

## **Group Discussion – Razgrad, June 19, 2003**

*Participants – 8 people. Among them:*

*Men:*

A teacher, a trade-union member, 55; a machine engineer in an agency for metrology, 33; an engineering technician of Turkish origin, 28;

*Women:*

A pensioner, 59; a private-sector employee, 53; an employee in a government enterprise, 48; a high-school teacher of Turkish origin, 39, a technology technician in a government enterprise, 27

### **Theme 1 – Major problems**

In the first place, it is the row of closed enterprises in the town. The potentiality of Razgrad is destroyed, which has led to high unemployment and migration – to a large extent abroad.

The municipality must be criticized for this process. For example, due to weak activity of the municipal administration a glass factory will be opened in Rousse, whereas in Razgrad there used to be such a factory and there is a capacity built (Diamant Factory). This capacity is, first, in the existing base, and second, in well-prepared professional workers. The town has a tradition in porcelain production since 1930 (there are kaolin fields nearby). The factory was with out-of-date technologies, which instead of to be renovated they decline, and it was closed.

The second important existing enterprise, tending towards decrease of production and closing, is Balkanfarma. According to the respondents, it is intentionally led to bankruptcy because there is same factory in Dupnitsa.

Presently, out of the old factories working is only the factory for pistons and segments, however at 30 percent of its capacity.

There is also an example in the municipality of good-working enterprises – a factory for sweeteners and farina. It has been modernized, now working and standing well in the market, but does not employ much labor.

Less and less people work, and this has led to lower income for the municipality. It has less and less funds available.

As a result, there is high migration – all ethnic groups search for work abroad. Turks are leaving again for Turkey, the Roma for Holland and Belgium, and Bulgarians for Western Europe and the USA.

The blame for this situation is sought also in the mayor: “Not even a single enterprise has been established over the last three mandates. Just the opposite, he closed two of the biggest. On a national level, he works for decentralization of municipalities, but here there is not a single enterprise to render money, if the decentralization is to become a fact.”

There are no remarks regarding the cleanness of the town. Workers hired under employment programs clean the town every day. The central area is better maintained, but there are no problems in the end quarters as well.

There are funds available under the Beautiful Bulgaria Project and the situation of the town has been improved. The municipality makes efforts to take care of and fill in the street holes, but Water Supply and Sewage often digs for repair. Outside the town roads are excellent, however there are problems in town. Nevertheless, it is considered that the municipality makes maximum efforts in this respect.

There is almost no in-town transport. Tenders have been organized by the municipality, and the transport is assigned to private firms. Disputes and complaints are going on among them, and there is now a total chaos. The municipality is being accused of allowing for the chaos and of its patience.

Similar example is given also with reference to a spoiled project for restoration of the mosque in the center of the town. Funds were raised, and a competition had to be organized for a contractor firm to carry out the restoration but it was not, so the project failed.

Few funds are allocated for the educational system. Schools almost do not have sources for heating. According to the representative of the school syndicates, up to 75 percent of the money goes directly for salaries. It is impossible to do repair work.

The gas supply for kindergartens and schools is pointed as a positive sign in the work of the municipality.

The water price is also a problem – up to 2 Leva per cubic meter. Incomes are low, there is unemployment, but the water price is among the highest in the country. In the same time, there is a dam and water close to the town, so the blame is once again sought in the municipality administration.

The municipality has set high rent prices for stalls in the market, and thus the town has high prices for agricultural products as well.

The population of the town has decreased – from 50,000 in 1991 to 36,000 in 2001. According to the respondents, the town is even smaller, but “the municipality

intentionally raises the number because otherwise taxes must be reduced. But small and medium-sized private firms suffer from this, because they pay a patent tax...”

### **Theme 2 – Mayor / Municipal Councilors Relationships**

The opinion is that they work together perfectly. Decisions are always coordinated, and they are an excellent team and succeed in taking unified decisions. After a common opinion for a good team is reached, the respondents go back to the topic of Balkanfarma in order to express their surprise that such a team has “lost track about the situation in such important enterprise.”

### **Theme 3 - Mayor**

First, he/she must be proactive – to think of the revival of the town. He/she should be a little younger in order to be more active. He/she should be able to work with NGOs and European funds. Younger people have a different type of thinking, and they do not rely on the government only, like older people do.

It is not important for him/her to be a party member, but rather a “personality.” It does not matter if he/she is a manager, and more important is his/her administrative experience.

The respondents mentioned some such personalities. For example Georgi Chobanov – a lawyer who has in the past refused United Democratic Forces (UDF) to run for a mayor. Also Angel Takev, a BSP Member of Parliament, who now is in the private business.

Conversely, Emel Etem was mentioned as an inappropriate choice, because her candidacy is perceived as a result of “party interplays and agreements with MRF.”

### **Theme 4 – Municipal Councilors**

There are good municipal councilors, but they are in different lists. In each list, there are both good and bad candidates.

Here introduced was the topic of the team principle and the mixed lists. The opinion is that, in principle, there is no division by ethnicity in the town. In each party’s list (not only MRF), there are different candidates. A tolerant opinion is expressed that “we support a list in which we see more good candidates and more people whom we respect, and not a party.”

The bad thing is that there is no preliminary selection and election of councilor candidates in the parties themselves. The voter faces the problem that, in each list, there are both appropriate and inappropriate candidates.

Moreover, the choice is predestined – the parties work with about 40 names and they determine the order of arrangement.

Readiness was declared for participation in selection and preliminary arrangement of candidates in municipal councilor lists. The opinion is that the respondents would take part in preparation of such lists, regardless of the party represented.