

# Speak Loudly

*Idaver Memedov*<sup>1</sup>

I GREW up in the small city called Veles located in central Macedonia which is populated with a vast majority of Macedonians and a small minority of Roma. In this environment the negative stereotypes and prejudice about Roma were widespread and Roma were often treated as a second class people. From my early childhood my parents taught me to respect Macedonians and not to raise my voice against them because we are a minority and we cannot fight against them.

This lesson helped me a lot in my life because I kept asking myself why I should respect someone who does not respect me and why I should remain quiet when I see that someone humiliates me for being Romani. For these reasons I decided to continue my tertiary education in the Faculty of Law in Skopje. I thought that a legal education would help me to break the negative stereotypes about Roma as less intelligent and not capable of studying and show that one Romani individual can also be a lawyer and can fight against injustice.

Throughout my studies at the Faculty of Law, I became interested in International Law, particularly the human rights dimension. Therefore in the fourth year of my studies I decided to specialise in International Law. At the same time I started working in the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, where I was always involved in the cases related to Roma. During my work I realised that many Roma who were asking for legal aid were often victims of inappropriate governmental policies. For this

reason, I developed my interest in doing an MA in Public Policy which helped me a lot in understanding the policy making process and how it can be impacted by different interest groups.

In this story, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) has a very special place. The first time I heard about the ERRC was eight years ago when I was desperately looking for financial support in order to start my studies at the law faculty. The agony ended when I got information from a friend of mine about the ERRC's scholarship programme. At that point I did not know anything about the ERRC, thus I decided to visit their web page and try to familiarise myself more with the work of the organisation that opened the door for my further educational development.



When I read about the mission and activities of the ERRC, I was very much surprised that someone actually does care about the rights of Roma in Europe and takes action to promote and protect the rights of people who were never perceived worthy to enjoy

any of the rights. From that moment I developed an interest in working for the organisation and had a very strong feeling that one day I would end up working for the ERRC.

My wish was partially realised six years later when I got an opportunity to conduct an internship at the ERRC. This internship exposed me to the practical and theoretical knowledge about the ERRC's effort in fighting against discrimination, prejudices and abuse of the fundamental human rights of Roma, which is also my fight.

<sup>1</sup> *Idaver Memedov joined the ERRC during the summer of 2008 as International Advocacy Officer.*

Today, two years since my internship finished, I am again here ready to use all my knowledge and skills to help in the fight against discrimination and the abuses of the human rights of Roma. I have to admit that many positive changes have happened since

my childhood; at least we can speak loudly about our problems and the ERRC played a crucial role in the creation of these changes. Now our task is to make our voice heard by the governments and to make them move from political commitments to actions.