Chronic Deception: A Brief Analysis of Roma Policies in Macedonia

By Nadir Redzepi[1]

[1] Nadir Redzepi is Project Manager at the Open Society Institute. He has been serving as a Board member of OSI Roma Initiatives in 2008/2009 and is active Board member of Roma Education Fund since 2007.

Foreword

The Republic of Macedonia started its journey through the challenges of democracy in the early 90s with a long and painful transition, which prompted each ethnic community to focus on its own needs. Roma, of course, were no exception to this trend – they established their own political parties and civil society organisations. The preliminary mandate of the Romani political and civil society organisations was (and still is) focused on the application and promotion of the rights of the Romani community aiming at contribution to the development and integration of the Romani community in Macedonia.

Roma mainly organised through political parties and non-government organisations (NGOs), gradually and laboriously were taking their position in the public life of Macedonia. It is a process that inevitably continues, and it has to be propounded that neither of the forms of the Romani organising have set up efficient, visible dialogue and co-operation with state institutions. Additionally, during the first 15 years of independence in Macedonia, institutional negligence and ignorance towards the problems of Roma by the Government contributed to the enlargement of the gap and deepening distrust between Romani political parties and civil society organisations. While the Romani political parties were always making coalitions with the Government, Romani NGOs were regular critics of the Government and, as a result, of Romani political parties. While the former had to adjust to and follow the priorities of their coalition partners, the latter profiled its organizational capacities and acted according their needs and organisational vision. Consequently, the inner anomalies with regards to the Romani constellations deepened: the power that Romani political parties acquired within the institutions was not adequately supported by the better developed organisational capacities of Romani associations.

Essentially, these were the relations among the key actors until 2004, when the process of building public policies targeting Roma in Macedonia finally began. In January 2005 the Government adopted two public policies for development of the Romani community: the National Strategy for Roma and National Action Plans for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, with a decision that the latter was an integral operational part of the former.

In the following short analysis, institutional efforts to finance and implement the adopted policies for Roma[2] so far are described, with partial discussion of the quality and effects of these policies. The following factors are taken into account: institutional arrangement and structural set-up, regulations and finances. This analysis is based on my participation in and information gathered from the observing the process in the past 7 years.

The character of Roma policies in Macedonia

Romani policies are clearly targeted and set up on an ethnic and socio-economic basis, and as such, they target almost 90% of the Romani population in Macedonia. Time-wise, the policies are determined to last 10 years, for the period 2005-2015. Planned measures in the given priority areas represent socio-integration projects with a wide range of inter-related activities. Key responsibility is placed on the Government and several ministries in Macedonia. Although it was expected that the responsibility for Romani policies would be transferred to the local level, a top-down approach has remained an unchanged feature of the management of Romani policies: there has been no systematic transfer of responsibility for implementing Romani policies from the central to the municipal

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[2] Referring equally to the National Strategy for Roma and National Action Plans of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015

level. This is largely due to the fact that most of the key policy actors promote and view these policies as affirmative and not legally binding. Once Romani policies became part of State policy, dependant on the position and will of State actors and in the absence of wide acceptance and understanding, the interpretation of their legal basis and justification was accompanied by selective and daily politicising which exacerbated ineffective implementation.

In monitoring attitude of the Government and institutions towards Romani policies, one gets the impression that the policies are formally brought with the expectations that they will be supported financially by foreign sources. Thus, unlike civil society organisations during the last 5 years, institutions have started implementing various parts of the Romani public policies through projects in which a pilot phase and identification of good practices[3] in dealing with the complex situation of Romani is always emphasised. Although good practices and solutions for certain problems have been identified, they have not been systematically incorporated across the institutions and certain institutions still prefer using foreign donations.
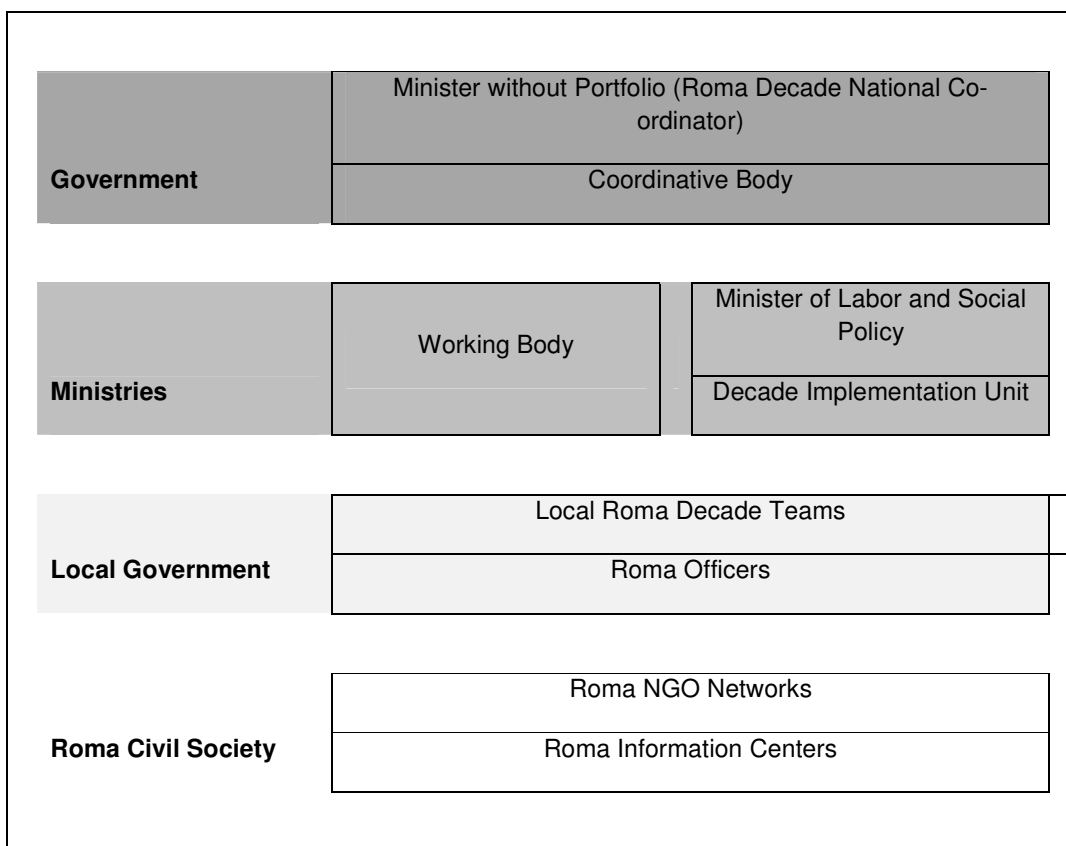
Structures 2005-2010

Since their official adoption, Roma policies in Macedonia have been enhanced several times with human and financial resources. In the period 2005-2006 the only body responsible for Roma policy was the Government's Coordinative Body which was comprised of representatives of ministries, Romani political parties and Roma organisations. A National Coordinator of Roma policies was appointed by the Government, mainly the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP). This Ministry established 8 Roma Information Centres (RICs) during 2007 in cooperation with Romani civil society organisations. In the following year, 2008, two new bodies related to Roma policy were established. The position of National Co-ordinator for the implementation of the two policies was moved from the MLSP to a Minister without Portfolio, who, at the same time, established a new cabinet with five employees. Within the MLSP an Operational Department for implementation of Roma policy was also established, which currently has three employees, soon to be extended by two more. The current Government has planned, for several years, to increase of the number of RICs from eight to twelve: however, this has not been implemented yet. Several ministries have established working groups for Roma policy implementation and these are also responsible for planning and implementing annual plans within the given Ministry. In several towns, Local Action Plans for Roma have been adopted and accordingly local teams have been established, but so far this has been on a voluntary or project basis.

The described structure could freely be interpreted as a product of the current policies towards Roma. The Government of Macedonia tends to parade all the measures and arrangements contributing to, in a general sense, improved participation of Roma in the public administration, including projects financed by foreign sources, etc. This is largely due to the responsibilities of Macedonia within the Ohrid Framework Agreement and of course the raised awareness of the Romani community about participation in the on-going processes. The following table[4] illustrates the institutional arrangement of the structures resulting from the current public policies:

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[3] http://insoc.org.mk/publications/DW_MK_2010_EN_1.pdf, pages 9-23, 57-58
[4] http://www.romadecade.org/report_examines_institutional_setup_for_roma_policy_in_six_decade_countries, Decade Institutional Setup report, June 2009, by Nadir Redzepi and Alexandra Bojadzieva

| Government | Minister without Portfolio (Roma Decade National Co-ordinator) | |
| | Coordinative Body | |

| Ministries | Working Body | Minister of Labor and Social Policy |
| | | Decade Implementation Unit |

| Local Government | Local Roma Decade Teams | |
| | Roma Officers | |

| Roma Civil Society | Roma NGO Networks | |
| | Roma Information Centers | |

Of all of the above bodies, only the employees in the cabinet of the National Co-ordinator and the MLSP Decade Operational Department are paid from the State budget for public administration. It is important to note that working group members in the Ministries are tasked with implementing Roma policies in addition to their other work: thus, it would be incorrect to interpret their pay as a budget allocation for Roma policy implementation.

Two employees in each RIC are paid on a project basis. The people working in other bodies are not financially supported in any way from the State budget for their engagement: they are mainly financed on a project basis.

Governance of Roma policies

Policies for the integration of Roma in Macedonia are largely the result of influences and initiatives coming from abroad; mainly in relation to regional aspirations for European integration. This regional trend created the conditions in which Roma policies are easily and quickly processed and adopted. During the planning and preparation phase in Macedonia, a number of mistakes were made, influencing the implementation in subsequent years. During the first two years, 2005 and 2006, no visible progress was made in implementation. This was mainly due to the fact that the Government had not put in place adequate administrative or operational structures to manage implementation and, of course, the Government had failed to allocation adequate funds to finance implementation. The lack of these two important elements determined from the beginning that the Roma policies were only declaratory reflections of political will. In the same period, the Coordinative Body for implementation of the National Strategy for Roma and the National Action Plans of the Decade functioned without a strategy or terms of reference, with frequent changes in its composition. Meetings of the Coordinative

Body were organised on an *ad hoc* basis and there was almost no decision-making. Most of the meetings were spent merely reporting on current activities and related opportunities.

After the National Co-ordinator moved under the Minister without Portfolio and the MLSP Operational Department was established in 2008, work became even more complicated. Theoretically, this change was adequate and maybe desirable to raise responsibility for Roma issues to a higher level and assure adequate institutional attention. However, the reality has been that the functioning of these institutions has fallen short of expectations. Misunderstandings between the MLSP and the National Co-ordinator have negatively impacted the work of other ministries, including internationally where confusions arose among Decade actors. The misunderstandings occurred mainly because of weak communication and co-ordination between the two ministries and insufficiently clear division of responsibilities and mandates. In practice, the mandate of both offices is recognised as planning and co-ordination of the stakeholders, accompanied much more with consultancy arrangements than decision-making and implementation. Having limited institutional power and space to manoeuvre, both offices often entered into contest in situations with certain initiatives or steps undertaken, often impeding each other in the process. This has not been about institutional competition. The problem has been fighting among Romani political parties which gained dominant influence over one office or the other through participation in the Government coalition. This has been the basis for arguments about insufficient Government dedication and attention to Roma policy, allowing the Romani political parties to influence both the implementing structures on the basis of narrow party interests.

These experiences clearly show that the division of roles and responsibilities within the system is a highly important element for the practical application of public policies. This case proved that it is not enough to have a common national strategy and a specific structure with a formal description of tasks and responsibilities. The need for a clear hierarchical arrangement and adequate political agreement among the actors is crucial to the effective functioning of institutional divisions of roles and responsibilities to implement a given public policy. In Macedonia, three years were wasted on institutional misunderstandings and divergent political aspirations, as well as resources for irrational competition and flirting with the Government about which Romani partner in the coalition was better.

Financing

Securing financial resources for the implementation of Roma policy in the State budget was a difficult process in Macedonia. Altogether 1,046,780 EUR has been allocated for that purpose. This amount represents an average of 0.009% of the total State budget in the last 6 years (2005-2010).In 2005, the first year of policy implementation, there was no specific budget allocated. Most of the funds were allocated in 2009 – over 390,000 EUR[5].

To better understand what this resource allocation could change in the Romani community the easiest way is to divide the annual budget by the total number of Roma in Macedonia. In 2005, for example, the Macedonian State did not allocate any budgetary resources for implementing Roma policy. In the following years there were modest financial investments for Roma policy implementation.

Dividing the annual budgets by the total number of Romani living in Macedonia,[6] the lowest amount was allocated in 2006 at 0.30 EUR per person. The highest amount was allocated during, 2009, at 7.24 EUR per person. Altogether, the Macedonian Government has allocated 18.60 EUR per person towards inclusion programming for the Romani population in the last 6 years. If we add that

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[5] http://www.finance.gov.mk/view/budget2008; short analysis of State budget 2006-2010
[6] http://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/knigaI.pdf According to official statistics, there are about 54,000 Roma in Macedonia. Calculations are based on this figure.

the annual planned and allocated funds from the budget for the implementation of the Romani policies which were not completely used, it could be concluded that Macedonia has allocated very little from the state budget to implement Roma policy.

The following table[7] contains more details on the funds allocated to particular ministries in Macedonia, albeit without publicly available reports on what and how has been spent.

EUR 1	MKD 61,5	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy	Ministry of Transport and Connections	Ministry of Education and Science	Ministry of Health	Ministry of Culture	total targeted budget for Roma	total state budget of RM	% of Roma budget from total state budget
2005	**MKD**	0	0	0	0	0	0	56.501.999.000	0,00%
	EUR	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**918.731.691**	**0,00%**
2006	**MKD**	1.000.000	0	0	0	0	1.000.000	103.197.984.000	0,00%
	EUR	**16.260**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**16.260**	**1.678.016.000**	**0,00%**
2007	**MKD**	4.203.000	0	0	0	0	4.203.000	108.634.894.000	0,00%
	EUR	**68,341**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**68,341**	**1.766.421.041**	**0,00%**
2008	**MKD**	8.500.000	0	6.000.000	0	0	14.500.000	128.739.888.000	0,01%
	EUR	**138,211**	**0**	**97,561**	**0**	**0**	**235,772**	**2.093.331.512**	**0,01%**
2009	**MKD**	13.034.000	5.000.000	4.000.000	1.000.000	1.000.000	24.034.000	153.215.000.000	0,02%
	EUR	**211.935**	**81.301**	**65.041**	**16.260**	**16.260**	**390.797**	**2.491.300.813**	**0,02%**
2010	**MKD**	9.340.000	5.000.000	5.500.000	300.000	500.000	20.640.000	143.334.000.000	0,01%
	EUR	**151.870**	**81.301**	**89.431**	**4.878**	**8.130**	**335.610**	**2.330.634.146**	**0,01%**
2005 - 2010	**MKD**	36.077.000	10.000.000	15.500.000	1.300.000	1.500.000	64.377.000	693.623.765.000	0,01%
	EUR	**586,618**	**162,602**	**252,033**	**21,138**	**24,39**	**1.046.780**	**11.278.435.203**	**0,01%**

For the purpose of comparison, in 2009 alone Bosnia and Herzegovina allocated about 1,500,000[8] EUR for addressing the inclusion needs of its 75,000 Roma.[9] Financial assistance through the European Union's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) in Macedonia amounts to 30 EUR per capita for each year for the period 2007-2013.

Challenges and perspectives on Roma policy in Macedonia

All of the aforementioned points indicate that Macedonia's policies for Roma had a muddled start and have stagnated for some time now. The difference between measures planned and what was actually achieved is significant, despite the fact that more than half of the period planned for undertaking them has already passed. The reasons for this are multi-dimensional: most derive from

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[7] Decade Watch 2010 report http://www.romadecade.org/decade_watch

[8] http://www.zurnal.info/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2411:briga-za-glasae-zar-romi-ive-u-bih&catid=64:romske-prie&Itemid=134

[9] Statistically, there are less than 9,000 Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the number of 75,000 is unofficial assessment of the Romani organisations.
http://www.bhas.ba/arhiva/census1991/Etnicka%20obiljezja%20stanovnistva%20bilten%20233.pdf

the State system itself, but also, of course, part of it comes from the elite of the Romani community. The 2010 Decade Watch monitoring report[10] presents quantitative data on the relationship between planned and achieved measures in Macedonia and other countries. The following table allows comparison of this relation in numbers, where it can be seen that out of 86 planned activities only 12 were implemented, out of which only 7 activities have been fully completed according to the Decade Action Plan. Altogether, only 8% of the Action Plans of the Decade have been implemented, which is disappointing and defeating number.

Number of targets of Decade Action Plan (DAP) in Macedonia	Number of activities that should have been met according to DAP	Number of activities that have been met by October 2009	Number of activities that are targeted but not fully met	Number of activities that have not been begun	Percentage of activities completed
Education	30	2	1	27	7%
Health	26	/	1	25	0
Employment	7	1	1	5	14%
Housing	10	1	1	8	10%
Gender	13	2	1	/	15%
Anti-discrimination	/	1	/	/	0
Anti-poverty	/	/	/	/	0
Total	**86**	**7**	**5**	**65**	**8%**

Implementation of the planned measures remains the main challenge, and it is rightfully expected that the Government will play the dominant role and act as the carrier of all institutional arrangements. The Romani community perceives the adopted Roma policies as the legal obligation of the State. The Government manifests a contradictory dualism: Romani political leaders gradually gain high positions and institutional responsibility within the State apparatus but without adequate (or no) institutional power and decision-making autonomy. This certainly decreases the legitimacy and credibility of Romani political leaders and facilitates continuous distrust towards institutions and political elites of the majority. The greater part of the Romani community is increasingly unconvinced that the activities of the Decade of Roma Inclusion are implemented according to the plans. Distrust is so high that even Romani civil society organisations have growing problems in their daily communication and efforts to address the needs of their target groups. The perception about government negligence and being manipulated is particularly increased among Roma with recent measures and decisions undertaken by several institutions, primarily the police, which are totally in contrast to the goals of the current Romani policies. The situation and position of the Romani population in Macedonia is now a verification of the continuous lack of attention and ignorance to the problems of Roma in Macedonia. The next national institutional arrangements, as well as the efforts of internationals, are more likely to face rejection and more resistance from within the Romani community which will decrease the chances for positive change. The high expectations of the Romani community are transformed into frustrated distrust towards the state and on-going Romani policies and in the long run inevitably lead to conflict.

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[10] http://insoc.org.mk/publications/DW_MK_2010_EN_1.pdf

Instead of recommendations…some personal thoughts

Many questions remain in the air. What can be done with Roma policies? Can we keep and tolerate this tempo of institutional mobilisation and indefinitely wait for better times? Are Macedonian Roma capable of establishing the policy environment and managing policy infrastructure without risking isolation from mainstream interests? Scepticism surrounds the key actors but most of the problems are hard to live with inside Romani communities. Every person watches what the other does, waiting for his/her expectations to be realised by others … and while waiting for that they want to benefit and feel radical progress.

At this stage under such circumstances it is (maybe) quite late for making early warning recommendations on the future policy developments. It is not late from a time perspective but rather late from the perspective of the political and institutional commitments of this populist Government. From the past five years of "promises", we can't boast tangible and visible effects within Roma communities. For now, everything boils down to key individuals taking an interest. The benefits of these policies are still far from the average Romani person mainly because of superficial interests and knowledge about Roma issues. Most of the five years was irrationally spent on processing plans, meetings and procedures, not on the policy content implementation. Of course, it was an illusion to expect that the State would confer high priority on Roma policy. Nevertheless, it was realistic to expect that the state will start, at least, doing something to correct previous injustices towards Roma. Adding value to the pessimistic scenario of Roma policies is the fact that, in last two years, six Romani parties entered the Government coalition. This happened during the period in which the worst events and ill-treatment occurred; a period in which the mainstream definition of Roma vulnerability moved from an easy-going and leave-them-alone thinking framework to recent radical qualifications for undeserved State measures for Roma integration in Macedonia. Encounters with radical opinions from both sides inevitably push the perception to expect attitude and behaviour changes primarily within Romani communities. As the development and quality of initiatives does not come from responsible State institutions, it is reasonable to believe this will arise inside Romani communities. At this stage the capacities and organisational culture of Romani political parties in Macedonia do not correspond to the given institutional role. For sure they must catch up with all the challenges of the context if they intend to continue with political activism. The main challenge continues to be how Romani political parties will build their own capacities to make them capable to resume part of the policy load on Romani policy making and implementation.

Finally, as actors in promoting the social inclusion of Roma, Romani civil society organisations will have to transform soft donor-driven performances into tangible community daily-based activities. There is silent recognition that their past shadow diplomacy work contributed to the development of Roma policies at the national and international level but that it has also detached them from Romani communities. There is enormous vacuum left and the response to community needs is urgent and highly demanded. The basic preconditions for interaction among 3 policy actors (institutions, Romani political parties, NGOs) are in place.

Bearing in mind all the failures, shortages and stakeholder priorities I would like to close this article with the conclusion that policy arena has just started for Roma in Macedonia. It will be a long and very hard process but it is also unquestionable that it will produce changes. The soft changes produced in the past, whether positive or negative, enforced the formal justification of Romani policies. There is now solid empirical knowledge of how to address Roma issues, but most important is the fact that the established policy dialogue does not have a deadline: Roma public policies will exist beyond 2015. The dilemma will be in which way and who will move the slow policy "machinery" in the right direction (if the Government does not)?

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