

Group Discussion – Dobrich, June 20, 2003

Participants – 9 people. Among them:

Men:

A private-firm electrician, 53; a private-business tradesman of Turkish origin, 45; a service-sector employee, 44; a government-sector employee in a hospital, 35; a veterinary worker, 26;

Women:

A pensioner, 58; a private-sector employee of Turkish origin, 48; an employee in the Social Insurance Department, 38; a student, 24;

Theme 1 – Major Problems

There are problems with the streets in town. Construction work is now under way for gas supply in Dobrich – streets are being dug up, the road surface is being renovated. The project's progress is slow and this impedes traffic in town. Telephone cables are often torn.

The problem with the street dogs persists, and there is no progress on that.

There is a problem with street lighting. Firms, which have won projects (external firms – which means not registered in the town), have not fulfilled the orders completely. This is one of the examples when firms connected to the local administration receive projects and do not do their work.

Cleaning is not done well. The Social Services Department hires people under employment programs, but they do not do a good job.

Fewer and fewer factories work in the town. Most often, they are privatized in order to be sold off. Many good enterprises have been destroyed. As a result, there is “export/leakage” of experienced human resources from the town. Many professionals leave Dobrich.

Too many gas stations are being constructed without any idea of urban planning. They are close to each other and close to the blocks of flats. In some places they are perceived as a potential threat to the residents.

The municipal administration does not pay enough attention to pensioners' clubs. Funds are not secured for that purpose.

There are problems with the transport in town. It starts at 6 a.m. and closes at 8 p.m. This is why, “in the evening the town is dead after 8 p.m.” There is a problem in the morning as well – many people leave for work before the transport starts.

There is shortage of open-air play -grounds for children. Old grounds are being closed, and there are no new ones. Kindergartens and creches are being closed, with their buildings desolated and in ruins.

There are financial problems in the municipal hospital, and this changes the behavior of the personnel towards patients. The Emergency Aid refuses transport even on most serious occasions.

There are no organized parking lots. Cars are parked everywhere. This is an actual issue also because of streets torn up for gas supply – thus parking places are reduced.

Theme 2 – Mayor / Municipal Councilor Relationships

The problem of Dobrich is not in the mayor/municipal councilor relationships. They get along and work well but “not in citizens’ interests.”

Second, the problem is in the absence of the mayor. The opinion is that he may be very active on a national level, but he is not present in town and is negligent of his work there.

An example of a careless work of the municipality is the construction of a covered market in the center of the town (on a pedestrian area), which makes the central area look ugly. For this purpose, one of the main streets was closed and trees were cut. This project was started by the previous mayor, and the present mayor promised in his pre-election program to stop it. But it is during his mandate when the project has been completed and the place has been given for rent. “Both took money out of this project”, goes the rumor.

Theme 3 – The Mayor

When the question is about the personality of the mayor, the main pretension refers to his absence from town. The mayor should be easily accessible, be present in town and familiar with its problems. He should also build a team.

As regards the party membership, it is preferred that he/she is not a party member. The parties are associated with the process of liquidation of the economy in the town – closing and selling-out of a number of profitable enterprises like the shoe factory, the military factory, the sausage-making factory, etc.

Many politicians do not understand administration. They must understand it and know the legislation. Private managers know more about administration because they gain practical experience working with administrative structures.

It is not a problem if the mayor represents a party that the respondents do not sympathize. “The party is not important but problems of the town. If he/she can resolve them, then why would I not vote for that person?”

Municipal Councilors

The problem is in the “rotation” of the same people for years. Lists are made for “relatives.”

It would be good if the candidates were not only party functionaries – let there be representatives of various key institutions and organizations in the town, as well as professionals from different sectors.

Accepted very enthusiastically is the proposal that lists be prepared by the parties and afterwards given to the citizens for approval. The respondents would be pleased to take part in the selection of candidates – for example, if they can receive the list and mark against each candidate whether they approve of him/her or not. Candidates receiving the highest approval must be put in the first elective places.

Through such a selection however, it is necessary for the citizens to have some information about the candidates, especially if they do not know them. Such information can be provided from the respective party.

The respondents would back up a list that is selected this way no matter which is the party.

Regarding mixed lists (ethnically mixed), the respondents have a positive attitude.