



# LIVING TOGETHER IN MULTIETHNIC COMMUNITIES

## CLOSE AND STILL DISTANT

Macedonian – Kumanovo

*"We, Macedonians are more tolerant. Albanians have all the rights – to educate, to open companies."*

Albanian – Chair

*"Albanians do not have prejudices but Macedonians do. We, Albanians are more tolerant."*

Roma – Shuto Orizari

*"Roma has always wanted to live together with the others. We have always been sincere and open to others..."*

Macedonian – Kumanovo

*"My child has been beaten by group of Albanian children – he is bitter since then and do not want to be friend with them..."*

Albanian – Kumanovo

*"We want our children to go to school in order to get education - not to be beaten by others. That has happened."*

Roma – Shuto Orizari

*"Half of us were allowed to enter - the other half, that have darker skin were not allowed."*

### Why was the survey conducted?

*Common Values* team has conducted preliminary survey in several municipalities in order to illustrate the initial situation about the interethnic living together in multiethnic communities in Macedonia, as well as to what extent are the citizens informed about the presence, obligations and way of functioning of commissions for minority relations envisaged in the Law on local self-governance.

The results of this survey will be used as basis for designing more extensive survey regarding these issues.

### How was the survey conducted?

Information were gathered via group interviews (focus groups) conducted in 5 municipalities

purposely selected due to their ethnic composition: Chair, Butel, Struga, Kumanovo and Shuto Orizari. Focus groups were consisted of 8 to 12 respondents, ethnic Macedonians, ethnic Albanians or Roma from 25 to 55 years old. Each focus group was consisted of equal number of men and women with different levels of education and vocation. Thus, in the 12 focus groups total number of respondents was 127 - 52 ethnic Albanians (27 men and 25 women), 55 ethnic Macedonians (25 men and 30 women) and 20 ethnic Roma (8 men, 12 women). Considering the fact that the survey was not conducted on a random sample, there are limitations regarding the generalization of the results. Therefore they should be treated, above all, as an illustration that provides initial impression about the situation related to interethnic relations.

1. Four municipalities out of all municipalities in which live at least two ethnic communities were selected: Struga and Chair where ethnic Albanians are majority of the population (50%-60%) and ethnic Macedonians are minority of population (20-30%), and Butel and Kumanovo where Macedonians are majority and Albanians are minority of the population. In addition, municipality of Shuto Orizari in which Roma are majority of the population (about 60%) and there are about 30% ethnic Albanians and 6% ethnic Macedonians has been added to the sample. Focus groups of all three ethnical communities have been formed in this municipality. Focus group consisted of ethnic Roma (about 6%) which are minority in municipality of Chair has been formed.

Each focus group worked in the native language of the respondents and was moderated by a member of Common Values team that has been trained for moderation earlier. Field work started in December and ended in January 2007.

## How are the relations between different ethnic groups

### About friendship

Regardless the municipality the respondents from the three ethnic groups in the survey said that considering the fact that they are living in multiethnic environment the communication with people belonging to different ethnic community is inevitable. Only insignificant number of respondents claimed that they have lasting friendship with members of other ethnic group which are above communication in the neighborhood.

In general, parents are saying that children have friends that belong to other ethnic group with who they play on the street, while adults have few closer neighbors or friends that they are visiting on religious holidays. Yet, most of the respondents (especially in Struga and Kumanovo) consider such relations very formal, "dishonest" or related to some other concrete interest.

#### Albanian, Struga

*"Those are not honest friendships, but mutual interest".*

*"After a while [...] when we met she pretended that she did not see me only to avoid saying hello and to be blamed by her friends that she is saying hello to Albanians".*

#### Macedonian, Kumanovo

*"Young Macedonians and Albanians have no relations at all [...] they cannot stand each other. Every time they meet they are fighting".*

#### Roma, Shuto Orizari

*"...we will meet on a party or meeting, but very rarely a Macedonian or Albanian friend visits me at home".*

With only few exceptions, respondents from all groups claim that after the conflict in 2001 the contacts are reduced, while the tension between different ethnic communities is significantly increased. This claim is usually accompanied by a sharp comparison about how people belonging to different ethnic groups communicated more frequently and with more quality in the past.

#### Albanian, Chair

*"I grew up with Macedonians, but (after 2001) things have changed - they do not see us as they used to. There is hatred [...] I believe that they do not know why they hate us, but the hatred is a kind of imposed to them".*

#### Macedonian, Shuto Orizari

*"To tell you the truth, we used to live together with Albanians. But after the war - that is over".*

#### Macedonia, Shuto Orizari

*"We can live here for a year or two - there is no life for us, orthodox, after that".*

### About economic cooperation

For most of the respondents, except the ethnic Albanians from Struga (who have strong impression that their fellow citizens – Macedonians boycott them economically), ethnic belonging has not been registered as an obstacle for establishing business cooperation. Several have companies together with representative of other ethnic community. If the respondents are minority in the settlement they consider it as advantage since "the job is done easily" because of the friendships that a partner belonging to majority group would have.

Yet, the majority respondents consider that due to the common language and values, and the trust above all, is easier to cooperate with business partner does not belong to other ethnic group.

### About love and marriages

Ethnically mixed marriages, especially between Macedonians and Albanians, i.e. Christians and Muslims (that are said to be very rare) are real taboo. Usually reaction to such possibility is huge emotional disapproval accompanied with rationalizations that "although there is no such thing as love" the marriage between representatives of different ethnic communities cannot succeed because it will bear the burden of cultural and religious differences. Emotional reactions of the respondents that they will physically destroy their children without thinking if he/she wants to marry representative of other ethnic community are not rare case.

### About barriers for living together

The distance is usually considered to be a result of the differences in languages and cultures, difficult economic situation, as well as "mentality" of the other.

Roma think that generally Albanians are *brutal*,

and Macedonians are *full of prejudices* about them. Albanians think that Macedonians are *hypocritical, selfish and arrogant*, while Macedonians consider most of the Albanians as aggressive, *fond of corrupting others and uneducated*. Both, Macedonians and Albanians do not consider Roma to be group that is serious danger to them.

Roma, Chair

*"I have sent my daughter to school to learn Macedonian [...] they have grouped all Roma pupils in one class [...] and how can my daughter learn Macedonian now?"*

Albanian, Struga

*"We consider things as ours and theirs, so we do not have anything in common."*

Macedonia, Chair

*"...An Albanian child told my child to go away since that is their neighborhood...then I have taken precaution measures as a parent to avoid my child being beaten...I think it is due to awareness in the families [...] their parents are not educated..."*

Albanian respondents (especially from Struga) have strong impression that they are doing everything to have good relations with Macedonians, but Macedonians do not want that. They think that the general reason for such situation is the habit of Macedonians as majority "to be privileged compared to the others".

Albanian, Struga

*"...it is clear that Macedonian do not want to live with us - now they do not have the privileges they used to have [...] the problem is in them so you (civil society organizations) should deal with them, not with us."*

Albanian, Shuto Orizari

*"...We have always been separated and put aside. A power line was passing in front of our house and for 15 years we were not allowed to connect and we were living without power and water."*

In each focus group consisted of ethnic Macedonians, the distance with Albanians is considered to be due to their fear regarding physical safety and "policy of forceful creation ethnically clean settlements through systematic psychological and physical violence". This discourse is especially strong among Macedonians who are minority in their settlement.

Macedonian, Shuto Orizari

*"If there are lot of Albanians in the bus my son is waiting for other bus even if that means that he should pay expensive ticket, only to avoid problems... once, Albanian came, and just looked for a reason to start a fight... and just before the Brewery they have beaten Macedonians, broke their noses."*

Macedonian, Kumanovo

*"When we have lived in mixed community my child had a knife. When I have asked him why he said: we have nothing, and Albanians have knives, guns... They are always violent..."*

Roma, who expresses the highest level of preparedness for interaction with other ethnic groups, consider the fact that other ethnic groups are not prepared to interact with them as an obstacle. Most of the non-Roma clubs are not accessible to them, and they claim that Roma children have been segregated in the schools. Even more, due to the low level of self-confidence they feel most comfortable in solitary since they are less exposed to the risk to be mocked or physically attacked.

Roma, Shuto Orizari

*"Roma are timid, have no self-confidence and feel safe only among other Roma [...] thus ghettoizing themselves."*

Roma, Chair

*"Currently, they are more aggressive, but that is why we learn at school - to become more aggressive."*

### What are interethnic problems?

Asked whether in their community there are problems emerging from multiethnic population, all respondents regardless they belong to minority or majority group and municipality, express personal and heard experiences of discrimination, starting from the cases of delay of an administrative procedure, to (no)opportunity for employment.

Prevalent feeling among Albanians is that Macedonians are continuously blocking their economic progress, trying to perform "cultural genocide" and are not perceiving them as constituent part of the country.

Albanian, Chair

*"Macedonian's policy is to make Albanians poor. I was waiting for 25 years to find a job, and I was force to work any kind of jobs..."*

Albanian, Struga

*"While Macedonians do not accept Albanians as equal, there will not be a peace here [...] they think that the town belongs to them and according to them Struga belongs just to Macedonians and to nobody else..."*

On the other hand, major problems for Macedonians are concerns regarding their safety and the more frequent tendency "Albanians to obtain diplomas and job positions without appropriate competences."

Macedonian, Kumanovo

*"They have a strategy... Macedonians are leaving then. If you refuse to sell the house to Albanian you cannot let your child out of home anymore."*

Macedonian, Shuto Orizari

*"They are selling the houses for small money. I would not sell my house if it us up to me, but I will sell it for my children."*

Roma consider themselves as extremely adaptable since they have always been living in communities with lot of different ethnic groups. In general, they are frightened of possibility of physical violence and they have constantly been exposed to discrimination, even in a community with predominant Roma population.

Roma, Shuto Orizari

*"It is beyond any doubt that Roma are always discriminated. Even in the school in which 95% of the students are Roma and where I thought that there is no room for discrimination by the teacher, there is such case..."*

### What about Commissions for minority relations?

General result is that respondents are not aware of the presence of Commissions for minority relations. Few respondents have heard about them but do not know how they function and have never asked for help. Furthermore, prevalent opinion is that interethnic problems can be solved "in higher instances" rather than on local level.

Yet, many respondents share the idea that if the Commissions for minority relations function well they can be useful. Citizens consider media campaigns and appointing individuals that will inform people in the neighborhood the most efficient way of informing.

Albanian, Struga

*"We will do what ever is needed [...] I think that Albanians were tolerant. Commissions can function if all the parties want that."*

Roma, Shuto Orizari

*"Why that commission do not build a cultural home, a sport hall for everybody [...] we all know that music and sports bring people together... that would be a preventive measure."*

Macedonian, Butel

*"...It would be useful if there are also external people, not just councilors, in order to share the experience with the rest out there [...] that would contribute to popularity and efficiency of the commission."*

### General impressions of the survey

In places with representatives of several ethnic communities, the interaction between people belonging to different ethnic communities is formal and limited in most of the cases.

Generally, the dominate impression is that after 2001 the communication between people belonging to different ethnic communities is reduced and relations are deteriorated.

Respondents declare smallest ethnical distance in business.

Respondents express highest level of aversion to ethnically mixed marriages.

There is a clear tendency to assign the reasons for ethnical problems to the ethnical *other*.

Almost no respondent in the survey is aware about the presence, work and functioning of the Commissions for minority relations.

Media and "spread of word" are identified as preferred way of informing.

Author: Nikolina Kenig

**Common Values - CV** is a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization with headquarters in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia. The mission of then association is directed towards encouraging and supporting civil dialogue for equal participation of ethnic communities living in the Republic of Macedonia in the sustainable development on local and national level.

**Address:**

Kliment Ohridski blvrd. 7/1  
P.O.Box 589, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia

**Phone/fax.** +389 2 3113 966  
+389 2 3113 907

**E-mail:** info@cv.org.mk

**Web site:** www.cv.org.mk