

POLICIES FOR INTEGRATION OF ROMA IN MACEDONIA REALITY OR ILLUSION???

❖ FROM NOTHING TO SOMETHING

This policy brief is focused on the existing policies for Roma in Macedonia, challenges and opportunities which institutions should accommodate and exploit. The justification of the discussion arise from the fact that third year this policies do not produce tangible results or simply said there is **no implementation of policies for Roma**. The objective of the policy brief is to propose concrete approach for exceeding the existing Romani problems, much more that the implementation of policies for Roma will bring positive scores on to Macedonia towards Euro-integrative processes.

From the independence of Macedonia in 1991 till 2003, all governing political parties failed to develop policies or pay particular attention towards the needs of Romani population. The first 15 years' transition of Macedonian society is characterized with complete **indifference** of the system towards the Roma issues, relation which mainly ignored the needs of small ethnic communities in the state. Although the lawmakers loudly argument that the laws and policies are equally addressing the needs of all Macedonian citizens, yet they were forgetting that in reality the ethnic communities have their specific needs and different starting position from those of the majority, in order to benefit from the majority-voted policies.

Enlivened by the initiatives of World Bank and OSI during 2003/2004 the Government of Macedonia joined the Decade of Roma Inclusion (Decade). At same period, because of the aspirations of Macedonia to join the European Union, the National Strategy for Roma (NSR) was parallel drafted. Thus, in January 2005, Macedonia finally had policies for Roma, processed through the parliamentary Committee for Relations of Communities and adopted by the Government of Macedonia. Prior to this National Action Plans (NAP) under the frame of Decade were finalized and translated to Operational Plans for the period 2006-2009. All these processes provoked hopes among Roma that their long term problems will be systematically solved. The hopes came because of the fact that both of the processes were transparently managed with satisfactory level of consultation with Roma political and NGO structures. The Decade of

Roma Inclusion was launched in April 2005 and it has obviously provoked attractive attention among the whole Macedonian population.

If we analyze present public policies adopted as strategies in several sectors we will identify their common parameter – **infertility**. Starting from the Strategy for Poverty Reduction, National Youth Strategy, National Plan for Employment, National Plan on Education and previously mentioned Roma Strategy,¹ the political elites and governments of Macedonia manifest **lethargic** relation towards the long-term policies. The **discontinuity** in all strategies is result of the **government changes**, when each new government **derogates** the previously achieved; and from the **opportunism** of political elites with an approach based on public **daily-political** short term **actions**. However if we compare this policies with policies for Roma, we can identify obvious differences in the approach and managing this long term policies.

There are almost 3 years as policies for Roma do not produce tangible results or otherwise told **there is no implementation of Romani policies**. Everything has stopped with the adoption of strategic and action plans so the perceptions are that the government does not pay sufficient **attention and resources** on Roma policies, and obligations that are coming from this policies. Moreover, the Government does not consider on the fact what and how much benefit will bring the successful implementation of Romani policies in regard the efforts of Macedonia in joining the EU.

For now, the whole process around the systematic policies on Roma in Macedonia **resembles as a story** which is equal to **optical illusion**. In order to illusions be grater governments of Macedonia continues with **declarative wording** of its **political will** without concrete engagement regarding the existing policies and plans for Roma integration in Macedonia. Quite spontaneously, among the Roma population the hopes achieved its maximum in 2005, with belief that Roma finally will have adequate respect, attention and place in the policies of the system. In the next 2006 these hopes transformed to **disappointment** while at present the ordinary Roma has total **distrust** on the institutions, that they have sincere intentions on engagement for Roma policies. If the

¹ On the proposal of Minister on Labor and Social Policy, Mr. Jovan Manasievski, the Government of Macedonia adopted the National Strategy for Roma and 4 Action Plans on Decade. Because both of the documents are inter related to each other the decision is that Action Plans be part of the National Strategy for Roma, which means that in places where are mentioned separately this policies in essence means the same policy on Roma

confrontation among two sides goes on with this tempo, they are potential initiators for deepening of distrust and conflict, which will negatively influence approaching of Macedonia to EU. It is obvious that at the moment the attention and relation towards Roma policies in Macedonia **is not adequate** with the attention and measure that EU overtakes on Roma integration. In near past, open critics have been given to Romania and Bulgaria, which had additionally to put efforts in the remaining deadline in accessing EU, in order to finalize planned reforms and measures on Roma integration.

SOMETHING IS EQUAL AS NOTHING

The Republic of Macedonia is democratic and multiethnic state and its Constitution is unique on the globe in the recognizing Roma as a constitutive category of citizens. According the Constitution of Republic of Macedonia, the legislation is based upon the principles of equality, freedom of expression of ethnic belonging, freedom of speech etc. With this the Constitution of Macedonia guarantee the rights of all citizens, and this definite obliges all democratically elected governments to address the rights of citizens on equal basis, without any implications based on ethnic or religious belonging. But as usual, often happens to have lot of lacks and anomalies in practical implementation of laws due to the different factors and interests that influence the society. In the theory, the state functions through respecting the set of (constitutional) laws and rights, ensuring functionality to order and rule of law, in which the state has to practice transparent behavior and overtakes responsibility for its own decisions. Nevertheless, very little, or no one state is completely neutral in influencing different ethnic groups. In most of the cases, state policies are based on arbitrary-subjective decisions, which often results with negative effect or discrimination of minorities. Even in the situations when decisions are not made on minorities, with the not addressing the institutions have impact on the life of minority communities. With this the legitimacy of governments is questioned because of the unequal approach and (not) prioritizing of ethnic needs in its own political agenda.

Our governments needed more than 15 years period yet to be reminded that there is need for addressing of Romani issues through particular policies. Although the NSR and Decade were publicly promoted in several times during the 2004, in election year

2006 the previous government was no more willing to speak publicly on Roma policies. Purely understandable, this behavior was because of forthcoming parliamentary elections and caution of the Government in order to avoid the frustration of its majority electorate. This hidden behavior push us to raise the question “Who has the legitimacy to create minority policies?” The governments elected by the majority are always careful against its own electorate, in which most frequently they have the mandate to realize the interests of majority and in which often there is no place for promotion on the needs of minority communities. This was the case with the Strategy for Roma in 2005 and 2006, the period when political elites entered earlier the election campaign and forgotten all policies which were not their priority. Additionally, the fact that there was a very minor number of Roma employed in state institutions negatively influenced the implementation of policies on Roma. Finally, lack of clear procedures, mechanisms and structures to deal with policy measures inevitable brought complete stagnation in the phase of implementation of NSR and Decade.

The previous and present government missed the opportunity publicly to explain to the citizens on the nature and needs for institutional policies for Roma, what kind of benefit these policies bring to Macedonia. As a main creator of public opinion the Government should always inform citizens and argument on policies and decisions made. This was never done for Roma policies. The explanatory process was more than needed because policies for Roma were created through process of cooperation between formal and informal actors and because the whole process guaranteed building of really needed and relevant measures for Roma integration. This fact was neglected and the whole success of this process was prescribed to the previous government by itself while getting the candidate status for membership to EU. It is also important to stress that the previous government ignored the follow up phases of Romani policies in its own agenda which means it was satisfied with formulation and adoption only. It has also forgotten that the ownership and responsibility on the implementation was institutional mission. Especially was ignored the part of introducing financial mechanism and allocation of concrete funds from the state budget, followed by the unclear decision that each ministry should put money for Romani policies, knowing that there are no funds available because the same government approved ministry budgets at the end of previous year. Without publicly

made statement by the government coalition of SDSM, where was expected to clearly state the state budget input on Romani policies, lot of funds are lost from the donor agencies present in Macedonia. They clearly stated that are willing to support Romani policies in Macedonia but only in cases if the state translate its commitment through financial instruments.

Both wider and Roma public are not informed from the institutions that the measures adopted as a Romani policies are positive action or have affirmative character. The background of the nature of these policies comes from the long term exclusion and ignorance of the system to integrate Roma as own citizens. Following this, the institutions have pillar arguments to justify the special attention towards Roma, the process that should be done till now in each ministry dealing with Roma issues. There is particular need to promote the affirmative approach and specific distributive character of Romani policies, in order for wider understanding and acceptance by the majority, namely that this measures have time determination and are non-repetitive but aimed to decrease the gap of economic inequality. With this act will be avoided further gaming with symbolic policies from the political elites or hiding own decisions by the governments from the majority of the electorate.

The present governmental coalition has several options or alternatives how to continue its approach toward Romani policies. Of course one of these is to continue in same way as it practiced till now. The alternatives are:

1. To develop concrete targeted actions with allocation of human and financial resources from the existing documents and policies for Roma(targeting)
2. To incorporate the existing policies on Roma into the mainstream policies of each ministry (mainstreaming)
3. The third approach is to combine the both approaches, namely to make clear distinction between the actions that requires targeting with those which have to be mainstreamed.

The third approach is the most preferred according to the pragmatic experiences of Roma movement and bearing in mind the multidimensional nature of the problems, which of course is most complex and requires much more resources and adequate engagements on different levels in the system.

THE POLICIES FOR ROMA NEEDS EVERYTHING

The addressing of societal problems during the designing process requires overall analyses as a basic precondition for further implementation and achieving the planned objectives and changes. While the adoption of decisions on some policy/strategy is easier part of the work, the hard work remains to be on the implementation phase and producing the preferred change. The next steps, based upon the dynamics of realization of measures for Roma integration, institutions should make concrete logical steps which will produce visible results and implementation of those policies. For example, the Decade needs urgent **transfer from national to local level**, in order to become domestic instrument and feasible policy. This transfer from international to national and to local level is quite complex and highly time-assuming process, but from the other side the central government do not show any kind of knowledge or interest to make the step forward just because the whole decentralization process is new for the actors in our system. The transfer of policies, measures and responsibilities from one level to another requires adequate structures and mechanisms, for which we can say that do not exist both at national and local level. Till now, the previous and present government **doesn't have any concept** what and how to transfer Roma policies to local level.

Within the frames of the state system the Decade and Roma Strategy are coordinated from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) in which there is no specific department to deal on these policies as a separate structure. The Government of Macedonia has established cross-sectoral body named Coordinative Body (CB) for Implementation of National Strategy for Roma and Decade National Action Plans which has acts as consultative body and do not have impact on the implementation of policies for Roma. This means that MLSP and CB from time to time are inspecting ongoing processes on Roma, but anyhow they have other priorities within their everyday work in the institutions. The coordination among ministries is also a weak point in the whole process and the same is reflected to the coordination with Roma political parties and NGOs. From all above mentioned it is obviously that our system does **not have adequate structure** which should give inputs and initiatives on the progress of Roma policies. Without structures there are **no concrete mechanisms and procedures**, which are

importantly needed for the regulation of relations between stakeholders, location of the responsibility and timed realization of planned activities. Finally, the ordinary Roma citizen has a lot of dilemmas equal to confusion because he is lost within the labyrinth of the system just because of this **undefined mechanisms and lack of permanent body to deal with these processes**. Adding to this that employees in the public administration have insufficient knowledge on the Roma problems, by the way ruled from the rigid bureaucratic rules, it is much more clear and evident why Macedonia has no implementation and visibility that policies for Roma are adequately solved in our state.

In order to achieve effectiveness and efficiency, the present policies on Roma needs urgent **revision and supplementing** segments which are lacking or missed in the previous two phases of formulation and adoption. The revision do not necessarily means conceptual or contextual changes but rather it means concretization and clarification of undefined parts. The most important is that the whole system of Romani policies should have **adequate mechanisms and structures**, which further will incorporate and coordinate with mainstreaming policies and institutions in the system. It is already mentioned that primary importance is to transfer Roma policies to the local level, which needs separate engagement and regulatory mechanism for directing the whole process. Nevertheless, there has to be considered that most of the local institutions do not have adequate Roma representation and that there is need for **systematic favour** of Romani priorities at local level through subventions, donations and tax exempts as a motivation more for local economic and social actors. In this regard, if Roma policies are left without above mentioned structures and mechanisms, bearing in mind the weak political and economic influence of Roma at national and local level, the chances for success will be completely reduced. This will confirm suspiciousness that our state does not have will to reduce the poverty and that aims to continue with lamination of its citizens by ethnic, economic and social background.

The following priority measures are recommended to the Government of Macedonia and to the National Coordinator of the Roma Strategy and Decade:

- 1. Establishment of an administrative / management office for the implementation, coordination, fundraising, reporting, etc**

- 2. Financial mechanisms – allocation of funds, meaningful fundraising**
- 3. Rules of procedure for the existing structures**
- 4. Establishment of a system for measuring and reporting on the progress (indicators, milestones, disaggregated data collection, transparent reporting)**
- 5. Systematic decentralization of the process – from the central government to the local government, institutions – central and local, outreach to the Roma community**

The present government as well the next ones, have to utilize the present frame and engagement of European institutions on Roma issues. Particular attention has to be dedicated to the part of absorption and management of EU funds, process which should be as fast as possible finalized in order that potential human capacities are structured in this direction. Of course, among Roma are existing potentials for this kind of structuring, which in combination with the knowledge of the problems of own population, priorities and final objectives are creating the basic preconditions for success of Romani policies. By the way, guarantees and responsibilities will be shared between institutions and Roma structures, which has to act in continuity and coordinated with international and national policies/institutions. The biggest challenge is the successful balancing between EU and Decade initiatives and their utilization with adequate financial and human engagement.

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