

Decade of the Roma

NON-ROMA GROUPS
Focus Groups Discussion
MACEDONIA

June, 2005

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- **Two main sources could be detected out of which the citizens of Macedonia build up their attitude toward the Roma. Firstly, the traditionally inherited attitude toward Roma as to a lower civilization class of the society, as toward a population with a nomad mentality without a concept for investment in the future, living just for today, and secondly, the common personal insights about the life of the Roma and their position in the society today.**
- **Regarding the perception of the Roma community, significant difference between Skopje and other towns could be seen. While the citizens of Skopje saw the Roma as more or less homogenous population, the citizens of the other two cities made distinctions within the frames of the Roma community.**
- **The opinions of the Macedonian citizens didn't differentiate significantly regarding the problems that the Roma face. All citizens, regardless whether from Skopje or not, and regardless of age and social status, believed that main problems that the Roma population faces are education and poverty.**
- **All citizens pointed to the lack of education as one of the main specifics of the Roma population. According to the majority, the primary education is compulsory for all citizens, therefore the reason for Roma's absence from the process lies in the Roma life style and the common practice in the Roma communities.**
- **According to the Macedonian citizens, the poverty, caused mostly by the unemployment, is one of the big problems that challenge the Roma population. Except the lack of education and the poverty, which cause number of other problems, part of the citizens added the Roma settlements and the hygienic conditions in them to the list of problems faced by the Roma population.**
- **Disregarding the everyday interactions with the Roma that beg in the streets and on the public places, it might be concluded that the interactions between the Macedonian and the Roma communities are limited to few spheres of social life.**
- **According to the largest number of the citizens, Roma, on an individual level, are good, peaceful, hospitable, happy, music talented and communicative people. Besides stressing the negative epithets: uncivilized, without proper upbringing, dirty, irresponsible and inclined to small thefts, most of the citizens showed sympathies toward the Roma.**

- **None of the Skopje citizens didn't express repulsive or ignoring attitude regarding the interactions with Roma. Contacts with begging children raised a feeling of pity in most of the young people from Skopje and the other cities. Yet, while passing by an adult Roma, most of the Skopje citizens would be cautious because of the small thefts that, according to their opinion, Roma are inclined to.**
- **Regarding the opinions over this issue, the citizens of the other cities differed firstly by their age. While the senior citizens didn't point any problems during accidental interactions with a Roma, the younger citizens, both from Stip and Prilep, stressed their provocative behavior, especially of the young Roma.**
- **The presence of Roma in the cafés, restaurants and other public places would not be objected by any of the Macedonian citizens, regardless of their age or social status, unless the presence is not accompanied by indecent or vulgar behavior. The young people said that the Roma do visit the cafés and night bars, even though in small number, and none of them had negative comments or objections.**
- **The citizens shared the opinion over the issue of education. There aren't special schools for Roma, and Roma children attend the same lectures in mixed classes together with the Macedonian. The interviewed accepted the fact like normal, adding that some of them even had the opportunity to study in such classes.**
- **The citizens stressed also that the presence of Roma children in the schools during the recent years significantly increased, welcoming it as a positive fact which would contribute to higher level of education of this population.**
- **None of the citizens objected the presence of the Roma in the high schools and the universities. Yet, the young citizens stressed that the state education system favors certain percentage of students from all minority groups, thus making a direct impact on the Macedonian students, taking in consideration that the Macedonian students must achieve higher results on the entry tests and to comply with large number of criteria, while the others manage the same just by belonging to different ethnic group.**
- **Even the presence of Roma in the neighborhood, or the building would not be objected by the citizens, but only as long as they respect the rules related to a life in the collective, meaning rules regulating the hygiene and order. The negative attributes given by the citizens like the dirt, hot temper and inclination to small thefts were in fact the main reason for caution in thinking about a possible closer interaction with the Roma population in terms of living in the same street or in the same building.**

- **It might we deduced that the non integration of the Roma and separation of their settlements from the Macedonian is due not only to the attitudes that the Macedonians have, but also due to the Roma practice to separate their habitats, even when having the choice to live in Macedonian settlements.**
- **Regarding the larger integration of the Roma in the society, it may be concluded that none of the Macedonian citizens would oppose it. According to the Macedonian citizens, larger integration of the Roma is possible only by leaving the nomad mentality and complete change of the approach to life in a direction that the modern society introduces, not only to the Roma, but to everybody.**
- **Most of the citizens believed that the Roma would like to integrate more in the Macedonian society.**
- **When they compared the Macedonians and the Roma, the citizens made clear distinction, sharing the opinion that there is essential difference in the concept and approach to life. The citizens, regardless their age and place of residence, strongly supported the opinion that the majority of the Roma population don't live the life according to a concept about the future, but just day for a day, approach that makes them different to any other people including the Macedonian.**
- **Several differences, regarding the equal treatment of Roma in the Macedonian society, could be numbered, based on various grounds. Even though most of citizens declaratively claim that Roma are equal, one may get a general impression that the Roma are approached more with a certain underestimation then with full respect.**
- **Largest number of the young citizens emphasized that the differences in culture and education especially, objectively exist, so that a systematic or social discrimination of the Roma is out of any question.**
- **According to the young citizens, being different, with different religion, doesn't present any reason for discrimination, concluding that there isn't any discrimination on those grounds.**
- **According to the young citizens, prejudices that can be noticed among the senior citizens are rooted in the traditional and folklore approach.**
- **All citizens said that the Roma are different then any other minority, comparing them firstly to the Albanians, whose minority issue was so much in the focus in Macedonia in the last ten years, that it caused even an armed conflict. According to the majority of the citizens, both the Albanians and Roma are on a lower civilization scale then the rest of the population, which is dominantly Macedonian, but contrary to the Albanians, who try to present their flaws as a direct product of the**

discrimination inclined Macedonian society, in which they live, the Roma are more objective and fair.

- **The majority of the citizens believed that the life of the Roma was improved in the recent years, even though none of them claimed that this improvement is of large scale. According to the largest number of the citizens, the presence of the foreign donations, activities of the nongovernmental sector, especially in the domain of the education, and Roma involvement into politics contributed to the improvement of the life of the Roma population. It shouldn't be forgotten that the increased participation of the Roma in the trade with textile and shoes provides safer existence for number of Roma families.**
- **When the citizens discussed the help provided to the Roma, they, reflecting the bad economic situation and the poverty in the state, thought firstly of the financial aid given by the state. Still, most of the citizens believed that the Roma should be helped. Taking in consideration that the majority of the citizens located the root of the problems that the Roma deal with, in the mentality and lifestyle of the Roma as ethnicity, they saw the solutions inside the Roma communities.**
- **Taking in consideration that the main help that the Roma need is in changing their daily habits in direction of redefinition of the priorities in life, most of the citizens believed that it is a domain of the NGOs, and not a responsibility of the government or other official institutions of the state. This attitude was presented by all citizens, but it was especially strongly stressed by the citizens of Skopje.**
- **Regarding the aid from the Macedonian authorities, the citizens believe that the Roma already receive the overall aid that the Government can offer. It is interesting to see that none of the citizens made a clear distinction which of the problems faced by the Roma should be dealt by the central authorities (the Government) and which by the local authorities.**
- **Regarding the responsibilities that could be taken over by the Macedonian community in order to improve the life of the Roma, there were differences in the opinions, depending on the age and the city of residence: While the young citizens of Skopje and Stip clearly stressed that the Macedonian community could pay attention to the proper upbringing of its children in direction of eliminating discrimination of the Roma and their acceptance as equal part of the society, the young population of Prilep shared the attitude of the senior citizens from Prilep and Skopje, who believed that the Roma are accepted enough in the Macedonian community, and therefore the responsibilities for the solutions of their problems lie in the sole Roma community.**

- **Significant differences in the opinions, about the necessary activities that the Roma community should take in order to improve its life conditions, could be noticed among the various age categories. The young population from the inquired cities searched for the potentials of the Roma population, and their engagement as a pulling force, which should enforce the progress of the Roma population in general, while the most of the senior citizens were not able to make such, or similar, observation.**
- **The citizens, without any exceptions, were familiar with the unemployment rate in the Roma population. The citizens had a full insight in the economic problems shared by everybody, expressing the opinion that the whole country is on the verge of existence, showing no surprise by the high unemployment rate among the Roma.**
- **Regarding the larger integration of the Roma in the Macedonian society, one may get the impression that the majority of the citizens expressed themselves positively. Yet, it should be mentioned immediately that all citizens, regardless of the age, education and city of residence, understand this as almost complete acceptance of the behavioral norms of the environment in which the Roma should integrate.**
- **Regarding the issue of segregation of Roma in separate settlements, the majority of the citizens replied negatively. The range of given reasons was wide and included human motives and political reasons, in terms of preservations of the interethnic relations and the stability of the country.**
- **All participants, especially the young people, were aware of the existence of several international non governmental projects focused to aiding the Roma. Yet, none of the participants could name any of the organizations related to these activities. The only name that was mentioned was the name of the Institute for Open Society, referenced as SOROS.**
- **During the discussion about the international efforts to help the Roma, one could get the impression that the Macedonian citizens are extremely unmotivated to take part, through sharing their experiences and voicing their opinions over this issue.**
- **Only a small number of citizens have heard about the Decade of the Roma and none of them could give any details about the concept of this project.**
- **After the information about the goals and the program of the Decade of the Roma, the citizens expressed various opinions, but it can be said that, even though it faced a dose of criticism, it was positively assessed. If there were a referendum over this issue, the majority of the citizens stated that they would vote pro.**
- **The citizens, except the group of senior citizens of Skopje, would support the initiative even if it takes a Government participation of 3-4 million of euros for the carrying out of the Decade of the Roma.**

- **When larger sums of money, 10 or 20 millions of euros, came in the focus, the discussion got pointless. None of the citizens could realize how big such amount of money is from state perspective, and therefore the majority of them couldn't even discuss about such amount of money.**
- **It must be mentioned that none of the citizens showed enthusiasm for participation in such or similar project. The citizens' common opinion was that Roma issue is a problem of the Roma community and most intensive activity was expected from the Roma communities. The involvement of Macedonians was mostly foreseen through the activities of the NGOs.**
- **Most of the citizens had positive opinion about lower prizes for the kinder gardens/books/transport/meals in school, for the poor Roma children.**
- **None of the citizens saw any need and necessity for inserting elements of Roma culture in the curriculum of the children, without any differences in the opinions, regardless of the age group and city of residence.**
- **Most of the citizens expressed distrust with regards to the idea of granting financial loans (Micro loans that would enable the Roma to start their business).**
- **Regarding the idea of passing anti – discrimination laws which would financially sanction the employers which would practice and promote discrimination in the labor relations, there were various opinions, but the citizens expressed the impression that in Macedonia such laws wouldn't be effective due to the poor efficiency of the justice system.**
- **The citizens didn't have any disagreements and discussions over the idea for free vaccines for the Roma children, and immediately accepted the idea wholeheartedly.**
- **Most of the citizens, asked to name some distinct Roma leaders, gave the names of the political leaders Amdi Bajram and Faik Abdi. Even though the name of Nevzdet Mustafa was familiar to a very small number of citizens, his figure was recognized from the media. The only name that appeared in the list of Roma leaders and comes outside the politics was the name of the artist Esma Redzepova.**
- **Large majority of the citizens believed in order to become a real part of Europe, Macedonians must take care of the people in the country who have been most discriminated against. The only exception was made by senior citizens from Skopje, who believed that there aren't truly discriminated people in Macedonia.**
- **Although large number of citizens believed that the Roma should be helped, yet, none of the participants agreed with the opinion that Roma in Macedonia are treated excessively bad. Only the young citizens from Stip believed, more than the others, that the attitude toward Roma should be lot better.**

- **Most of the citizens agreed that the reduce of number of benefactors of social aid, which mostly are Roma, would have a positive impact in tax reduction for the citizens as tax payers, but most of them didn't consider that this should be the reasons why the Roma should be helped. The young people from Stip, once again, more that the others, felt that this issue deserves more attention.**
- **Regardless of the opinions over the Roma issue in general, all of the interviewed citizens believed that the Roma children deserve the same opportunities for prosperity in the country as the rest of the children. It is definitely, the majority of the citizens believe that the Roma should be helped, firstly, as people, as individuals which seek their prosperity in the society. The citizens believe that better prosperity should be ensured for all people, including the Roma.**
- **Large part of the interviewed citizens from Stip and Prilep agreed that the citizens treat the Roma ignorantly. Most of them believed that they should act more fairly. This opinion was not shared by the citizens from Skopje, the senior and the young educated population, who believed that they treat the Roma fair enough.**
- **Although most of the citizens agreed that the poor and discriminated minorities have a bad influence on the overall situation in the country, yet, a large number of the citizens believed that the Roma might be the poorest people, but they are not constantly discriminated over every issue. This attitude was emphasized by the senior citizens of Skopje.**

Methodology

Procedure-Technique

Focus group discussion technique (qualitative research method which consists of discussion of approximately 90 to 120 minutes, led by a trained moderator, and involving six to ten persons) was used for two reasons:

- It allows deeper understanding of the overt behavior, attitudes, motives, beliefs, etc.
- The technique makes it possible to collect a lot of information in a short amount of time.

Focus groups (as well as the other types of qualitative research) do not allow any kind of quantitative generalization of the results on the population. The only reliable result coming from focus groups is the identification of the typical opinions, attitudes, and feelings on the topic discussed. The findings can only be considered as typical for the population, but cannot be used in any way for the assessments of their quantitative distribution in the population, (proportion of the typical attitudes). Due to quasi-random sampling procedure or/and small sample, the sampling error cannot be identified.

Standard SMMRI FGD Procedure

- Discussion guide - created and finalized on the bases of a draft provided by Client and sent back for final approval.
- Participants selection procedure - using the screening questionnaire based on the agreed criteria
- Recruitment - completed through SMMRI interviewers team in 3 to 5 days; recruitment includes incentives for participants. Participants are selected through quasi random procedure

Technical facilities

- VHS videotaping
- In another room TV set, so Client can monitor the discussion directly
- Simultaneous translate of recorded discussions

Project scope

The research with Macedonian participants was realized through discussions in five focus groups in three cities in Macedonia (Skopje, Stip and Prilep) where large Roma communities exist. Eight participants were in one group selected through the following group criteria:

MACEDONIA GROUPS STRUCTURE

Age	General population		
	Skopje	Prilep	Shtip
	Mixed sex	Mixed sex	Mixed sex
18 to 30	Edu: College or University (Higher income)	Edu: Secondary or less (Lower income)	Secondary school (Average income)
31 to 60	Secondary school (Average income)	Secondary school (Average income)	
Total	2	2	1
	5		

The participants in focus groups were selected through a quasi random procedure, with a screening questionnaire, using previously agreed quota that address:

- gender,
- age,
- education,
- occupation,
- income,
- marital status and
- number of household members.

Depending on composition of the group, inner dynamics and interaction among participants, the duration of the conversation was between 110 and 120 minutes.

SURVEY RESULTS

1. Situation in the country

- **All the citizens, regardless of their age, education or region where they live, evaluated the present situation in Macedonia as exceptionally bad. This evaluation was associated to all spheres of life and the major problems, which were pointed out, were the unemployment, the low life standard and the inefficiency of the institutions of the system.**

The general impression of the young citizens in Macedonia is that the situation in the country is exceptionally bad. The majority of them are pointing to the unemployment as a major problem, adding that the majority of the young people consider the option of leaving the country in search for better perspectives. This attitude was shared between the young people without university degree (unemployed in most of the cases), and the young unemployed citizens of Skopje with university degree, who strongly stressed this consideration.

Zoran 30, Skopje: Catastrophe. I follow what is going on, and the situation makes you want to cry.

Marija 27, Skopje: Decline; I don't follow politics or the media because I will be depressed. I know a lot of people who want to leave the country.

Maja, 26, Skopje: While I was studying, I was hoping that the situation will improve, but now it's terrible. I'm one of those people that want to run away from here and there is no way I am staying. Maybe I will be more disappointed there, but here, nothing is offered.

Kiril 24, Skopje: The situation is terrible, but I still have not decided whether to leave or stay.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: The situation is unchanged, but I'm not looking at the things from the dark side, maybe because the most of the people I hang out with are employed and have good salaries.

Verce, 26, Skopje: We are on the bottom, we cannot go any further down, but I'm not an optimist.

Marija 24, Skopje: I'm not an optimist.

Goran 24, Prilep: Things can't be any worse than this, especially the unemployment.

Cene 29, Prilep: You can't feel any change.

Saska, 26, Prilep: At the moment we are on the same spot or going down.

Ane, 19, Prilep: We have to hope for better, even though at the moment things are bad.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: I have no luck because I'm living in a country that doesn't want to organize; I have to raise my children here.

Ljupco, 22, Skopje: I don't know if these people are expecting any results. Nothing was done in the last 15 years.

Daniela, 30, Stip: the situation is better for those who are on power, and the young people are leaving, more and more.

The senior citizens of Macedonia shared the opinion that the situation in the country is bad. Except the unemployment, which is major problem for the younger population, the senior citizens strongly stressed the low life standard of the population too.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: We are all employed and we manage somehow, but it's hard.

Srebra, 53, Skopje: It's becoming hard to survive at work, the number of the employees is decreasing, and I can't see a bright spot.

Dime, 37, Prilep: Not good, as employed person I'm not satisfied; it's better to deal with black economy.

Daniela, 30, Stip: The standard is low, that's why it's bad. If the factories open and the people are employed maybe there won't be such dissatisfaction.

- **According to the bigger number of the citizens, nepotism and the rule of the political elites, and the corruption, which is a part of the everyday life in all of its spheres, were the main obstacles for the development of the country and the creation of better conditions. The majority of the citizens thought that the country is passing through a period of transition and the opinions about the dynamics of this process were divided. Some attention should be dedicated to a part of the young population that placed part of the guilt for the bad situation and the slow transition in the citizens who don't want to accept the changes introduced by the new social circumstances, especially the longer working hours and increased duty responsibilities.**

Dragan, 45, Skopje: Things are going one step forward and then two steps back. The biggest obstacle is the corruption, even if go wrong somewhere if I have the money I will make two telephone calls and everything is taken care of.

Saso; 31, Skopje: I also agree, it is not the quality that counts, but it's something else; there are potentials that are not used in this country. I got employed in the army because that was the only place where it is not necessary to be a member of a political party.

Ljupka. 19, Stip: The right people on the right positions. Until this principle is implemented, nothing will change.

Tome, 40, Prilep: The corruption should be handled and things will be ok.

Мики, 34, Прилеп: You would be better of if you deal with black economy. You can work everything out, besides the strickt controls.

Large number of the citizens was looking at the occurrences and the circumstances as a part of the transitional process of the country from one into another social system, and had different opinions over this issue. A part of the citizens took the posture that the condition in the country is normal for a transitional period, while part of the citizens believed that the transition is taking too long than it should be.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: The whole country is bad, but this is a period that has to pass.

Biljana, 24, Stip: Transition. But it's taking too long.

Goran, 28, Prilep: The period of the transition is lasting long and everybody is suffering the consequences. Literally, we are victims; maybe it will be better for the future generations.

Hari, 23, Prilep: I agree that this is a period of transition and we have to carry the consequences.

Ilija, 31, Prilep: Nothing can be done over night; we have to take the long way.

Miki, 34, Prilep: For Slovenia the way was shorter and for us is longer.

Silvana, 34, Prilep: It takes time until things get better. It's hard.

Besides the politics and the corruption, as two regressive factors affecting the development of country, the young highly educated citizens of Skopje put part of the guilt about the bad situation in the inflexibility of the population for the new social changes. According the young citizens of Skopje, the country is in a period of transformation from one to another social system, and that cannot be done without leaving some living habits, which were typical for the past system. Attention was paid to the length of the working hours and the working responsibilities, which in the newly created circumstances are increased. The young population of Skopje recognized the problem of the population, especially of the older generations, to answer this challenge.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: It's our own fault; we all want fixed working hours and salary.

Verce, 26, Skopje: The people are becoming aware that they should be working more.

Maja, 26, Skopje: The adults think that they should work from 7 to 15 and that's it. And that's how they it had all.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: We all want to work in offices.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: Would you be digging in the field with a finished university.

Certain number of the young population without a university degree stressed that the unemployment is weighed in partly by themselves, explaining that the offered work conditions and salaries at the available job positions are most often bellow their expectations – attitude because of which young people choose not to work, unless the working conditions are up to their expectations, at least to a certain degree.

Metodi, 25, Stip: Everybody tries to find a job, but nobody has ever come to ask if there were job vacancy. My position directly participates in the production process, it's hard, and everybody seeks a job at the Court.

Daniela, 30, Stip: Why should anyone work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for 4000 denars?

Pepa, 29, Stip: That money doesn't cover even the needs of the children.

Metodi, 25, Stip: I also don't like my work at the counter, but we have to adapt.

Goran, 28, Prilep: We search for a job without a real wish to find one.

Goran, 24, Prilep: I worked the night shift in an internet – café for 150 denars per diem.

During one night, so many incidents occurred I wasn't sure any more whether the risk is worth the money. Sometimes, those 3000 – 4000 denars per month are not worthy.

Hari, 23, Prilep: Who really tries, will find work. But everybody wants to do the job one is trained for. I'm trained to be a mineworker, but I work as a barber.

- **Except the young population of Skopje having university degree, which expressed hopes for a slight improvement, firstly of the economic situation, none of the citizens had the impression that there are improving trends in any of the fields of life. Most of the citizens expressed noteworthy pessimism regarding the social trends in Macedonia.**

Typical answer that followed the question 'Over which processes in our country do you feel optimistic' was: None. Most of the citizens expressed noteworthy pessimism regarding the social trends in Macedonia. Only a part of the university educated young people from Skopje had hopes for the improvement of the circumstances.

Maja, 26, Skopje: I don't understand economy, but I was explained that the things have started moving in a positive direction.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: The industrial capacities are restarted; it takes time.

Maja, 26, Skopje: They promised foreign investments.

- **Most of the citizens didn't believe in the near membership of Macedonia in the EU, and part of them even believed it would never happen. Part of the citizens pointed that Macedonia should rely more on its strengths in finding solutions for the problems and should take the control over the situation in its own hands.**

Andrea, 46, Skopje: If we manage to join Europe, some things would change for better, but we don't need Europe under any terms.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: There should be time when somebody from here would push things forward.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: We don't need Brussels or Belgrade to take care of us.

Magde, 34, Skopje: We are far away from Europe.

Dragica, 47, Skopje: Who knows when will we join?

Dragan, 45, Skopje: Until we become a member, EU would disintegrate.

Saso, 31, Skopje: We should sort out the things in the country ourselves, not to preoccupy ourselves with Europe.

Saso, 33, Skopje: It would be good to join.

Magde, 34, Skopje: We are far away from becoming a member.

Goran, 24, Prilep: I doubt we'll ever join.

Ilija, 31, Prilep: If things are not sorted out inside our country, it might be even worse.

Pepa, 29, Stip: We're not even close.

Darko, 21, Stip: We will manage to join when the other countries decide to step out of the Union.

Metodi, 25, Stip: We are told through the media it would happen in 2 years, but no way.

- **None of the citizens believed in the Europe's good intentions, with majority convincement that the membership in the EU would be economical – political move of EU, intent more to put the member countries of EU in better position and increase their profit, then to ensure well-being in Macedonia.**

Blaga, 51, Prilep: Europe invests in building of bridges, and who wins the tenders? European companies, not ours.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: Europe needs a market and that's the reason behind the start of some of the factories. But we don't have a sound politician who would discuss more essential relations with them.

- **Large number of the citizens believed that Macedonia's membership in EU should contribute to certain improvement in the domain of legislature (rule of law, decrease of corruption), but still, the majority of the citizens were not convinced that the quality of life, from economic point of view, would improve significantly.**

Verce, 26, Skopje: I strongly believed that everything would be better once we join EU, but not any more.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: I didn't support our membership in EU from the beginning and I don't believe we would be lucky with the European funds the way Greece was.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: The membership in EU is not interesting; the advantage is that the candidate countries have access to the European funds. I just don't believe it will happen.

Magde, 34, Skopje: Our financial situation would be better.

Dragica, 47, Skopje: It would be good if they decide to give us a chance, it would be clear where the money goes.

Saso, 31, Skopje: I'm a pessimist; maybe it would be better regarding the rule of law.

Magde, 34, Skopje: If nothing more, the borders would be open.

Cene, 29, Prilep: A lot should be changed in the politics.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: The prices would be European, but the economic standard would be same.

Ane, 19, Prilep: Maybe something will change, but only for a little, it takes years.

Goran, 28, Prilep: We can't join Europe with such economic growth. The labor price is very low in Macedonia and if we join the Union, we would all go for work in the other countries; they would lose their jobs.

According to a certain number of citizens, Macedonia's membership in EU would mean losing the political independence to a certain degree and getting into a subordinated position.

Saso, 31, Skopje: We would be marionettes.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: We would lose the national attributes.

Tome, 40, Prilep: We would be their slaves.

Goran, 24, Prilep: We would lose our name.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: We would be second graded citizens.

Largest number of the senior citizens of Skopje stressed that Macedonia's membership in the EU and the opening of the borders would stimulate the young people with university degree to seek better opportunities outside our country.

Dragica, 47, Skopje: The highly trained experts would drain out.

Magde, 34, Skopje: Our young people would leave to Europe.

Sase, 33, Skopje: It would be like in Bulgaria; all young people would go abroad.

- **Largest number of citizens, regardless of their age, education or region that they come from, recognized agriculture as branch of greatest potential in Macedonia. Larger group of the senior citizens mentioned also the health services as area needing more investments, while the young population believed that more investments should be made in the education.**

Highest consensus was achieved over the issue of the natural potentials of Macedonia. All citizens, without any exceptions, considered the good soil and the climate in the region as immensely big, but unexploited, potential of the country. Most of the citizens found investing in agriculture and competing on the western markets with ecologically produced goods more appropriate than investing in the industry which, according their opinion would never be competitive. Except the growing of cereals, the citizens believed that livestock breeding would be one more branch, which the country has large potentials for.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: I would start with the agriculture, 50 % of the resources are agricultural, we shouldn't dream about technology.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: Crop farming and livestock breeding. Macedonia has perfect conditions and we still don't have farms.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: I don't know about the economy, but there could be something done in the agriculture. Netherlands occupies same territory but it doesn't have an unused piece of soil. The land should be leased.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: Agriculture first, that would stimulate the growth of other branches as well, for example it might initiate an investment of a packaging factory.

Srebra, 53, Skopje: We have good soil, we shouldn't import agricultural products.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Agriculture, we don't have industrial capacities and we can't rich the other countries, which are more developed.

Goran, 28, Prilep: Agriculture. There are even genetically modified products in the western countries.

Ilija, 31, Prilep: Nobody has ever done anything in the agriculture.

Dime, 37, Prilep: The vineyard products and tobacco is also sold for nothing.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: I would invest in the agriculture.

- **Asked about the ways that the Government should distribute its resources, the citizens were not ready to give specific illustrations, because they believed that the distribution of the resources is not executed according to the needs of the country, but simply between the political partners on power, redirecting the funds intent for development projects of a certain branch away from the citizens.**

2. National identity and attitudes toward differences

- **Most of the citizens felt it's natural to be proud to belong to a nation with rich history and tradition like the Macedonian. Yet, according to the largest number of them, national pride is replaced by the everyday problems that challenge the Macedonians in their own country: firstly, the inter-ethnic relations, e.g. the conflict with the Albanians, which, according to the citizens, resulted in lower respect of the Macedonian national identity, and secondly, the extremely bad economic situation.**

Verce, 26, Skopje: Today, to be Macedonian means to be second graded citizen.

Maja, 26, Skopje: I have an Albanian friend, she finished college, and simply because of that she has all doors open.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: We are discriminated in all spheres, Macedonians are sent away from companies just to be replaced with Albanians.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: Being Macedonian, compared to the others in the country, means to be civilized.

Saska, 26, Prilep: Macedonian! It only sounds proudly. I don't feel the positive aspects from being patriotic, and there are plenty of negative ones.

Hari, 23, Prilep: You should be proud.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: It means to suffer.

Goran, 28, Prilep: I'm proud to be Macedonian, belonging somewhere; we have a long history, tradition.

Hari, 23, Prilep: It feels nice to be recognized as Macedonian in other countries.

Cene, 29, Prilep: We are left with pride of being Macedonian, but what with it?

Sometimes I feel that it would be better to live in another country and to have good life.

Lide, 27, Prilep: I'm neither proud, nor sorry that I am Macedonian.

Blaga, 51, Prilep: Being Macedonian means being able to endure a lot.

Silvana, 34, Prilep: It means suffering.

Sneze, 43, Prilep: It's hard to endure.

Ljupce, 22, Stip: Macedonian – wrong person.

Pepa, 29, Stip: Macedonian is a synonym for somebody who suffers.

Darko, 21, Stip: It means surviving.

- **Tolerance and hospitality were stated to be main characteristics of the Macedonian people. According to the largest number of citizens, the abuse of these features by the minorities, the Albanians before all, contributed directly to the bad situation, which leads to diminishing of the national identity of the state.**

Ljupco, 23, Skopje: We are too tolerant.

Marija, 27, Skopje: We are too tolerant. That's our weakness.

Magde, 34, Skopje: We are peaceful and civilized. We are too tolerant.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: We don't appreciate ourselves enough.

Srebra, 53, Skopje: We are good people; the blame is ours over some issues.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: We are too tolerant.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: We are hospitable.

Blaga, 51, Prilep: Is there someone more tolerant than us?

Silvana, 34, Prilep: Too tolerant.

Biljana, 35, Stip: We are not tolerant about everything. We don't tolerate homosexuality, for example.

Daniela, 30, Stip: The Macedonians are real angels.

Ljupce, 22, Stip: We are tolerant.

Pepa, 29, Stip: We are hospitable.

Tolerance and hospitality, which according to the largest number of citizens are main features of the Macedonian people, are performed depending on the interacting counterpart. According to the citizens, the Macedonians are very tolerant toward the foreigners. Yet, large number of citizen pointed that the hospitality toward the foreigners is very often motivated by expectations and attempts of financial, or other kind of gain, confirming the mentality of poor people, who try to find ways to profit.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: We are hospitable toward the foreigners, but we also have expectations from them.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: We bow in front of the foreigners.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: We address them in their own language.

Cene, 29, Skopje: We are hospitable, but if the guest doesn't understand our language we laugh at him, we tease him.

Goran, 24, Prilep: If the visitor doesn't speak the language we think of ways how to profit.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: I know a case when a taxi drove a visitor round and round, just to take him more money.

Ilija, 31, Prilep: We treat the foreigners nicely; I've walked them round the city lot of times.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: We help them if we understand them.

Blaga, 51, Prilep: When we go abroad, we don't receive the same quality of treatment.

Ljupka, 25, Skopje: We are hospitable, but we also know how to rip them, from time to time.

According to the citizens, Macedonian hospitality and tolerance was proved also during the Kosovo crises, when several hundred thousands of refugees were sheltered in Macedonia.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: At least half of Europe wouldn't have acted that way.

Verce, 26, Skopje: How should have we acted when they were almost half of the Macedonian population?

Magde, 34, Skopje: At first, we were companionate, but then they pushed it too far.

Lence, 42, Skopje: At the beginning, we felt sorry for them, but then we were scared from them.

Goran, 28, Prilep: We treated them nicely, then the crises were gone and we were left with irrecoverable consequences for the economy.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: They were nicely sheltered.

The largest number of the citizens was tolerant toward religious differences also. Most of them pointed that the conflict with the Albanians in Macedonia didn't have religious background, stressing the good cohabitation with the rest of the Muslim minorities in the state like the Turkish and the Roma.

Sase, 33, Skopje: Everybody has the right to religious freedoms. Everybody has the right to practice his own religion.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: People openly declare their religious feelings.

Magde, 34, Skopje: If you don't cause any problems, we wouldn't mind your religion, what ever it might be.

Saso, 31, Skopje: I personally don't mind, we are too tolerant.

Goran, 28, Prilep: We don't mind.

Hari, 23, Prilep: We are not used to them, we don't have any in our city, but I don't mind them.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: Yet, we inherited some prejudices, those are not of recent times, 500 years of Turkish occupation, we do have prejudices toward the Muslims. My daughter wants to have the music CD from Adrian, and I wouldn't buy it for her.

Dime, 37, Prilep: In general, our prejudices are toward the Albanians only, not toward the Muslims.

Marija, 24, Skopje: The situation makes us albanophobic; it wasn't like this in the past.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: I don't mind the religion. I don't like that the Albanian language is the only one spoken in the Parliament apart from the Macedonian, why not having the Roma and the Turkish in the Parliament as well?

- **The citizens described their relations with the other minorities with the term: cohabitation. That, according to the statements of the citizens, means tolerance and respect toward the differences, interactions during the everyday activities, but without crossing the walls, which, due to the different religion and different ethnicity, traditionally exist.**

Ljupka, 19, Stip: My parents let me have friends among them, but wouldn't agree with an intimate relationship. Older generations have prejudices.

Ane, 19, Prilep: If the person is a real friend, then it's ok.

Goran, 24, Prilep: Sometimes they can even be better friends.

Sneze, 43, Prilep: I agree that we inherited some prejudices. We didn't show them until few years ago, today, they are revived again.

Ilija, 31, Prilep: Maybe we had prejudices before the conflict, but they were silent.

Metodi, 25, Stip: It's ok as long as we sit together on the same table. Attitudes change when we start looking each other over the top of the barrel.

3. Attitude toward the Roma

- **The most usual spots where the Macedonian citizens interact with the Roma population are the specific parts of the city inhabited by Roma – parts visited at least several times by each of the interviewed, markets where Roma are constantly present as merchants of small things and textile products, parties of traditional type where they could be met as musicians, and unavoidably, the crossroads, streets and public spots where Roma could be seen as beggars.**

The group of senior citizens from Skopje (Group 2), which belong to the middle social class, have more frequent contacts in their everyday life and bigger personal insight about the Roma population, contrary to the younger population of Skopje, belonging to the more educated and higher classes of the society, which interact with the Roma extremely rarely.

It could be noticed that all citizens from the smaller towns of Macedonia, regardless of their age and social group had more frequent interactions and more information about the Roma than the citizens of Skopje, firstly because of the local ways of everyday life, which means gravitating around one spot (the centre), but also, due to the common appearance of settlements with mixed Roma and Macedonian population,. This was especially noticeable when the young population from Skopje was compared to the corresponding category from the rest of the towns.

- **Two main sources could be detected out of which the citizens of Macedonia build up their attitude toward the Roma: firstly, the traditionally inherited attitude toward Roma as to a class of the society on a lower civilization scale and population with a nomad mentality without a concept for investment in the future, living just for today, and secondly, the common personal insights about the life of the Roma and their position in the society today.**

Maria, 27, Skopje: They live just for today.

Darko, 21, Stip: They are not interested in anything; they just wait for the end of the day.

Metodi, 25, Stip: I think about the future, and they think only about today. The elders have a saying 'Living like a Gipsy, day for a day'.

Darko, 21, Stip: They are more irresponsible.

Pepa, 29, Stip: They cannot write, they wouldn't educate themselves.

Ljupka, 19, Stip: There is no one to show them directions.

Saska: I divide them by education and by culture. They are happy people and do not see far in the future.

Maria, 27, Skopje: They lie.

Maja, 26, Skopje: uncivilized, illiterate, with financial problems.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: Don't have anywhere to live, they are dirty.

Goran, 28, Prilep: There are some even more progressive than us. We build stereotypes.

It can be said that the personal experiences of the citizens of Macedonia from the daily interactions with Roma mainly confirm the inherited stereotype about the Roma population, and all of them, regardless of the age and the social class, built their opinions on the typical picture about the Roma, treating the members of the Roma population that do not fit in the stereotype as untypical examples.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: Our electrician is Roma, and also our friend, and they are an exemption, their home is not like of a Roma.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: Our neighbors (Roma) are sophisticated, but they are brought up here, not in Sutka.

Even though all the citizens shared the same stereotype about the Roma population, differences in the attitudes could be seen as well, especially among separate age groups. While the young citizens of Skopje, Stip and Prilep expressed readiness to leave the traditionally inherited stereotype about this population, the senior citizens of Skopje and Prilep believed that the inherited stereotype reflects the present circumstances in the Roma communities, and therefore pointless to leave the stereotype, which in most cases does give a true picture of the situation.

- **Regarding the perception of the Roma community, significant difference could be seen between Skopje and other cities. While the citizens of Skopje saw the Roma as more or less homogenous population, the citizens of the other two cities made distinctions within the frames of the Roma community.**

The citizens of Stip and Prilep pointed that the Roma community in their cities is divided in two groups – Roma that are old settlers, which in a certain way, historically participate in the city life and tend to integrate in the Macedonian way of life, and Roma which are nomads and live completely by their nomad mentality and temper, because of which they don't fit in the society. The citizens of Stip and Prilep were deeply aware of the life of the Roma population and of the problems between these two different Roma communities that exist in their town.

Biljana, 24, Stip: They are also divided among themselves, 50 – 50, we don't know all of them.

Goran: The Roma are also divided in two categories, ones are good and the others bad-the nomads, they are wild.

Goran1: There are newcomers and old settlers.

Goran: They even have two radio stations, they are divided.

Hari: I work with them, the nomads are different and they butcher themselves. There was a wedding last year and because of some song the uncle slaughtered the nephew.

Goran: I had a Roma friend in the fourth grade; he was carrying a knife during classes.

Saska: There are different from them, there are some dirty, without manners, don't look like people and there are others that are kind.

The authentic mentality of the citizens of the Macedonian cities was expressed over this issue too. In Prilep, the traditionalism of its citizens was strongly expressed, and amazingly, there wasn't any significant difference in the perception of the Roma and the attitude toward them among the young and senior citizens. Contrary to Prilep, the young people of Stip explicitly condemned as useless and unproductive the prejudices and attitudes of the senior citizens of their city, which stem from the inherited stereotype and expressed sincere readiness for a new approach toward the Roma population.

Ljupka, 19, Stip: Here, at the internet- café, I met a Roma girl and we got close. It's different then when Roma yells at you in the street or bullies you, one may think they are all like that, which is not true. The people experience good and bad things. We shouldn't generalize.

Daniela, 30, Stip: Everybody has reserves, everything is due to the unpleasant experiences and everybody is unnecessarily convinced that Roma steal.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: When we were kids, we had a lot of fights and clashes in my neighborhood. Today, I have friends among Roma and we visit each other.

Darko, 21, Stip: I know some very nice persons and I don't see a big difference. One might be afraid from those one doesn't know, the individuals create the picture about the whole group.

- **The opinions of the Macedonian citizens didn't differentiate significantly regarding the problems that the Roma face. All citizens, regardless whether from Skopje or not, and regardless of age and social status, believed that main problems that the Roma population faces are education and poverty.**

Darko, 21, Stip: Their biggest problem is education.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: Their biggest problems are education and unemployment. The unemployment is our common problem.

Metodi, 25, Stip: Education. Our education is for free.

Maja, 26, Skopje: They have financial problems of every kind.

Dragica, 47, Skopje: Education, they need more education.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Poverty, they don't have money.

- **All citizens pointed to the lack of education as one of the main specifics of the Roma population. According to the majority, the primary education is compulsory for all citizens; therefore, the reason for Roma's absence from the process lies in the Roma life style and the common practice in the Roma communities.**

The majority of the Macedonian citizens believe that the systemic absence from the compulsory education and the enormous illiteracy rate among the Roma population is due to the mentality of the Roma, who have the custom of living the life just for today, without a concept for investment in their own future, or the future of their children. All citizens supported this opinion with personal believes and experiences of the behavior of the Roma population, especially of the Roma parents.

Saska, 26, Prilep: I know a poor Macedonian woman that receives social welfare, but wouldn't hesitate whether to send her children to school or not because of the lack of money. She would send her children to school and later she would find a way to sort out everything else. That's a difference between the Roma and us.

Saso, 31, Skopje: Isn't the primary school compulsory, should we carry them to school?

Maria, 27, Skopje: There are some education projects for the Roma, but one can't make them sit in the school desks.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: They have a different approach to life. They don't take care of the children, maybe because their families are large. They don't think about the education.

Metodi, 25, Stip: They are interested in other things. They take example from their closest, if my brother didn't finish school I would not either. They take examples of each other.

Verce, 26, Skopje: They don't want to study, wouldn't let the children to school.

Cene, Prilep: They don't let the children to school at all.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: Education is an important factor, but one can take from a man by force, cannot give by force. They enjoy certain privileges like lower book prizes etc; they find the money for the alcohol and yet don't have the money for the books? There should be a project that would dedicate its attention to the young not to be influenced by their elders.

Goran, 24, Prilep: When the child goes home and witnesses acts of violence e.g. his father beating up his mother, no matter how hard it studied at school, it wouldn't be able to implement this knowledge in his environment.

In this aspect, the Roma parents, especially the male, were assessed as indifferent, irresponsible and ignoring, and some of the citizens stressed that the absence of the children from the schools is due to the failure of the parents to give proper upbringing and directions, but also because of the abuse of the children by their parents to make easy money. As examples, the interviewed pointed to the Roma children that can be seen as beggars through out all the cities of the country, and most of the citizens believed that these are not separated cases of extreme poverty, but more a well planned system for easy money through child abuse, by their parents and care takers.

Biljana, 24, Stip: The children are exploited by their parents.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: If he was that concerned, why did he leave his little baby on the pavement of the Stone Bridge to beg?

Ilija, Prilep: A friend of mine, from Skopje, wanted to take the child with her, when all of a sudden, a group of adult Roma surrounded her, almost beat her up; it's their business, and that's not small money at the end of the day.

Ljupce, 22, Stip: Those kids don't beg because they are forced to; only those of alcoholics, they beg and take the money home, instead of going to school.

Dime, 37, Prilep: It's good money.

Goran, 24, Prilep: It's a fault of the parents to have their children raised that way.

Apart of the mentality and the life style of the Roma, which were considered as reasons for the lack of education among the Roma population, some of the citizens pointed to the fact that even though the primary education is free, the additional costs for books and other school materials present financial problem for the Roma.

Hari, Prilep: They don't have money to study.

Goran, Prilep: They have a large family and the social welfare can't cover the costs, because the education is not entirely for free.

Pepa, 29, Stip: Please don't say that education is free. What about the books, bus tickets, food...? All those things cost money.

Srebra, 53, Skopje: It would be good for them to get educated, but the circumstances wouldn't let them, they don't have the money.

Still, according to the citizens, the Roma mentality and their concept for the future present themselves in full power over this issue again, because in need to reduce some of the costs, the Roma parents don't consider the education of their children as a priority.

- **According to the Macedonian citizens, the poverty, caused mostly by the unemployment, is one of the biggest problems that challenge the Roma population.**

The Macedonian citizens link this situation directly to the lack of education of the Roma population, which drastically reduces the possibilities for employment.

Blaga, 51, Prilep: There is no company that has more than two Roma employees.

Dime, 37, Prilep: And only for the low positions.

Ljupka, 19, Stip: They are on the edge of existence because they don't educate themselves.

Regarding the employment, the citizens stressed the fact that employment is most often attained using friendly and family links with the company owners, or with influential politicians from the ruling political parties, and taking in consideration the absence of the Roma from the mentioned positions, their employment opportunities were assessed minor.

Biljana, 24, Stip: They, same as us, find a way to survive; the difference is that we get employed because of our close acquaintances, and they more often go to work abroad.

On the other hand, a large number of the citizens consider dishonesty (firstly, the inclination to small thefts), insincerity (lying) and laziness, as attributes of the Roma population, inducing mistrust in the professional relations with them.

Ljupce, 22, Stip: If a Roma ask for a job, he would immediately be rejected. Just because he doesn't know how to address properly he is doubted he would steal and wouldn't be employed.

Darko, 21, Stip: Even when given a job, they steal, although not all of them.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: Not quite eager workers.

Maria, 27, Skopje: Laziness is their problem.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: Some are maybe honest, but most of them only look what to steal while working round your house.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: One cannot turn ones back on them. Given the hand, they would take your glove.

Maria, 27, Skopje: There are some, working in our company, but they lie a lot, they are bad workers. We have given them a lot chances.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: Generally speaking they are lazy; they collect 1000 denars daily by begging, which they find much easier then working.

Goran, 24, Prilep: Some of them don't want to work; they wait for the social welfare.

It should be added that the Roma were second rated even as manual workers. A principle of communicating only with ones that are more familiar could clearly be detected from the opinions of the citizens.

Cene, 29, Prilep: Yet, if you run a company and look for a worker, and if Roma girl and Macedonian girl apply, you would take the Macedonian.

In addition to the previously said, the young people from Stip pointed to few small companies from their city managed by Roma (taxi company, production company ...) which prefer to employ Roma staff, and would employ Macedonians only if certain professional profile is needed, lacking an adequately educated Roma.

Metodi, 25, Stip: It is true that they are not treated equally, but they are discriminating us as well. If a Roma starts a company he wouldn't employ one of ours, unless he needs a trained worker, which there is none among the Roma.

- **Except the lack of education and the poverty, which cause number of other problems, part of the citizens added the Roma settlements and the hygienic conditions in them to the list of problems faced by the Roma population.**

Aside the lack of infrastructure, there were opinions that placed the blame for the bad hygiene in the Roma settlements in the Roma themselves, emphasizing the wide spread attitude that the Roma are people with low hygienic standards.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: Where to live is also a problem of theirs.

Maria, 24, Skopje: They have unsolved issue of place to live.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: I had a chance to see where they live; it's a disease source.

Ilija, 31, Prilep: Everywhere is the same, there's poverty among us also, but to wash yourself you don't need money, just water.

Except the specifically pointed problems faced by the Roma, the majority of the citizens still see the nomad mentality and hot temper of the Roma as key source for their

problems, imposing them a need for broader personal freedom and institutional independence, which directly affects their, already insufficient, integration in the society, which causes the majority of the problems that the Roma face.

From this perspective, according to the large number of the citizens, all the spheres of the social life and all the needs of a human being, like education, employment, health services... don't present a problem in strict terms of the word, but they are also their life style, part of their everyday life.

- **Disregarding the everyday interactions with the Roma that beg in the streets and on the public places, it might be concluded that the interactions between the Macedonian and the Roma communities are limited to few spheres of social life.**

Traditionally, due to the reputation of being joyful and talented for music, Roma have always played the role of music performers on weddings, christenings and other kinds of traditional parties, which are common in the everyday life of the Macedonians. Except as music performers, Roma most often can be seen as manual workers, especially the women, who work as cleaning ladies in the households of the wealthier. In the recent years, especially due to the increase of smuggling and black economy, Roma can very often be seen as merchants of textile goods, shoes and other small things used in the households. One can freely state that most of the Macedonian citizens have isolated and rare personal interactions with the Roma.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: We have a Roma woman cleaning in the house, she is already like a part of the family, we dine together.

Maria, 27, Skopje: There are some, working in our company, but they lie a lot, they are bad workers.

Silvana, 34, Prilep: The cleaning lady that cleans our building has had a coffee in my home.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: I have Roma neighbors and they are normal family, haven't had any problems so far.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: I work as a postman, I see how they live every day, I work in that part of town.

Hari: Those that beg in the cafés.

Saso, 31, Skopje: I have negative impressions and ignore them. Where I work, the military reservists are only capable of killing a cow, grilling it and eating it.

Dime, 37, Prilep: 90 % of the market counters at my work are managed by Roma. We drink coffee together. No problems at all.

- **According to the largest number of the citizens, Roma, on an individual level, are good, peaceful, hospitable, happy, music talented, smart and communicative people. Besides stressing the negative epithets:**

uncivilized, without proper upbringing, dirty, irresponsible and inclined to small thefts, most of the citizens showed sympathies toward the Roma.

Hari, Prilep: They are happy; regardless how badly they need money, they are always happy and smiling.

Pepa, 29, Stip: They have a different mentality, they are more relaxed ... Not that they don't have problems, they just know how to relax.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: I like them a lot, they are very cheerful.

Saska: I divide them by education and by culture. They are happy people and do not see far in the future.

At this point, we would single out only the opinion of the senior citizens of Skopje, who see the negative characteristics of the Roma population as equally important. Most of them, especially the men, didn't express readiness to tolerate the attributes like dirt, laziness, inclination to thefts, lying and neglect of the children, which they assign to the Roma people as typical.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: They are not self-disciplined, 80 % of them receive social welfare and spend the money on beer. They have two schools, free books and yet, nothing.

Sase, 33, Skopje: One can't help them, a generation gap should be created in order to separate the young people and bring them up differently, but maybe even then the genes would do their job.

Saso, 312, Skopje: If they don't feel sorry to leave their children beg on the Stone Bridge, why should I feel sorry for them?

In any way, the only significant difference in the opinions of the Macedonian citizens regarding the characteristics of the Roma was about their working habits. Part of the citizens believed that the Roma are hard working people, while others thought that they are lazy. It was obvious that regarding this issue the people judged according to their personal experiences or of someone close to them.

- **None of the Skopje citizens didn't express repulsive or ignoring attitude regarding the interactions with Roma. Contacts with begging children raised a feeling of pity in most of the young people from Skopje and other cities. Yet, while passing by an adult Roma, most of the Skopje citizens would be cautious because of the small thefts that, according to their opinion, Roma are inclined to.**

Most of the Skopje citizens, regardless of their age and social status, said that they would be careful not to have stolen some personal belonging, like mobile telephone or wallet. The citizens of Skopje, lot more then other Macedonian citizens, expressed wariness related to small thefts by the Roma.

Verce, 26, Skopje: I would loose my mobile.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: I would get stolen my wallet.

Maja, 27, Skopje: I would feel sorry if it were a small kid.

Maria, 24, Skopje: I can't speak in general, I feel sorry for the small children.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: You can't turn your back. Given the hand he would take the glove.

Srebra, 45, Skopje: There are thieves among us too, but among them there are more, because of the way their population is.

- **Regarding the opinions over this issue, the citizens of the other cities differed firstly by their age. While the senior citizens didn't point any problems during accidental interactions with a Roma, the younger citizens, both from Stip and Prilep, stressed their provocative behavior, especially of the young Roma.**

According to the young people from these cities, when the Roma are gathered in small group in the central areas of the city, they behave normally like all other citizens. In this case, passing by or having a contact with a Roma would not have any implications. On the other hand, passing by a large group of Roma near their settlements is followed by provocations from their side. This was especially emphasized by the female participants of the groups, who expressed a feeling of uneasiness because of the vulgarity of the young Roma population, but not a feeling of wariness or fear.

Speaking in general terms, all young citizens from Prilep said that the provocations most often remain verbal, and the young people from Stip said that actual fights are unlikely to happen, and if, only between children.

Darko, 21, Stip: I pass by Roma neighborhood everyday and I find nothing strange, but someone passing there for the first time might feel uneasy.

Pepa, 29, Stip: We have contacts with several Roma families, but there are no interactions between the young people.

Metodi, 25, Stip: The children (Roma and Macedonian) look each other with evil eyes. Mothers call their children home when Roma kids pass our street.

Daniela, 30 Stip: They are a bit distanced, like we don't know each other. I know you, but I don't.

Hari, 23, Prilep: They act united when they are in a group, but calm when they are alone.

Ane, 19, Prilep: If they don't hassle me, it's ok. There are some that do that, but there are also very kind ones.

Cene, 29, Stip: They used to be different, calmer. Now, they are changed a lot, they are vulgar, they lack decency from an early age.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: When we were kids we had a lot more clashes and fights in our neighborhood. Now I have some Roma friends with whom I keep a regular contact.

- **The presence of Roma in the cafés, restaurants and other public places would not be objected by any of the Macedonian citizens, regardless of**

their age or social status, unless this presence is accompanied by indecent or vulgar behavior.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: I wouldn't mind.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: If they behave properly and don't bother anyone, let them be then.

Tome, 40, Prilep: Why should I mind? They sit on their table, I sit on mine.

- **The young people said that the Roma do visit the cafés and night bars, even though in small number, and none of them had negative comments or objections.**

Young people pointed that the Roma organize their nightlife as well, occupying the same places (mostly discothèques), which the Roma visit on a specific day of the week.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: They come to the same places as I do, and I don't mind. But they don't visit all cafés.

Pepa, 29, Stip: They don't go out, they isolate themselves.

Metodi, 25, Stip: We mingle together but not that excessively. There are Roma where I go out, but it's a group of 20-30 people. They attended and finished high school, some have a job, and those are the people that mingle with us. The rest stick to themselves.

Goran, 24, Prilep: The uncivilized don't come to the centre.

Goran, 25, Prilep: I don't mind them at all. Monday to Saturday they gather up there (in the Roma settlement), on Sundays they come to the centre. Yesterday I saw 20-30 of my acquaintances.

Some of the citizens mentioned the public use of the Roma language as a possible obstacle in the communication.

Ljupce, 22, Stip: They discriminate us too, they speak Roma. If I come to a bar and they sit next to me speaking Roma, which I don't understand, I would mind. They might be talking about me.

Metodi, 25, Stip: They are discriminated because we lack culture. When you go abroad you would speak Macedonian too, and nobody would understand you, and they would mind you being there.

- **The citizens, regardless of their age and city they come from, shared the opinion over the issue of education. There aren't special schools for Roma, and Roma children attend the same lectures in mixed classes together with the Macedonian. The interviewed accepted the fact like normal, adding that some of them even had the opportunity to study in such classes.**

All Macedonian citizens had the opinion that the Roma are not discriminated over this issue. According to the young citizens of Stip the division between the Roma and the

rest of the children that could occasionally be seen in the schools is a result of the Roma's self-separation and not of a systematic discrimination regulated by the education system.

Ljupce, 22, Stip: They put them in the back of the classrooms.

Metodi, 25, Stip: The children isolate themselves.

Ljupce, 22, Stip: When he goes to school he is shouted at: 'Look, Gipsy'.

Goran, 24, Prilep: When we were at the school there were some coming from outside causing problems, those that studied were calm.

Biljana, 24, Stip: The generations today don't have any prejudices and you can see Macedonian pupils in Roma schools, and the parents are more careful not to divide the children and speak well about them (Roma).

- **The citizens stressed also that the presence of Roma children in the schools during the recent years significantly increased, welcoming it as a positive fact which would contribute to higher level of education of this population.**

Goran, 24, Prilep: During my school days there weren't that many Roma in the school, now there are lot more.

- **None of the citizens objected the presence of the Roma in the high schools and the universities. Yet, the young citizens stressed that the state education system favors certain percentage of students from all minority groups, thus making a direct impact on the Macedonian students, taking in consideration that the Macedonian students must achieve higher results on the entry tests and to comply with large number of criteria, while the others manage the same just by belonging to different ethnic group.**

In this way, according to the young Macedonian citizens, while the model of multiethnic society is being enforced, the Macedonian youth is obstructed in the development of its potentials. Because of such ideas, the majority of the citizens expressed bad feelings about education privileges based on ethnicity, sharing the opinion not only for the Roma, but also for all minority groups.

Saska, 26, Prilep: They have equal rights, and for entering the universities they even have bigger rights.

- **Even the presence of Roma in the neighborhood, or the building, would not be objected by the citizens, but only as long as they respect the rules related to a life in the collective, meaning, rules regulating the hygiene and order. The negative attributes given by the citizens like the dirt, hot temper and inclination to small thefts were, in fact, the main reason for**

caution in considering possible closer interaction with the Roma population, in terms of living in the same street or in the same building.

Differences upon this issue could be spotted among the senior citizens, who, even though stated that they wouldn't mind living in same settlements or buildings with Roma, expressed more concerns that the Roma would threat the rhythm of everyday life with their ethnic characteristics. On the other hand, the young citizens from Skopje with a university degree, presented highest readiness for a larger integration of the Roma in their neighborhood.

Pepa, 29, Stip: They moved in our building and everything is normal, good afternoon, how are you ...

Metodi, 25, Stip: They wouldn't even think to move to a neighborhood with Macedonians only. They make sure they don't mix with other people.

Ljupce, 22, Stip: It all depends on the neighborhood. When a Roma family wanted to move in, there was a petition. Only two families didn't sign and they are still angry because we allowed them to move in. There were some problems in the beginning, but it's ok now.

Daniela, 30, Stip: If they play music loudly, there would be problems.

Saska, 26, Prilep: I don't mind if they move in if they are nice and kind.

Hari, 23, Prilep: They live in my building and they are kind. Yet, there are some things they will never learn, no matter how hard they try.

Miki, 34, Prilep: Roma family bought a house in my street and there weren't any problems.

Blaga, 51, Prilep: When we were selling our house we were warned by the neighbors not to sell it to Roma.

Silvana, 34, Prilep: They also wouldn't mix with others.

Blaga, 51, Prilep: They want to integrate, but only the wealthier ones.

Tome, 40, Prilep: They don't want them mainly because of the uncleanness. We all know Trizla (Roma settlement) and we think that if the Roma came, our neighborhood would become just the same.

Verce, 26, Skopje: There won't be any problems, I support their integration.

Mihail, 26, Skopje: I wouldn't mind. I can't see any reason against their integration.

Maja, 26, Skopje: It would be very interesting.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: We are raised that way, we don't mind the Albanians, the Roma are especially funny.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: I wouldn't mind at all, my Polish neighbor is more of a burden. It depends on the personal qualities, not on the nationality.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: I wouldn't mind at all. There are some extreme examples now and then, like the Roma family that moved in the apartment on ground floor somewhere in Lisice and keep their horse in the yard.

- **It might be deduced from the statements quoted above, that the citizens believe that the non integration of the Roma and separation of their settlements from the Macedonian is due not only to the attitudes that the Macedonians have, but also due to the Roma practice to isolate their habitats, even when having the choice to live in Macedonian settlements.**

At this point, the interviewed emphasized certain classes of the Roma population that don't comply with described practice and who integrate immensely in the Macedonian environment with their profession and their place of residence.

- **It may be concluded that none of the Macedonian citizens would oppose the larger integration of the Roma in the society. It must be stressed that all of them, regardless their age, social status and city of origin, shared a common opinion that the majority of the Roma population is on a lower civilization scale, starting with the lack of hygienic habits, proper upbringing, and ending with the lack of seriousness, opinion and understanding of the importance of the family, education and other institutional norms of the society. According to the Macedonian citizens, larger integration of the Roma is possible only by leaving the nomad mentality and complete change of the approach to life in a direction that the modern society introduces, not only to the Roma, but also to everybody.**

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Their way of reasoning should be changed.

The young citizens of Skopje and Stip were the biggest supporters of larger integration of the Roma in the society, mainly in order to improve the life conditions of the Roma communities, which are the poorest class in the society, while the senior citizens of Skopje expressed highest disbelief over this issue, taking in consideration the Roma nomad mentality, which, according to them, is a constant determinant.

- **Regarding the social activities of the Roma, largest number of the Macedonian citizens noticed the increased participation of the Roma in the Christian religious sect Jehovah's Witnesses.**

Larger number of the interviewed didn't have distinct opinion regarding this issue, while the female citizens of Skopje approved it, supporting it with the fact that it is a successful example of change of the life style of Roma, contributing to the improvement of the hygienic habits and level of politesse in communication. To these citizens, the increased participation of the Roma in the Jehovah's Witness is an example that, provided proper guidance, the Roma can achieve lot more. Yet, there were opinions that presented intolerance toward religious sects and didn't approve this occurrence.

Magde, 34, Skopje: Some members of the Jehovah's Witness live in my neighborhood. You should see how tidy they (Roma) are. Washed, clean, always straight up. They need stimulation, guidance.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: I don't have a strong opinion. For example, how many of them have turned into Jehovah's Witness?

Dime, 37, Prilep: It's all about money. They (Roma) can easily be manipulated with money.

- **Most of the citizens believed that the Roma would like to integrate more in the Macedonian society.**

Verce, 26, Skopje: They want.

Ilija, 31, Prilep: They don't have a choice, they have to.

Still, large number of the citizens didn't see the low level of integration of the Roma in the society as a result of a discriminatory policy of the official authorities or the rest of the people of Macedonia, but as a consequence of the tradition and the mentality of the Roma, who live isolated and outside the margins of the society in the rest of the world countries as well.

Lidija, 27, Prilep: They look not interested in integration.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: It's their fault why they don't integrate and socialize, their own choice, following their tradition.

Sase, 31, Skopje: They can integrate, but they don't want to.

Ilija, Prilep: They can't fit in the system.

Tome, Prilep: They haven't really tried.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: They are integrated enough.

Saso, 31, Skopje: They can integrate, nobody denies this them that.

- **When they compared the Macedonians and the Roma, the citizens made clear distinction, sharing the opinion that there is essential difference in the concept and approach to life. The citizens, regardless their age and place of residence, strongly supported the opinion that the majority of the Roma population don't live the life according to a concept about the future, but just day for a day, approach that makes them different to any other people including the Macedonian.**

According to the citizens, the concept by which the Roma live involves carelessness and recklessness as typical characteristics of the Roma population, pointing to the irresponsibility toward the family, and especially the child neglect, due to which the problems of this population build up, generation by generation. The citizens illustrated the 'child neglect' with different examples, starting with carelessness over their education, ending with the carelessness about the children's health.

Pepa, 29, Stip: They have different mentality, we are not similar.

Darko, 21, Stip: They are more irresponsible.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: We share only the air that we breathe.

Magdalena, 34, Skopje: The attitude toward the children is different, we care too much, and they don't.

Hari, 23, Prilep: Those that beg near the cafes, if you give them something it's ok, if not they spit on you.

Goran, 28, Prilep: It's because of the lack of education. That child is raised in such environment.

Dragica, 47, Skopje: They differ in every aspect. They live only for their holidays.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: There are civilization differences.

Hari, 23, Prilep: If we are 50 years behind (on the civilization scale), then they are 250.

Cene, 29, Prilep: There are differences in everything, most importantly the color, education and culture.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: The hygiene and the lack of education, with generations behind, and the lack of proper upbringing.

Lidija, 27, Prilep: They don't act civilly.

Saska, 26: Among us, if there were money shortage the parent would still send the child to school, instead of sending it to beg.

Contrary to all others, who spoke mainly about the differences when they compared the Macedonians and the Roma, the young citizens of Skopje, those with a university degree, dedicated certain attention to the mutual similarities. According to them, the musical talent, friendly temper and kindness are attributes characterizing both of the people. The rest of the interviewed replied by stressing the differences. The only obvious similarity that was brought up was the poverty, which, as a result of the bad circumstances in the country, affects both communities.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: A talent for singing.

Verce, 26, Skopje: Warmth, friendship, and openness.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: Peacefulness.

- **Several differences, regarding the equal treatment of Roma in the Macedonian society, could be numbered, based on various grounds. Even though most of citizens declaratively claim that Roma are equal, one may get a general impression that the Roma are approached more with a certain underestimation than with full respect.**

Tome, 40, Prilep: They are like the jokers in the card deck.

Darko, 21, Stip: There's a job shortage for us, let alone the Roma.

Hari, 23, Prilep: They are pushed aside by us, we say, 'stay away from him, he's Gypsy'.

Cene, 29, Prilep: There's poverty, nobody offers them any jobs, they are segregated as Roma.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Generally speaking, they are treated equally. There isn't any restriction where they could work or which school to go to.

Tome, 40, Prilep: They are underestimated.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: They are not treated as people, but like a number.

Maria, 24, Skopje: We should try more to accept them; we seem to reject them somehow.

Miki, 34, Prilep: They are pushed to the farthest margins.

- **Largest number of the young citizens emphasized that the differences in culture, and education especially, objectively exist, so that a systematic or social discrimination of the Roma is out of any question.**
- **According to the young citizens, being different, with different religion, doesn't present any reason for discrimination, concluding that there isn't any discrimination on those grounds.**

The citizens pointed out that all Balkan people have an unwritten rule that family and other close relations with people of different race and religion is undesired, and in these terms, the attitude toward Roma is identical to the attitude toward all other non-Macedonians.

- **According to the young citizens, the prejudices that were performed by the senior citizens are rooted in the traditional and folklore approach.**

Ane, 19, Prilep: Generally speaking they look happy, but it's echoed by the elder that they steal.

Pepa, 29, Stip: We have prejudices about them (Roma).

The young people from Stip and Prilep believed that the older population frequently uses the traditionally inherited stereotype about the Roma as nomad people, in their daily communication, meaning, the use of traditional forms of speech and sayings which are often used, for example to keep the children obedient (sayings to make the children afraid etc.). This practice was not performed and is condemned by the young people from Stip.

Pepa, Stip: In most of the families here in Stip, a Roma character is used to scare the children in order to make them eat, which enters the children's psychology. My kid is afraid (of the Roma) also. Such fear was induced by the grandparents, which is absurd.
Darko, 21, Stip: The children are scared with the Roma with no purpose at all.

Regarding the equal treatment of the Roma, the senior citizens of Skopje presented most rigid attitude. They strongly supported the opinion that the Roma are completely equal in the Macedonian society. The majority of them stressed that the Roma enjoy free education and health services like everybody else in the country, and recognized

their mentality and lifestyle as key reasons for the bad situation that this population finds itself. Large number of the interviewed, especially the senior population of Skopje, stated that the Roma still drain and abuse the social welfare given by the society, even though they don't contribute to the social progress.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: They enjoy highest rights in our country.

Saso, 33, Skopje: They have 2-3 politicians that manipulate with them, but compared to what rights they enjoy in Europe, they are ok.

Dragica, 47, Skopje: The same health system both for them and for us.

Saso, 31, Skopje: Isn't the primary education compulsory, should we take them to the schools?

Dragan, 45, Skopje: They wait for their social cheque, and then buy beer and drink. They would think tomorrow about the next day.

This category saw the solution of the problem only inside the margins of the Roma community, which should change the approach to life and the priorities in life. This category strongly opposed the attempt to present the Roma as mistreated, associating the negative characteristics of this population to the inconsistencies of the state. The majority of the citizens believed that the approach toward this issue and the model offered like a solution for the problems is a model imposed by the Albanians, which is wrong and catastrophic for the Macedonian people and state. At any point during the discussion, the interviewed were focused on the relations between the Macedonians and Albanians, fearing that the European countries would enforce the model imposed by the Albanians, by means of military pressure, as model for managing the relations with the rest of the ethnic minorities, including the Roma. This fear was expressed even among the senior citizens Prilep, even though in lot milder form.

- **All citizens said that the Roma are different then any other minority, comparing them firstly to the Albanians, whose minority issue was so much in the focus in Macedonia in the last ten years that it caused even an armed conflict. According to the majority of the citizens, both the Albanians and Roma are on a lower civilization scale then the rest of the population, which is dominantly Macedonian, but contrary to the Albanians, who try to present their flaws as a direct product of the discrimination inclined Macedonian society in which they live, the Roma are more objective and fair.**

The focus of the Roma lifestyle is placed in the personal freedom more then in the rest of the institutional benefits, and therefore, the Roma, contrary to the Albanians, don't have territorial or nationalistic aspirations that endanger the integrity of the state. For that reason exactly, the citizens, especially the young ones, described the Roma as well-intentioned, tolerant and peaceful people, and, according to their opinion, the Macedonian people treats them with tolerance and positive emotions. It must be mentioned that the senior citizens of Skopje expressed an excessive intolerance

regarding this issue, but this was an immediate reflection of the interethnic relations between the Macedonians and the Albanians, which were critical in the last ten years.

4. The Government and the Roma

- **The majority of the citizens believed that the life of the Roma was improved in the recent years, even though none of them claimed that this improvement is of large degree. According to the largest number of the citizens, the presence of the international donations, activities of the nongovernmental sector, especially in the domain of the education, and Roma involvement into politics contributed to the improvement of the life of the Roma population. It shouldn't be forgotten that the increased participation of Roma in the trade with textile and shoes provides safer existence for number of Roma families.**

The citizens of Prilep pointed to the increased presence of Roma children in the primary schools as a success of the educational process of the Roma population, while the citizens of Stip stressed that the more objective, undiscriminating and tolerant attitude of the young generations toward the Roma is also an indication of the improved life of the Roma. It shouldn't be forgotten that the increased participation of the Roma in the trade with textile and shoes provides safer existence for a number of Roma families. This trading activity is most intensive in Skopje. It was illustrated with a description of the largest Roma settlement, where one may find large number of textile and shoe shops, visited not only by the lowest class, but also by the middle class of not only Roma population. The citizens stressed that the illegal import and tax evasion to the state make the Roma competitive traders, prompting in a spread of this business, but it should be mentioned as well, that this process wasn't judged badly by any of the citizens.

Ljupce, 25, Skopje: Nothing much is changed, apart from their involvement into trade. But even that is better than begging on corners.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: There are improvements. Maybe the efforts of the NGOs and counseling centers are not fruitless.

Magde, 34, Skopje: There were a lot of donations.

Ljupka, 22, Stip: There are a lot NGOs that help the Roma, granting scholarships to those that want to study.

Biljana, 24, Stip: The things are moving in a positive direction because we started to accept them as people, not as Roma.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: Better, now, even the political parties joined the NGOs in helping them.

Saska, 26, Prilep: Numerous international organizations help them.

Goran, 28, Prilep: There is a newly opened center for the education of the children, concentrating on the female Roma. There are also two radio stations that, in a way, contribute to the education process.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: Improved. They made it with the market shops, they don't beg. The NGOs helped them a bit, made them learn English.

Silvana, 34, Prilep: They started to distinguish themselves in the politics too.

Blaga, 51, Prilep: They make their children study harder.

- **When the citizens discussed the help provided to the Roma, they, reflecting the bad economic situation and the poverty in the state, thought firstly of the financial aid given by the state.**

It must be stressed immediately that this point of the discussion raised certain disagreements, and some citizens reacted even bitterly.

The citizens emphasized the fact that the ruling poverty in Macedonia affects all its citizens, and therefore, aid should be given to all, including the Macedonians, not only the minorities. Therefore, any project aimed to help only the Roma in Macedonia inflicted negative emotions in a large number of the citizens.

- **Still, most of the citizens believed that the Roma should be helped. Taking in consideration that the majority of the citizens located the root of the problems, that the Roma deal with, in the mentality and lifestyle of the Roma as ethnicity, the citizens believed that the solutions should be found by the Roma communities.**
- **Taking in consideration that the main help that the Roma need is in changing their daily habits in direction of redefinition of the priorities in life, most of the citizens believed that it is a domain of the NGOs, and not a responsibility of the government or other official institutions of the state. This attitude was presented by all citizens, but it was especially strongly stressed by the citizens of Skopje.**

Verce, 26, Skopje: Non-Governmental Organizations.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: NGOs and the Government.

Maja, 26, Skopje: The Government can only give support; it can't be the key planner of the helping strategies.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: NGOs.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: I don't believe that the Government or the Ministries can help them.

Maria, 24, Skopje: Baring in mind all other unsolved problems, the Government is not the one.

Lide, 27, Skopje: Taking in consideration the actual policy of employing members of the minorities...

Andrea, 46, Skopje: Maybe some of the institutions in charge can approve certain project aimed to help them, but its execution depends solely on them.

According to the majority of the citizens, the success of the NGOs efforts to help the Roma depends on the sole Roma communities, which by help, in most of the cases, understand only financial aid, failing to see the other concepts of help, directed to their education and raise of awareness. That, according to some opinions, may be the greatest challenge for the non-governmental sector.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: All NGOs are engaged in aiding the Roma. Starting with the education, all the way to the issue of passports. The people from the NGOs want to help, they try hard, but somehow the Roma seem to be reluctant.

Marija, 24, Skopje: The NGOs try hard, but we are yet to use the outcomes.

Ljupco, 25 Skopje: How much they will gain depends on them. There's great engagement in their case.

Saska, 26, Prilep: The help shouldn't be financial. Their awareness should be raised.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Their way of thinking should be changed.

Biljana, 24, Stip: ... Their habits. Their awareness should be raised; sole money should not be given.

- **Regarding the aid from the Macedonian authorities, the citizens believe that the Roma already receive the overall aid that the Government can offer.**

Taking in consideration that the education and the health services are free to all citizens, including the Roma, and baring in mind that the poverty and unemployment torment the whole Macedonian society, none of the citizens was convinced that the Government could do something more about the Roma.

Ile, 31, Prilep: Education, health services, same treatment, same services for us and them, what should be done differently?

Magde, 34, Skopje: They have all that, they are aided.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: The Government helped them by inventing their grammar.

Goran, 24, Prilep: They participate in the Government.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: The government has its priorities, they should help themselves.

Education is not out of bounce, and yet, they wouldn't study.

Srebra, 53, Skopje: The Government provided everything, but they should change their lifestyle.

Pepa, 29, Stip: Not only the Roma, everybody should receive the same kind of aid.

Because, there are some of us (the Macedonians) that don't finish school due to money shortage.

Metodi, 25, Stip: Maybe the Government should help them. I just don't know how, they have the school, but still wouldn't go to classes, should the Government build them new one?

Goran, 24, Prilep: We agreed not to segregate them. Why then, should they be helped only?

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Our people (the Macedonians) receive 2000 denars social welfare, just the same as the Roma. Everybody enjoys the same rights and privileges.

Only the young citizens of Skopje believed that the Government should dedicated more aid and attention to the education of the Roma.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: The education should be stimulated, they should be more privileged in that domain.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: The education is the bases and it is where they should be more privileged, if there could be a model managing that.

Marija, 24, Skopje: Investments should enter their education, they shouldn't be privileged more.

Zoran, 30, Skopje: They should be given a chance with the education.

Verce, 26, Skopje: They should be stimulated to study, not given the money.

The senior citizens of Skopje, especially the male participants, had the most conservative attitudes. They stressed once again that the key to the problem lies in the mentality of the Roma population, and not in the lack of services and privileges offered by the state, and therefore considered the discussions over the models for helping the Roma as groundless, adding that the Roma are not using even the assistances that the state offers them, even at this moment.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: The problem lies within them, not the state.

Sase, 31, Skopje: How should we help them? One can't always rely on being helped by someone else, without taking any self - initiative.

Magde, 34, Skopje: They should find a way to help themselves, there is enough aid directed toward them.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: They are undisciplined.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: They are helped enough.

Saso, 33, Skopje: They already have a Deputy Minister. What they have at the moment is more than enough.

- **It is interesting to see that none of the citizens made a clear distinction which of the problems faced by the Roma should be dealt by the central authorities (the Government) and which by the local authorities.**

With an exception of only few citizens of Prilep, who pointed that the problems related to the Roma habitats and settlements is a domain of the local authorities, the rest of

the citizens believed that the local authorities don't have the capability to deal with big infrastructural issues, and therefore is not able to solve the problems of the Roma communities.

- **Regarding the responsibilities that could be taken over by the Macedonian community in order to improve the life of the Roma, there were differences in the opinions, depending on the age and the city of residence: While the young citizens of Skopje and Stip clearly stressed that the Macedonian community could pay attention to the proper upbringing of its children in direction of eliminating discrimination of the Roma and their acceptance as equal part of the society, the young population of Prilep shared the attitude of the senior citizens from Prilep and Skopje, who believed that the Roma are accepted enough in the Macedonian community, and therefore the responsibilities for the solutions of their problems lie solely in the Roma community.**

Zoran, 30, Skopje: We should see them as equal; we shouldn't judge them by the few that beg in the streets.

Maja, 26, Skopje: We are tolerant enough, they are respected enough, what they will make out of it, I don't know.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: We can't do anything more than saying our opinion and teaching our children properly.

Pepa, 29, Stip: We should take care of our children, not letting them being thought by the elders.

- **Significant differences in the opinions could be noticed among the various age categories about the necessary activities that the Roma community should take in order to improve its life conditions. The young population from the inquired cities searched for the potentials of the Roma population, and their engagement as a pulling force, which should enforce the progress of the Roma population in general, while most of the senior citizens were not able to make such, or similar, observation.**

In that context, the interviewed firstly mentioned the educated Roma citizens, who are in position to have a clearer insight in the problems of the community and influence the overall circumstances, in coordination with the aid coming from outside the community.

Goran, 28, Prilep: To task the educated Roma.

Ane, 19, Prilep: The highly educated Roma should awake the awareness of the Roma population, they trust each other more.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: The educated Roma should help the rest of the community to realize and accept the need for education.

- **The citizens, without any exceptions, were familiar with the unemployment rate in the Roma population. The citizens had a full insight in the economic problems shared by everybody, expressing the opinion that the whole country is on the verge of existence, showing no surprise by the high unemployment rate among the Roma.**

Some of the citizens pointed that the statistical unemployment figures are not real, not only regarding the Roma, taking in consideration that in order to avoid contributions for the social or pension insurance for the employees, the employers engage the black labor market. The citizens concluded that the same principle counts for the Roma as well and that, in fact, a certain number of Roma is unofficially employed. It is a fact due to which the extremely bad economic situation of the Roma looks even worse.

- **Regarding the larger integration of the Roma in the Macedonian society, one may get the impression that the majority of the citizens expressed themselves positively. Yet, it should be mentioned immediately that all citizens, regardless of the age, education and city of residence, understand this as complete acceptance of the behavioral norms of the environment in which the Roma should integrate.**

The idea of a larger integration of the Roma in the society raised different opinions and attitudes, depending on the age and city of residence, besides the general acceptance by the majority of the citizens.

The young citizens of Skopje with university degree, and the young population of Stip were most positive over this issue. Even though the largest number of them believed that the larger integration of the Roma is hardly possible, they expressed unconditional acceptance of the idea. Contrary to them, the senior citizens of Skopje and the larger number of the citizens of Prilep couldn't see the need for larger integration of the Roma, and considered the present level of integration sufficient and natural. Contrary to the young citizens of Skopje and Stip, who immediately rejected the idea of Roma segregation as wrong, the citizens of Prilep and the senior citizens of Skopje took the idea in consideration, but of course, by the end, dropped it as impractical solution.

Maja, 26, Skopje: Of course the state would benefit from the integration of the Roma.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: The state pays them everything, just like us.

Verce, 26, Skopje: I don't support the segregation, they shouldn't be isolated.

Marija, 24, Skopje: Segregation is out of the question, they are isolated anyhow.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: Segregation is not the solution.

Ljupco, 22, Stip: Segregation. That's what Hitler did.

Biljana, 24, Stip: Their settlements would become like the black gethos, dangerous.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: Segregation wouldn't serve anyone.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: They are involved, we are a poor country, otherwise segregation is good, they would feel more free.

Saska, 26, Prilep: Both ideas have their advantages and disadvantages.

Ilija, 30 Prilep: In the western countries people did it after observing the situation.

Everywhere in the western countries, the Roma live in separate settlements.

Silvana, 34, Prilep: It would be discriminating if we put them in gethos.

Dime, 37, Prilep: They live in their own part, though not literally segregated; we should only give them some help.

Goran, 24, Prilep: They are already integrated.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: They are integrated enough.

Miki, 34, Prilep: It's not possible; we find it hard to integrate after the changes of the society, let alone their integration.

- **Regarding the issue of segregation of Roma in separate settlements, the majority of the citizens replied negatively. The range of given reasons was wide and included human motives and political reasons, in terms of preservations of the interethnic relations and the stability of the country.**

During the discussion about the Roma segregation, most of the citizens expressed the opinion that the hot Roma temper could be dangerous for the Roma community itself, but also for the surrounding communities, if the Roma were isolated on small territory. There were citizens, especially among men, which saw the Roma isolation as a time bomb, baring in mind the accumulation of the problems in such communities, which could later explode and inflict crises. Some of the interviewed expressed fear that Roma segregation would give birth to Roma nationalism, which would have a negative impact in the society, especially to the Macedonians. Yet, there were citizens that believed that the enforced integration and favoring the Roma in the society would make them follow the example of the Albanians, giving burst to their nationalism.

Goran, 28, Prilep: It's safer if they are integrated. They would accept more from us if we were together.

Tome, 40, Prilep: Living together would be better, we would make larger political structure, and the state would benefit from them. You can buy them (the Roma) for a penny.

Metodi, 25, Stip: Segregation is not the solution. After 100 years there might be even bigger problems.

Dime, 37, Prilep: If they are stimulated like the Albanians, then we will see what they are like.

5. The decade of the Roma

- **All participants, especially the young people, were aware of the existence of several international non-governmental projects focused to aiding the Roma. Yet, none of the participants could name any of the organizations related to these activities. The only name that was mentioned was the name of the Institute for Open Society, referenced as SOROS.**

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: Until several years ago SOROS was supporting the Albanians, now they shifted slowly toward the Roma.

The citizens confirmed that even some international donations for helping the Roma could be recently noticed, which was assessed positively, but only if used properly, meaning, if the projects are undertaken avoiding the concept of direct money contributions.

- **During the discussion about the international efforts to help the Roma, one could get the impression that the Macedonian citizens are extremely unmotivated to take part in these activities, through sharing their experiences and voicing their opinions over this issue.**

The only concern whether their opinion would be taken in consideration or not, could be felt only regarding the activities of the Government over this issue, but in general, most of the citizens shared the opinion that Government doesn't listen to its people about any issue.

Yet, the citizens had an opinion over this. The majority believed that the Roma should not be given single money aid, because, due to their mentality, it would be spent without making any change. The interviewed groups believed that the Roma could be helped only through a process of education, which would change their understanding of life and priorities. The citizens stressed the importance of the international programs related to this issue, especially the of the non-governmental sector, and it was a belief of most of the citizens that this would take great efforts and a lot of time. The senior citizens, especially the ones from Skopje, supported the opinion that there couldn't be any program that could change the Roma mentality, because it's in their blood, independent to the social circumstances. This attitude was supported with the claim that the Roma are the same all around the world, even though the social circumstances in the countries they inhabit vary.

- **Only a small number of citizens have heard about the Decade of the Roma and none of them could give any details about the concept of this project.**

Goran, 24, Prilep: I've heard about it, there would be international investments for the Roma in the next 10 years.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: I read in the newspaper few days ago.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: It's a global project, isn't it? It was in the papers.

- **After the information about the goals and the program of the Decade of the Roma, the citizens expressed various opinions, but it can be said that, it was positively assessed, although it faced a dose of criticism,. If there were a referendum over this issue, the majority of the citizens stated that they would vote for.**

As it could be expected, the young population of Skopje with a university degree, accepted and supported this idea most enthusiastically, and the young population of Stip, who considered it a positive step, shared such attitude.

Marija, 24, Skopje: I support the initiative.

Maja, 26, Skopje: Once decided, let them invest.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: It sounds like the last efforts are being made; I hope it will succeed.

Marija, 27, Skopje: Why shouldn't it succeed?

Verce, 26, Skopje: Let them invest.

Pepa, 29, Stip: It's necessary that they integrate.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: It's needed, at the moment there are problems with the Roma in Bulgaria and the situation is getting out of control – the people want the Roma move out.

The young population of Skopje and Stip stated that they would vote positively if there were a referendum for the approval of the Decade of the Roma.

Even though the citizens of Skopje also agreed with the program of the Decade and stated that they would vote positively if there were a referendum, this group also gave room for an attitude according which, taking in consideration the rest of the problems that bother the country, the Roma issue is given unnecessarily big attention.

Magde, 34, Skopje: It's ok. The initiative should be welcome.

Saso, 34, Skopje: That is ok.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: It's ok. I just feel that they are given too much attention.

Saso, 31, Skopje: More they cry more attention they will get.

Greatest varieties over the issue of the Decade of the Roma could be spotted in Prilep. Contrary to the other cities, where the citizens spoke mainly about the positive effects of the Decade of the Roma, the citizens of Prilep expressed fear from the negative consequences that this project might have for their community.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Why should we oppose it?

Goran, 24, Prilep: I'm not against them to start their own companies, I just wonder if they would employ us (the Macedonians)?

Goran, 28, Prilep: They should be educated, we don't hold anything against them, but it wouldn't be good if they later turn against us.

Goran, 24, Prilep: But they shouldn't be integrated because they will rise against us later.

Saska, 26, Prilep: If it is true integration, then it should be ok.

Ane, 19, Prilep: It might happen that they cause problems if someone passes in front of their café in the center of the city.

Tome, 40, Prilep: It would be good for the state also; the money would go into the state funds.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: I believe that everybody should be given a chance, and we would all benefit from it.

The opinions of the senior and young citizens of Prilep differed when they discussed the support of the referendum over the Decade of the Roma. While the senior citizens stated they would vote positively, the young citizens, unexpectedly, expressed criticism and weren't ready to support the project under any circumstances.

Lide, 27, Prilep: I would vote pro.

Cene, 29, Prilep: Pro.

Hari, 23, Prilep: I don't know. It depends.

Goran, 24, Prilep: Against.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: It depends on the media campaign.

- **The citizens, except the group of senior citizens from Skopje, would support the initiative even if it takes a Government participation of 3-4 million of euros for the carrying out of the Decade of the Roma.**

The citizens stated that such amount of money, even if it looks big by itself, isn't big if treated like a state investment, and every state, including Macedonia, can grant it.

- **When larger sums of money, 10 or 20 millions of euros, came in the focus, the discussion got pointless. None of the citizens could realize how big such amount of money is from state perspective, and therefore the majority of them couldn't even discuss about such amount of money.**

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: We don't have any idea how much money that is.

More specific ideas appeared only in Skopje, where the citizens believed that funds for this project should not be too big.

Mihail, 30 Skopje: I wouldn't mind it in normal circumstances, but having the present situation in the country, I think 10 million euros is too much.

Marija, 27, Skopje: Yes, I support it, but let's have first other things in the state sorted out.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: The amount of money shouldn't be too big.

- **It must be mentioned that none of the citizens showed enthusiasm for participation in such or similar project. The citizens' common opinion was that Roma issue is a problem of the Roma community, and most intensive activity was expected from the Roma communities. The involvement of Macedonians was mostly foreseen through the activities of the NGOs.**

Otherwise, apart of the citizens' opinions quoted above, most of the citizens believed that larger integration of the Roma could provoke positive changes.

Magde, 34, Skopje: It would help, they would stop begging.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: If it takes 1 million euros to carry out such a project, the state would benefit from the decrease of crime and contagious diseases.

Srebra, 53, Skopje: If the money were used properly it would return back to the state in a different form.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: Decrease of benefactors of social welfare would be positive.

Marija, 24, Skopje: Because they are part of our environment, it would be good for us as well.

Pepa, 29, Stip: Life would be better.

Ljupce, 25, Stip: If we all had good income, it wouldn't matter who is who.

Tome, 40, Prilep: That money would return back to the state.

Biljana, 35, Prilep: The differences would be reduced.

- **Most of the citizens had positive opinion about lower prizes for the preschool programs/books/transport/school meals for the poor Roma children.**

As it could be expected, the young population of Skopje with a university degree, overwhelmingly supported the idea, the senior citizens of Skopje and Prilep stressed that the Roma children already enjoy such privileges, and part of the young population of Prilep and Stip believed that such a step favoring Roma would have a negative impact on the poor non Roma population.

Magde, 34, Skopje: Didn't they have something similar?

Verce, 26, Skopje: That is exactly what we proposed as well.

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Why only for the Roma children, everybody should get some.

Ljupka, 19, Stip: There should be something like that for the poor children, for everybody.

Ljupco, 22, Stip: Others (non Roma) would oppose it; it would send a wrong message.

- **None of the citizens saw any need and necessity for inserting elements of Roma culture in the curriculum of the children, without any differences in the opinions, regardless of the age group and city of residence.**

Still, as a sign for a good will toward the integration of the Roma, most of the citizens expressed their support to the insertions of elements of Roma culture in the children's curriculum, but only in a form of facultative classes which would have informative nature only.

Marija, 24, Skopje: Facultative.

Marija, 27, Skopje: It's not necessary.

Mihail, 30, Skopje: Facultatively.

Kiril, 24, Skopje: Optional, as facultative part of the curriculum, to be studied only voluntarily.

Verce, 26, Skopje: It depends, if it's a part of a lesson, yes, if it's a separate subject, no.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: I don't support it.

Goran, 24, Prilep: There's no need for that. Or it could be taught only to the Roma.

Ane, 19, Prilep: Facultatively.

Pepa, 29, Stip: Good idea.

Vladimir, 24, Stip: I don't mind, but somebody else might.

- Loans and scholarships in order to enable the Roma youth attend the University

Most of the citizens expressed themselves positively about university education of the Roma population. But there were differences over this issue as well: While the high educated young citizens of Skopje univocally agreed over the idea, part of the other citizens opposed it, because the Macedonians have to comply with very strict criteria to enter the university, while the minorities are privileged in these terms. Some of the citizens believed that regarding the university education minorities are more privileged than the Macedonians.

Ljupka, 19, Stip: We should all have the same opportunities for the university.

Pepa, 29, Stip: Our people (Macedonians) put themselves in the minority category in order to enter the university.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: Why shouldn't they earn their place in the university by studying, like the rest of the children, why should they have special privileges?

Saso, 33, Skopje: The money would return to the society, I support it.

Magde, 34, Skopje: Yes, if the student deserved the scholarship.

Ilija, 31, Prilep: It would provoke negative response by the public opinion, just like with the Albanians.

- **Most of the citizens expressed distrust with regards to the idea of granting financial loans (Micro-loans that would enable the Roma to start their business).**

Except few young citizens from Stip, all other citizens believed that the Roma, due to their mentality and temper, wouldn't use the loans properly and would spend the money in other than the intent purpose.

Slave, 25, Prilep: They will not return the money.

Ljupco, 25, Skopje: I wouldn't grant them any loans.

Maja, 26, Skopje: It's risky.

Dragan, 45, Skopje: Only if they pay the money back.

Regarding the financial loans, the majority of the citizens believed that the Roma shouldn't be privileged and that the same rules should be applied for them just like for everybody else.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: Under the same terms as for us.

Dragica, 47, Skopje: Only under the same terms. Why should there be special loans for them?

Saso, 31, Skopje: Why should ethnicity be before everything else?

Slavco, 25, Prilep: Loans are granted to everybody, so they can apply too. There don't have to be special loans for them.

Goran, 24, Prilep: No, if the loans would be granted only to them.

- **There were various opinions regarding the idea of enacting anti – discrimination laws which would financially sanction the employers for hiring and promotion discrimination practices; the citizens expressed the impression that in Macedonia such laws wouldn't be effective due to the poor efficiency of the justice system.**

In any way, the young population welcomes the idea while the seniors expressed their disagreement.

Saso, 31, Skopje: In my company, I would employ the ones I decide.

Magde, 34, Skopje: There are legal suits over such issues in the western countries.

Andrea, 46, Skopje: I, as an employer, could find 1000 reasons why should I fire somebody.

- Health

- **The citizens didn't have any disagreements and discussions over the idea for free vaccines for the Roma children, and immediately accepted the idea wholeheartedly.**

6. Ambassadors of Change: Voices of Trust

- **Asked to name some distinct Roma leaders, most of the citizens gave the names of the political leaders Amdi Bajram and Faik Abdi. Even though the name of Nevzdet Mustafa was familiar to a very small number of citizens, his figure was recognized from the media. The only name that appeared in the list of Roma leaders and comes outside the politics was the name of the artist Esma Redzepova.**

The citizens named the President Branko Crvenkovski, the leaders and some members of the biggest political parties like Vlado Buckovski, Ilinka Mitreva, Tito Petkovski, Risto Penov, Nikola Gruevski, Ljupco Georgievski, and the Mayor of Skopje, Trifun Kostovski, as most distinguished leaders in our country.

- **The Macedonian citizens suggested the following list of names, which would give the most reliable, or, the most convincing promoter of the idea of 'Decade of the Roma':**

**Branko Crvenkovski
Kiro Gligorov
Trifun Kostovski
Vasil Tupurkovski
Vlado Buckovski
Radmila Sekjerinska
Tito Petkovski
Nikola Gruevski
Esma Redzepova**

According to the young population of Skopje, the best choice for the most convincing promoter of the 'Decade of the Roma' could be found among the former President Kiro Gligorov, the Mayor Trifun Kostovski, and the leader of the Democratic Alternative, Vasil Tupurkovski.

The senior citizens of Skopje believed it could be somebody among the President Branko Crvenkovski, the Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski, or Radmila Sekjerinska, close associate of the President.

The citizens of Prilep listed Tito Petkovski, Vasil Tupurkovski, Nikola Gruevski and Esma Redzepova, and the citizens of Stip decided for Branko Crvenkovski or Kiro Gligorov.

7. Message concepts

- **Large majority of the citizens believed that in order to become a real part of Europe, we must take care of the people in our country who have been most discriminated against. The only exception was made by senior citizens from Skopje, who believed that there aren't truly discriminated people in Macedonia.**
- **Although large number of citizens believed that the Roma should be helped, yet, none of the participants agreed with the opinion that Roma in Macedonia are treated excessively bad. Only the young citizens from Stip believed, more than the others, that the attitude toward Roma should be lot better.**
- **Most of the citizens agreed that the reduce of number of benefactors of social aid, which mostly are Roma, would have a positive impact in tax reduction for the citizens as tax payers, but most of them didn't consider that this should be the reasons why the Roma should be helped. The young people from Stip, once again, more that the others felt that this issue deserves more attention.**
- **Regardless of the opinions over the Roma issue in general, all of the interviewed citizens believed that the Roma children deserve the same opportunities for prosperity in the country as the rest of the children. It is definitely; the majority of the citizens believe that the Roma should be helped, firstly, as people, as individuals, which seek their prosperity in the society. The citizens believe that better prosperity should be ensured for all people, including the Roma.**
- **Large part of the interviewed citizens from Stip and Prilep agreed that the citizens treat the Roma ignorantly. Most of them believed that they should act more fairly. The citizens from Skopje, the senior and the young educated population, who believed that they treat the Roma fair enough, did not share this opinion.**
- **Although most of the citizens agreed that the poor and discriminated minorities have a bad impact on the overall situation in the country, yet, a large number of the citizens believed that, the Roma might be the poorest people, but they are not constantly discriminated over every issue. The senior citizens of Skopje emphasized this attitude.**