can work together and forge partnerships;
- improving the living conditions of a community;
- improving the status of Roma settlements in the municipality;
- raising Roma awareness of their own problems.

An additional important element of the DROM project was that it was the first of its type to benefit the Roma of Kumanovo. Previously, no one had taken steps on behalf of the Roma, and the local government of Kumanovo had never showed interest in the Roma and their settlements. Thus a major benefit of the project is that DROM established a role in cooperating with a powerful and important partner in the town.

DROM has not finished its work in Roma settlements. It is continuing with the implementation of further steps within the same project as well as initiating new projects. In Sredorek, the second part of the project is underway, begun in an atmosphere of friendly communication between DROM and the mayor's office, which bodes well for the present and future projects in Roma settlements in Kumanovo. For the current project the donors are the IRC (International Rescue Committee) and, again, the local government. This time attention is being given to the sewage and water supply system in the parts of Sredorek that were passed over in the first phase. Also, with MPDL and ECHO, it is engaged in focusing attention on the ecological aspects of Sredorek. The project's goal is to organize a total clean-up of Sredorek's riverbeds (of the Kumanovka and Konjarka rivers) and to set up garbage containers in Sredorek. This will be followed by the construction of several bridges across the rivers, which will make it possible for Kumanovo public services to remove the garbage. The bridges will also serve to connect the settlement with neighboring settlements.

DROM's plans for the year 2000 and beyond are to become more deeply involved with local government institutions and the Roma within them in order to realize projects which will bring long-term benefits for Roma and increase their participation in local government.

The Sredorek experience has shown that it is evident that it is truly possible to establish cooperation between local government and a nongovernmental organization. In addition to this, it is necessary to pay attention to the principles of professionalism and adherence to principles in the work that organizations do together. For example, in Kumanovo the local government was eager to cooperate with various groups in various fields, but it was, and will always be, necessary for an individual or a group to act as a catalyst for the initiation of cooperation and approach the government with the aim of encouraging and motivating it to help. Approaching local government should not be done from a distance, i.e., by a nongovernmental organization or another government institution. The local government should be shown that the partnership is to be taken seriously. The more a partnership is strengthened, the more possibilities open up. However, in all cases the responsibilities and duties of professionalism should be observed.

Roma issues are present in many aspects of everyday life. In every segment of society, in every situation, in every normal transaction the Roma face factors that characterize how they are neglected, both by the state and by those who should stand up as their representatives or advocates. Only by looking squarely at the problem can steps be taken to reduce the discrimination against them.