

"Who and how landed the powerful 'Ekonomija' in a poorhouse and whether there is hope to get it back on the old track"

Maxim Gorky, for the literature lovers one of the most powerful writers. For the citizens of Skopje, apart from the literary significance, Maxim Gorky marks one of the three streets leading to the epicenter of Skopje, the Macedonia Square. Instead of the contemporary shops and various windows, until 15 years ago an unusual shop stood there and had dual purpose, trade and resocialization.

- I know that one of my friends, a prisoner, was selling here. In the prison they produced, they brought it here and those who were good prisoners in quotation marks, they were sellers.

- Here, they sold pastry crust. The best in Skopje.

- The store managed to work in its own way. It probably had a turnover because it worked for a long time.

This store on Maxim Gorky was not the only prison store in Skopje. There were 6, half of them in pretty attractive locations. The original stores now do not work at all. Some of them housed completely different entities, while part of them received a different purpose. They were used as party headquarters of the former ruling party VMRO DPMNE.

The fate of the shops was experienced by the entire economic unit called "Ekonomija" (economy). Legal entity with dozens of facilities in and out of Idrizovo Prison, thousands of hectares of land, machinery, goods.

Of those stores owned by the "Ekonomija", one or two are rented, for which we do not receive monthly rent, companies do not want to pay us. They request signed invoices, and we do not have a signatory because our manager is resigning. A property was taken away from us in Kolonija, in total of around 1,500 to 2,000 square meters of office space, with a decision of the Council of Gazi Baba municipality, because we did not have any documents. And we have documents that we are the owners.

The epilogue, the workers of the "Ekonomija" have not received pay for 26 months and prisoners are losing the place where they can prepare for a new life. Only ten years ago, the "Ekonomija" made so much money to even invest in improving the Idrizovo prison conditions.

Economic unit "Ekonomija" not only carried out its primary goal, re-socialization of prisoners, but also production, trade, economic work in a way that many enterprises could feel envy. If someone is successful in its work, who and why would want this unit to stop working, but not only to work, but practically to cease to exist.

The source of the problem is in 2006, when the government decided the prison economies not to be separate entities. Employees would be transferred to prisons but continued to do their job through a special account for their business.

- Employees were transferred to the budget account and worked on behalf and on the account of the management. We received salaries from the budget, and what we produced was given to the prison kitchen. An income account was to be set up where the funds would be paid. The problem was solved in all the prisons, it remained only in ours. For what reasons I do not know.

Unlike other prison economies in the other cities, the authorities failed to find a solution for the richest such organization in the years to come. The most serious attempt was in 2011, when the state could still save something from the "Ekonomija". Then the employees pressed for a decision in the institution responsible for prisons, the Administration for Execution of Sanctions. The administration transferred the ball to the Idrizovo Prison and the prison back to the administration. The "Ekonomija" then addressed the government, which also declared itself incompetent, but provided guidance: employees and prison director to propose a model for work, and the administration to seek approval for employment from the government if necessary. And after the correspondence, there was no solution. The "Ekonomija" continued to deteriorate and decline, and fewer prisoners had a place to prepare for a new life.

Finally, in 2014, the state is pulling a move. Unlike similar economies from other cities that were annexed to the prisons, "Ekonomija" is unique. It becomes a legal entity with a sole proprietor, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, and the employees received salary from the budget. This decision, contrary to the will of the workers, was practically enforced by ex Director of the Administration for Execution of Sanctions, Lidija Gavrilovska. In a phone conversation for 360 program, she told us that it was the best model, that she was not to be blamed for all the problems, but the employees. Gavrilovska's successor, Jovica Stojanovic, only agreed to a telephone conversation. But according to him, the debts that destroyed the "Ekonomija" were the fault of the previous leadership.

A similar position, that the responsibility should be by no means found in the employees, is also held by the union workers from the administration, the judiciary and civil associations.

- All economic units, not only in Idrizovo, but also in Macedonia, have large assets and many tools for work. It was the same with the business unit in Idrizovo Prison which unfortunately due to improper operation became insolvent and put into a situation not to be able to pay salary, which is the fundamental workers' right guaranteed by the constitution, the law and collective agreement. A situation in which workers were not able to receive a salary for 25 months is unacceptable, illogical and shame for the state and the government as the sole owner of these entities which demonstrated such disregard for these employees.

They now wait for a satisfactory solution from the new government.

- We were received by the Deputy Minister of Justice, who has great authority and power to help us.

- The positive outcome is the payment of all salaries and solving the problem with their jobs. If their job, that is, the economic unit where they work is insolvent, there are several ways to solve this. Under the Law on Trade Companies, a status change of that economic unit can be made, that is, to be taken over the other economic unit that are actively working. Employees would be taken to that commercial unit and would receive a regular salary.

The government is the only place from where the last 6 workers of the “Ekonomija” are waiting for a solution. They gave up on everyone else, including the Ombudsman. On two occasions, Ixhet Memeti did not want to hear of their problems. But who used to work to the detriment of the “Ekonomija”, may be answered by the courts, because the union will certainly sue because there were no salaries for the employees.

Waiting for the solution, workers spend the day under the open sky. The executors seized almost everything that was usable. The inmates do not have much benefit either. The space that once served for resocialization is now at best used for sleeping.

- I watched closely the Government's Secretary General, Mr. Rashkovski on “Top Tema”, and he said that there are 650 employees in the government who do not go to work and take a salary. And the employees at our economy unit, which is under the government, go to work and do not receive salaries. 25 months in continuity we have not taken personal income. I do not have any health insurance, we have nothing. The Lord is a witness that my dear friends, comrades and families are helping me.

And this goes on for 26th month