

Roma in Europe From Social Exclusion to Active Participation

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Roma's self-government in Shuto Orizari

It is great honour to be a member of the Roma community and it is an even greater honour to live in Suto Orizari - the first municipality in the world where over 80% of the habitants are Roma. As a Roma journalist I was very lucky that I was part of the inauguration of Suto Orizari. There were so many events in my 11-year career as a journalist in the Roma news department at the Macedonian television that couldn't make me indifferent. My reports on the events were full with facts and objective, but the colour of my voice was the soul of my heart which proudly presented me as an ordinary Roma women. I sincerely hope that these few pages show the exact image of one people gathered at the place called Suto Orizari together with their friendly neighbors (Macedonians, Albanians, Turks)

Roma and Politics

The date September 12, 1996 has gone down in the annals of Roma history in gold. According to the Macedonian Act on Territorial Division and Definition of Units of Local Self-Governments as of that date the municipality of Shuto Orizari (unified from the settlement Shuto Orizari and the villages Gorno and Dolno Orizari) started its work. This is an historical event not only for the Roma people in Macedonia, but for the Roma in the whole world as well. For the first time a municipality was founded in which the Roma population was in the majority.

The Suto Orizari local administration was chosen at local elections in November and December 1996. These organs started to function in January 1997 under difficult technical and financial conditions, because the budget of the municipality was limited to 4.9 million Macedonian dinars, the equivalent of 76,000 euros. As a consequence of the low budget the Municipality services were staffed by only eight employees in total.¹

Nezdet Mustafa was elected first mayor of the municipality of Suto Orizari with 9,000 votes out of a total registered voting body of

¹ Mustafa, N., The first years, 2000

12,330. He was mayor of the Municipality until the parliamentary elections in 1999 when he was elected a member of the Parliament.

Erduan Iseni, member of Mustafa's party, was appointed as temporary mayor of the municipality. Iseni was elected mayor of Suto Orizari at the extraordinary local elections in Suto Orizari after a few months and was mayor until the last local elections in 2005. He was a candidate of the OPE (United Party for Equality) which was coalition partner of the parties in position (SDSM, DUI and LDP) named «For Macedonia» (za Makedonija). This year elections for mayors of the municipalities were held. In the spring of 2005 there were five candidates for mayor of Suto Orizari. Erduan Iseni (Coalition For Macedonia), Amdi Bajram (Alliance of Roma in Macedonia), Kemal Sadik (Party of Democratic Streght of Roma in Macedonia), Severdzan Iljaz (Democratic Union of Roma) and Kadri Sefo (independent candidate). In the second round there were two candidates in the race for mayor: Erduan Iseni and Amdi Bajram. At the time of the local elections Amdi Bajram was sentenced to four years in prison by the Stip court for textile misdemeanors involving the head of the textile industry company Makedonka from Stip. It was only a matter of time before the high court issued a warrant for his arrest. But, Bajram officially had won the local elections in Suto Orizari, and the state election committee confirmed the results. However, Amdi Bajram's joy lasted only few days: Now he is in prison in Suto Orizari.

The local elections in Suto Orizari returned a new municipal council. The Roma parties have ten members in the Council: The party of Amdi Bajram won six seats, the United Party for Emancipation four. One seat is reserved for VMRO-narodna (the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) and the rest are taken by the two Albanian parties DPA and DUI (Democratic Party of the Albanians and Democratic Union for Integration). Sami Srebezovski, member of the Alliance of Roma in Macedonia, was elected chairman of the council.

On 21 August extraordinary elections were held in Suto Orizari. Three candidates ran for mayor of Sutka: Erduan Iseni (OPE), Enver Ibrahim as independent candidate, Saban Saliu (the only Roma lawyer in Macedonia) for the Alliance of Roma in Macedonia.² The second round of the elections was held two weeks later and the citizens of Suto Orizari had to choose between Erduan

² Sources from the municipality election committee

Iseni and Saban Saliu. The new mayor of Suto Orizari is Erduan Iseni from the United Party for Emancipation (OPE).

Affirmation of Suto Orizari

Suto Orizari was built after the catastrophic earthquake in Skopje in 1963, as a solution to the harsh conditions facing the Roma families whose homes had been destroyed. The substandard living conditions in which they lived were sad reality. The new unit of Romani local self-government gave hope that the problems would soon be alleviated, the right questions asked, and the solutions identified.

First of all, the Roma population in the Municipality expected more from «its» administration. Actually, the poor living conditions prompted new activities. The municipality of Suto Orizari became a motivation for the self-esteem and dignity of Roma, because they prepared the first official newspaper in the Romani and Macedonian languages, where for the first time in the world official documents were published in the Romani language. The municipality's seal and flag were inaugurated, which has strengthened the identity of the first municipality in Europe with a majority Roma population.

One of the first steps made to improve the infrastructure in the municipality was the reconstruction of the Suto Orizari high street, the reconstruction of the local road from the neighborhood Suto Orizari through the settlement of Vizbegovo near the frontier with the municipality of Cair, and the building of the square of Suto Orizari. The resources for the building work were provided by the City of Skopje and the municipality of Suto Orizari. Two years later the same sources gave approximately 84,000 euros for the reconstruction of the Vietnamska and Nov Zivot streets and an amount of 38,000 euros for the reconstruction of the Garcia Lorca street in 2003. The maintenance of the communal electricity costs 33,000 euros a year. But these projects are only a drop in the ocean. The municipality is not powerful enough to solve communal problems such as the construction of lighting, green zones, a water-supply system, etc.³

According to article 22 of the Local Self-Government Act, the community's scope includes: urban and rural planning, protection of the environment and nature, local economic development,

³ Mustafa, N., The first years, 2000

communal activities, culture, sports and recreation, social protection and the protection of children, education, health care etc. The Local Self-Government Act opens up many significant steps towards decentralization of central powers, since the municipalities take over some of central government's powers. The authority assumed by local government involves many spheres and segments, such as education, science, culture, healthcare, etc. According to the new Decentralization Act (territorial organization), which came into force this year, units of self-governments are no longer dependent on the state. The municipalities should provide themselves with better conditions and authority is in the hands of its administrative organs. This law reaffirms the government's commitment to move closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures through the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. This was a confirmation of the pledge to uphold the country's territorial integrity, unitary and multi-ethnic character.

a) Sutka – little Paris

In the neighborhood of Suto Orizari there are many happy people. You can see faces with a great smile, although there live in poverty and social isolation. When you get closer to the center of the neighborhood, there is a big crowd and a big commotion. And especially, if you have decided to visit the neighborhood on the weekend, then you will find a special atmosphere prevails. On every corner there are improvised counters full of colorful pieces of clothes, jewelry, shoes.....

Nowadays, the Sutka bazaar is the most popular market in Macedonia where you can buy very cheap things. Shopping is a great deal of fun, especially when you can hear the latest gipsy music blaring so loud from the nearest CD shops. Approximately 90 percent of the inhabitants of the neighborhood are tradesmen. The low level of employment has encouraged the inhabitants of Suto Orizari to work in trading and after only a short period their ability to earn has shown that the race to eke out an existence always begins again and never ends. This situation is a result of a lack of manufacture capacities in the municipality. In Suto Orizari there are only two schools, one kindergarten, one community center Rosh, one polyclinic, one post office and the few regional centers of Romani non-governmental organizations. The biggest problem is the high number of unemployed.

The detailed urban plan envisages individual housing along with social and public facilities: schools, marketplaces, hospitals, culture centers etc.. Unfortunately, only 30 percent has been realized to

date. One of the latest projects is the main fecal sewage fecal collector, being implemented with the financial support of the Austrian Government. The project costs 26,250,000 MKD (430,300 euros)⁴

b) Little and small houses, side by side

The houses in Suto Orizari have popped up like mushrooms. There are large and small houses side by side, some of them are new with latest kind of modern facades and others are very old, built when the neighborhood was born. The colors of the houses are very interesting: baby-blue, light-orange, lemon-yellow, but white definitely predominates. The new houses have a high standard with living space above 10 m² per family member but they represent only 20% of the overall housing stock.⁵

There are uniform huts which, most of them, are already ruined due to the lack of maintenance. The assembled tin-can buildings are called "hangarni baraki" and they were gradually reconstructed, but the living standards are below acceptable levels.

However, you cannot forget the colours of these buildings in Sutka, they spark happy emotions.

c) Socio-economic situation of Roma in Suto Orizari

The lasting unfavorable economic trend in the Republic of Macedonia affects the entire population and has impacts negatively on the living standards of a significant number of citizens. One of the biggest problems which is a consequence of this trend is the high unemployment. The employment of Roma could improve only if government initiates more positive general macroeconomic conditions.

The large number of Roma looking for work deed not have the necessary level of education and this is the main reason why they are not competitive on the labor market. Official data shows that in 2003 of the total number of unemployed registered in the Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia 4.3% were Roma. One half of these have incomplete elementary education. According to the last May 2005 report of the Employment Agency, 17,177 Roma are unemployed.

⁴ Mustafa, N., The first years, 2000 - Rougheri, Chr., Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe - Southeast Europe (CEDIME-SE), Minorities in Southeast Europe, Roma in Macedonia

⁵ Iseni, E., Suto Orizari, 2005

The population in Suto Orizari has the highest number of socially disadvantaged families. According to the data from the Center for Social Work 1,700 out of the total number of families are registered as the most disadvantaged with no regular income. Bearing in mind the everyday closure of state-owned and private enterprises, it is evident that the number of social cases is increasing. One of the crunch problems in the municipality is unemployment, which is the main cause why the Roma families are socially disadvantaged. The municipality does not have manufacturing capacities and due to the well-known economic problems there are no opportunities for employment in the other municipalities.

In addition, in the Municipality there are no natural resources for the development of agriculture or other resources.

Roma in the Municipality live “from one day to the next” and are still waiting for better days. In the mean time, most of the families live from trading and money received as social benefits.⁶

d) Citizens without citizenship

One of the issues which is very problematic is the 1992 Citizenship Act, because from November 1993 onwards all Roma and other individuals from the republics of former Yugoslavia were no longer eligible for Macedonian citizenship. The main obstacles set by the law are related to the conditions of legal residence in Macedonia. Before filling an application, persons must have resided in Macedonia for 15 years and have a permanent source of income. The application fee varied from 50,500,250 Denar to 80 USD (last year) and many of the Roma did not have the money needed for the application fee.⁷ In Suto Orizari this problem was solved thanks to the three non-governmental organizations which are focused on human rights protection (ROZPR, CDRIM and Avutnipe). These organizations collect the documents needed to apply for citizenship and the application fee is paid by the UNHCR (actually the applicants pay for the citizenship themselves and the money is later reimbursed by UNHCR). This year there has been a major drive for Macedonian citizenship from the NGO's which work on human rights and from the Macedonian Government. One of them is a TV spot in the Romani and Macedonian languages in which the citizens say why it is important to hold Macedonian citizenship. Also

⁶ Iseni, E., Shuto Orizari, 2005 – Mustafa, N., The first years, 2000

⁷ Rougheri, Chr., 1998.

brochures prepared were which outline the conditions for Macedonian citizenship and the application deadline, namely March 2006.⁸

e) Mirror, mirror on the wall, what school is the best for me?

In Suto Orizari there are two primary schools with a total number of 3.800 pupils. The first is OU "26 July" and the second is called OU "Braka Ramiz Hamid". The classes in the primary schools are defined by the Macedonian Ministry of Education, which is in charge of lessons. There are many problems in these schools. Every year, when the time comes for enrollment of children in the first grade of primary education the parents do not appear go to the schools owing to their everyday work duties or their ignorance. In fact, they tend to wait until the last minute in September for the enrollment. Sad, but true. And this is only one of the problems. The low level of pupils who continue with their education in secondary schools is not at a satisfactory level. The problem of "the ghetto" for the Roma children has many negative consequences such as an ignorance of the Macedonian language (administrative and official language in these two schools). Of course, this further causes poorer results in studying and whittles away at the motivation of these pupils to achieve better results.⁹

In recent years, broad progress had been discernible. Thank to the Roma NGO's and their activities the situation has improved. The latest numbers show that 15 % of the population over 15 years has finished secondary education and the proportion of the population with higher (academic) education is still low (only 0.48%). Slowly, but encouraging, there are some examples of academic citizens from Suto Orizari who act as the ambassadors of higher education in this municipality. For example, there was one student last year in the Drama Art faculty and this year there are two Roma girls who are attempting to enter the same faculty. Seven years ago, there was only one Roma pupil in the secondary art college (he became the first Roma graduate in sculpture in Macedonia) and after him there were two more who successfully completed the same course.

With the assistance of foreign donors the Roma NGO's have worked with the Roma children aged between 5 - 7 to improve their

⁸ One of those brochures was prepared by CDRIM

⁹ Saip, I. Principal of the primary school "Braka Ramiz Hamid", Suto Orizari (personal communication, 2005)

knowledge of the Macedonian language. The key to successful education lies also in the work of these NGO's with the parents of the children in order to enlighten the latter on the importance of the education. Some of the children attend the municipality kindergarten, which has the capacity to take 150 children.

To return to primary schooling: The Dutch embassy together with the non-governmental organization *Mosaic* gave school support in the period of 1998-9 in the form of 416,000 Macedonian dinars (equivalent to 6,800 euros). The same year the World Bank provided elementary education funding and one year later financing for the primary schools has given the German Embassy totaling 1,100,000 dinar or 18,000 euros. The latest support for the elementary schools was forthcoming from IOM (International Organization for Migration) and comes to 120,000 euros.¹⁰ Over the latest two years The German Caritas organization provided meals and milk for pupils in all-day schooling.¹¹

f) Romani in the Primary schools

Facultative schooling in the Romani language has started in the two primary schools in the municipality of Suto Orizari. The beginning was very hard due to the lack of literature materials in Roma language, but things have gradually improved. Professor Saip Jusuf together with renowned Macedonian author Krume Kepeski has published the first Romani grammar. Moreover, Jusuf has prepared a spelling book in Romani. In addition, the Romani teachers use Romani literature from other European countries.¹²

g) Media and culture: the soul of one people

Besides the use of the Romani language in the primary schools in Suto Orizari there is also an opportunity to hear the news in Romani. Over the past ten years a local TV station named "TV Sutel" has existed in Suto Orizari. The greetings for the dearest ones are one of the most interesting programming features at the TV station. Given the fact that the Roma people enjoy music, this is not an unfamiliar thing for the Roma population. The celebrations of

¹⁰ Mustafa, N., *The first years*, 2000

¹¹ Mishel-Ilieva, K., representative of the office of Caritas (Essen, Germany) in Suto Orizari (personal communication., 2005)

¹² Iseni, Saip, Principal of the primary school "Braka Ramiz Hamid", Suto Orizari (personal communication, 2005)

weddings, birthdays or academic graduations are but a few of the occasions for which the habitants of Suto Orizari are sending greetings with video-materials and their own photographs!!! And all of this can be watched on TV Sutel. Roma journalists work for this TV station and it also broadcasts daily news and the program is not only limited to municipal issues.

There is a variety of cultural and educational programs, and when culture is mentioned, it is necessary to say that the roots of Roma culture in Republic of Macedonia can be traced back to the neighborhood of Suto Orizari. Back in the early 1950's, a number of young enthusiasts founded the Roma association Phralipe which later on sponsored a theatre company that performed throughout Europe. The name Phralipe over the next decades meant and represented the Roma culture not only in Macedonia but also abroad. And everything started in Suto Orizari. After 3 decades of successful work in Suto Orizari the theater company Phalipe went to Germany. In the 1980's, a few ex-members of Phralipe who had stayed in Macedonia formed the Student theater and in the mid 1990's there were several amateur theater groups as a result of the earlier work of Student. Today there are two amateur theater groups, namely Roma and Fadiljoni, and one group which is a part of the "Romano Ilo" NGO. Unfortunately among them there is only one young girl Sanela Emin who is about to finish her training at the Faculty of Drama in Skopje. The others are only enthusiasts and talented young and middle-aged Roma activists who simply love the theater. Their performances of plays are only seen once or twice a year. The dire financial straits are a reality for the theater groups. Only once a year does the Macedonian Ministry of Culture provide financial support for the Roma and Fadiljoni theaters (an amount of 60,000 dinars or 1,000 euros each). In 2005, there were in total two premiers performed by them. These theaters do not have their own premises to rehearse in; there is no theater building in Suto Orizari. There is not even a hall where these theaters can demonstrate their knowledge and hard work. For these reasons the plays are shown at the theaters in the center of Skopje, such as MNT-teatar Centar.

The situation of the other cultural activities is similar. The Roma population in Suto Orizari thirsts for cultural life. In fact, nothing special happens at the municipality. Only once a year, on the Romas' world day, April 8, are cultural events held. These events celebrate the day when the municipality officially started its work. And everything is happening thanks to the Roma NGO's. They are organizing music-poetry evenings, concerts of Roma music, cocktails... Worthy of mention is the fact that there is a young

generation which is involved in new music for the Roma population. The late 1990's saw the beginning of the new wave of music for the Roma in Macedonia and the epicenter was again in Suto Orizari. For 50 years, folk dances and traditional music have been performed by the Phralipe folk ensemble, which was a synonym for Roma music performances not only in Macedonia but in Europe as well. Pop, R'n'B and Rap has for the last decade been the most popular music. Names such as Shekil and Dzevat are very popular. Shekil originates from Suto Orizari and back in 2003 he had a No. 1 hit in the Macedonian charts (singing in Macedonian) together with Mustafa and famous Macedonian singer Aleksandar Ristovski-Princ. Dzevat was one of the 10 finalists and ended third at the Macedonian M2 potraga po nova zvezda contest for new music talents and this year he is one of the most popular new music names in Macedonian pop scene. The new wave Rap singers and dancers are to be seen at every major Macedonian musical event.

This is a fact which shows the great talent for music in the Roma population and add to this the fact that in recent years the number of Roma pupils from Suto Orizari who have continued their education at the Music academy in Skopje has increased by the year. For several years in a row, the mandolin orchestra of the "Braka Ramiz Hamid" primary school led by the teacher Samir Mehmed (academic musician) several has been the most successful orchestra in Republic-wide contests.¹³

h) Support from the Roma NGO sector

The Roma NGO sector started to function at the same period as the country received independence. One of the first NGO's in Macedonia is originated in Suto Orizari. "HOMOS" was a humanitarian organization which for several years has provided humanitarian aid for the inhabitants of Suto Orizari. A few years later other NGO's were founded, such as the women's organization Esma (the name is in honor of the most famous Roma singer Esma Redzepova Teodosievska). In Suto Orizari there are now three organization working for Roma human rights: ROZPR (Republican Organization for Roma Rights), CDRIM (Center for Democratic Development and Initiatives of Roma in Macedonia) and the Association for Human Rights Avutnipe.

¹³ Petrovski, Branko, 2004 - President of the Association for Roma folklore and culture "Romano ilo" (personal communication) - Abedin, Faat, 2005 - Actor in the theatre "Roma" (personal communication) – Iseni, 2004

Their main concerns are:

- To inform the habitants about their rights
- To help them with the all sorts of documents (how to write an application for job, a request for citizenship, etc.)
- To collect the necessary documents for Macedonian citizenship
- To fight against discrimination toward Roma
- To help the Roma refugees in their efforts for better status in the Republic of Macedonia and to help them find adequate solutions for their everyday problems.

These NGO's together with the citizen's information center, which works as a part of the Municipality of Suto Orizari, give new and timely information on every problem or question which needs solving or answering.

One of the latest projects for direct help of the citizens in all the neighborhoods where the Roma population lives is the program from IOM (International Organization for Migration) for the victims of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust of Roma (called Poraimos by the Roma) in Macedonia was bound up with the Bulgarian fascists. In 1944, Germany formed the Albanian Skanderbeg Waffen SS Division which occupied Kosovo, Southern Serbia, Montenegro, and Western Macedonia. The Macedonian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Roma, and Macedonian Jewish populations were the targets or victims of genocide and extermination. In the Greater Albania region of Western Macedonia, the Macedonian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Roma, and Jewish populations were similarly targeted for elimination and deportation.¹⁴

This program in Suto Orizari was implemented by the women's organization Esma and twice included food and sanitary packages, things for the winter and clothes. Also there is a free-of-charge medical support for all Roma victims of the Holocaust (those born no later than May 9, 1945).¹⁵ Last year the Association for Youth and Women Luludi started activities for the young population and for women in Suto Orizari. There is a creative workshop for Roma children every day. Young educated Roma volunteers are teaching Roma children in these informal schoolings.¹⁶

¹⁴ Carl Savich, Greater Bulgaria, Roma and the Holocaust in Macedonia, October 2004

¹⁵ Memedova, Kevser, President of WA Esma, personal communication, 2004

¹⁶ Kjmet, Amet, RAZM Luludi, personal communication, 2004

As regards informal education it is important to mention the cultural community center Rosh formed in 2000 – it was donated by Arc, UNHCR and Unicef. This center has many informal activities not only for the locals but for Roma refugees. There are courses on sewing, computer courses, courses in English, a kindergarten (where the Roma children learn Macedonian), etc. The cultural community center is open to local habitants and by all means, for the Roma refugees from Kosovo. And the Roma refugees are really a unique story for themselves.

i) Your home is where your heart is

In the summer of 1999, as a consequence of the NATO strikes against FR Yugoslavia, there were 2,500 Roma refugees from Kosovo in Macedonia in the Stenkovec camp. By April 2000, domestic and international sources claimed that there were some 5,000 refugees from Kosovo since 1999.

Unlike the case of the Albanian refugees, some of which were accommodated in camps and among friends and relatives in western Macedonia, this was not the case with the Kosovo Roma. Only few Romani families were willing to accommodate the Roma refugees from Kosovo due to the poverty of the Macedonian Roma. In the beginning of 2,000 Roma refugees were removed to temporary collective centers. The same year the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs decided to create a standing camp for them based in the settlement of Suto Orizari. The camp accommodated over 3,000 Roma refugees and it functioned under supervision of the UNHCR until 2003.

Because of the poor health and sanitary conditions in the Suto Orizari collective camp, the government and UNHCR decided to close it down. The refugees continued to live in the collective camp until May 2003, although the camp was officially closed on March 31. The refugees were granted by the Macedonian government with Temporary Humanitarian assisted Status. Their status was reviewed by the government every six months and they were not allowed to work which meant they became wholly dependent on humanitarian assistance.

They did not like the accommodation in private families which was suggested by the UNHCR because they were afraid that the financial aid provided from the “High Commission” was not enough to find a decent and long-term housing solution.

The other reason for fear was that if dispersed to private homes, it would become easier to deport them back to Kosovo.

When the camp was closed the refugees stayed without any fixed abode and their residence in the country became illegal under Macedonian law. This was the main reason for the famous "Odyssey" of the Roma refugees from Suto Orizari to the Medzitlija border crossing. The Macedonian government advised the Roma to return to Skopje to register and undertook to accept their individual applications for refugee status in the country, in anticipation of the enactment of the then draft Bill on Asylum.

After almost three months the Roma refugees were not longer able to put up a fight as they were exhausted from living under such unhygienic conditions.

Most of the Roma refugees over the last year were accommodated in private families in Suto Orizari to which end the UNHCR gives financial aid both to refugee families and the local families which have accommodated them.¹⁷

In Suto Orizari those people are now part of the Roma community and of nowadays reality.

Roma in the independent Republic of Macedonia

The Macedonian Constitution of 1991 recognizes the Roma as one of the nationalities of the republic: "Macedonia is established as the national state of the Macedonian people in which full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romas and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia."

The Party for the Total Emancipation of the Roma (PCER) was the first Roma party in Macedonia, founded by Faik Abdi in 1990. He held the seat in the Macedonian parliament for the Suto Orizari constituency until 1998. Before the creation of the second Roma party, 38,000 Roma were registered as members of PCER and the party had local representation in almost all the places where Roma were present. At that time, Roma won 15 of the 1,510 seats in the municipal assemblies. In the Skopje Assembly, Roma held two of

¹⁷ 2003 Human Rights Watch, Background: The Plight of the Kosovo Roma Refugees, 2003

the 70 seats and had two representatives in the 120-member National Assembly.

With this representational power, the PCER participated in the coalition government.

During the local elections in 1996, the second member of Parliament of the Roma in Macedonia, Amdi Bajram, left the party to form his own party, the Alliance of Roma in Macedonia (Sojuz na Romite vo Makedonija). He had two mandates until 2003.

The Democratic Progressive Party of Roma in Macedonia was founded by a group of intellectuals in 1991. In late 1998, Nezdet Mustafa became leader of the Party: he was at that time mayor of the municipality of Suto Orizari. The party changed its name to United Party of the Roma (Obedineta partija na Romite) in 1998. In 2003, it was formed a new party named the United Party for the Equality of the Roma in Macedonia (partija za ednistvo na Romite vo Makedonija) in which he was joined by the Party of the Roma and the Party for Total Emancipation of Roma. Nezdet Mustafa was chosen as first president of the party.¹⁸ Later that year, at the parliamentary elections, the party of Nezdet Mustafa entered into coalition with the Social Democratic Alliance in Macedonia which won the elections. Mustafa was the only Roma representative at the Macedonian parliament. He was the first General Secretary of the Party for the Total Emancipation of the Roma (PCER). Later, he was one of the founders of the new Democratic Progressive Party of Roma in Macedonia and a few years thereafter he was elected its new president and the party was renamed Party of Roma in Macedonia.¹⁹

The progress of Roma people started in the independent Republic of Macedonia in the early 1990's. The Party for Total Emancipation launched a major campaign for facultative learning of the Roma language in primary schools where the majority of the pupils are Roma children. For a start, there was a need for a course for Roma teachers; this was achieved and the idea came true. Macedonian Roma started awakening from their big dream. The Macedonian constitution gave them, for the first time in their history, the same rights as other people in one state. Roma political parties made a big influence in changing the future of Roma population in Macedonia. They gave a great meaning to the Roma's world day, April 8. The celebration of this day with many cultural events and

¹⁸ Minorities in Southeast Europe, Roma in Macedonia

¹⁹ Mustafa, N., The first years, 2000

activities provided an opportunity for the younger generation to free itself of its anonymity. The founding of Roma news department at Macedonian Radio and TV was very important in this context, and real motivation for the Roma population. This program started from very small beginnings, but the two departments were the voice of Roma people in Macedonia. Soon, Roma literature was honored by the first Romani grammar being brought out. Day by day, the growth of Roma literature progressed successfully.

The Roma poets gathered at music-poetry evenings several times a year. One of the first activities of the Roma political parties was the first Roma folk festival Sutka folk festival which brought together famous Roma singers from all over Europe. The festival had as its patron the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. As the years have gone by, the political influence of the Roma has increased. The second and the third parliamentary elections in Republic of Macedonia returned two Roma members of the Parliament. At this time several successful steps were made. One of them was the enrollment of over 40 Roma who had finished high schools at the Police Academy on a course for police officers. Moreover, at the two Universities in Macedonia "a quota for minorities' enrollment" in the Faculties was introduced. The "quota" for Roma students was 2% according to the percentage of Roma people in the whole population. Over the last year, according to the Ohrid frame agreement, over 20 Roma who finished high school have attended the course for employment in the State administration. This year they are working in government and ministry offices.

A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR SUTO ORIZARI

According to the present situation there is a need for detailed urban planning. The problem with the Sutka bazaar needs to be solved. Suto Orizari does not have a trade center (mall). Given that everything in the Sutka bazaar is sold in the open in improvised selling places there is a widely seen need for a big shopping center. It is well known that the Sutka market place is the most famous shopping place in the whole country, especially on Sundays. This is the reason why there are long lines of cars from the beginning of the town through to the center. There is much commotion, many vehicles, and there is a great danger to human life as a consequence of the traffic. A large car park built behind the market should solve this problem.

The citizen's information center now provides better and more timely information for the population in the municipality, but for all requests and other socio-economic news there should also be a Social Referrals Office in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare.

At the moment in Suto Orizari there are no conditions for manufacturing industry. If an industrial zone were made as part of an urban planning project then we could be expect to see conditions for the development of the economy and local employment.

In the summer in the Municipality there is always a problem with the water supply system. Especially those houses which are built on higher ground wait for the water to trickle through to them. This situation lasts for hours. This system needs to be improved.

The local Roma non-governmental organizations need support from the municipal administration in the realization of projects of great importance for the future of the population in Suto Orizari. In past few years the human rights situation in Suto Orizari has been improving thanks to the activities of the local NGO's. The cooperation between the Municipality and these NGO's could bring a better and brighter future for the locals. And what matters is the education of the population, many pupils from the two primary schools do not continue with their education after finishing the primary education. One of the reasons for this is the lack of financial conditions for school literature, busses, and catering expenses. This is why there is a need for a high school in the municipality. At the moment the Roma political leaders are negotiating this issue with the Macedonian Ministry of Education and there are strong possibilities of this dream coming true for many youngsters in Sutka. To date, 750,000 euros have been provided by NGOs and additional funds are being discussed with the Ministry of Education. And when youth is the issue then there must be a solution for their employment. There is a need for a strategic concept for short-term employment of youth such as in the 1960's with the agencies for youth employment (mladinski zadruzi). They focused on founding short-time jobs for young people

For the young generation in Suto Orizari there is a need for youth-cultural centers where they can gather at one place and will be sheltered from the bad influence of the streets. Given that there is a long theatre tradition in the municipality there is a prime need for municipality culture to be able to rely on a theater building.

The locals are famous as good sportsmen. There is one soccer club, one boxing club, but one of the most successful sports in the municipality is table tennis. The young members of this team have qualified for the first Macedonian table tennis league. They practice in the children & youth center Nadez in this municipality. Sport courts and halls could be very refreshing for the young and it would motivate them to continue with the successful results and certainly could awaken an interest in these activities among the larger part of the population.

According to the Deputy Minister for Labor and Social Policy, Samka Ibraimovski, Suto Orizari has a need for a well-educated and intellectual mayor who can provide better conditions for the future of the Municipality. Education is a key for this to happen because the future mayor should work on projects which will bring foreign investments to attract the foundation of small factories in Suto Orizari. Economic development and a decrease in unemployment depend on investments in manufacturing. The competence of the municipality now is bigger and it is only a matter of time before the departments of the Macedonian Ministries start functioning here and this will bring better communication between the local and state level.²⁰

These are only few of the suggestion for improving the future of the Municipality of Suto Orizari. Sad, but true, this municipality exists on a minimal financing. The road to brighter times is very tough, sometimes cruel, full of obstacles, but it is worth trying it to walk it right to the end. Good luck to the latest mayor and to the citizens of Suto Orizari.

²⁰ Interview with Samka Ibraimovski, Deputy-Minister of Labor and Social Policy, July 2005