

Sait Balic was born on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1932, as the son of father Osman, prewar tradesman and secondhand dealer and mother Fatima. He was born in Nis in the family with four more children, two younger brothers, Hasan and Kadrija and two sisters, Nafija and Nazmija.

When he was 12, his father died. He started vocational education to qualify for a fitter. Being a prosperous young man in the country, destroyed by war, he participated in the voluntary work action on building Novi Beograd. There, he earned recognition and knowledge of the society, position of Roma in Yugoslavia of that time. He was an outstanding athlete and footballer. He became very active in Roma Cultural and Artistic Society KUD "Ibo Ademovic" in Nis. He gathered his generation of prosperous Roma and started his mission of "Roma emancipation". On his own example of educated, politically and socially active Roma he attracted the others, focused on the idea of human rights, education, preserving the culture and awakening of the national conscience of Roma in Yugoslavia.

The mission and era of Sait Balic started in 1965. It lasts even nowadays. It is difficult to say and use the term "father of the nation". Not much time has passed since his death. However, we can freely say that Sait Balic is the first reformer in terms of awakening of the national conscience of Roma in Yugoslavia. and even in the world.

There is no so significant person or individual, and even institution that contributed to the history of Roma more than Sait Balic. The personality and deed of Sait Balic is a starting point of the new history of Roma..

In the beginning of 1970s, on the territory of former Yugoslavia he awakened the national conscience among Roma and established around 40 Roma associations in the towns of Yugoslavia. The task and goal of these, so called, cultural and artistic associations was the struggle for human rights, national identity, culture and education and improvement of the social position of Roma.

Many classes were opened for adults basic education. In that way, for only one year more that 200 adult Roma became literate.

He initiated the action of establishing preparation classes for children about to start elementary school.

He propagated the need of children going to elementary schools. It was "door to door" action. He organized first professional investigation of Roma schooling problem. He initiated actions for improvement of Roma living conditions in their settlements all over Serbia. He organized first internal census of Roma in Serbia and Yugoslavia which proved much greater number of this national group.

He initiated scientific research on health status of children and women in Roma settlements. (Vaccination of children).

He directed and intensified the work of Social Welfare Services in local communities. In 1974 he initiated and organized a unique cultural manifestation of Roma that lasts 26 years, "Roma of Serbia Cultural Achievements Event". This manifestation has gathered around 17000 participants up to date.

He initiated the issue of the national status of Roma in constitutions of Serbia and Yugoslavia.

He opened the first Roma cooperative "Ponos" as a professional organization of Roma tradesmen. He opened and managed the first kindergarten for Roma children.

On the international scene, the problems were also complex and difficult. In most of East-European countries there were no serious activities of Roma, as a nation during these 1970s. It may be freely said that first international contacts of the Roma of East-European countries were taking place in Sait Balic's modest appartement, by the end of 1970s. Then, the weak International Roma Organization acquired new enthusiasm and conception by Yugoslavia joining it and becoming its active member. (Against "Getho").

By activism and constant hard work of Sait Balic, eight more new countries became the members of RIJ. In the Third Congress of RIJ, Sait Balic was unanimously elected the President of the Roma World Organization (RIJ).

Within two mandates he established a new concept of RIJ work and program of activities. This organization was admitted to OUN and got the status of NGO in Organization of United Nations.

New work programs covered the language standardization, cultural exchange, war reparation, protection of human rights (collective and individual), EU and European Council priorities.

For his immeasurable work and results he received many awards and acknowledgements. The most significant of these are as follows:

- Vuk's award (Vukova nagrada) – golden letter,
- Golden badge – Cultural and Educational Community of Serbia,
- Award “May 1<sup>st</sup>” (Prvomajska nagrada) of the City of Nis,
- October Award (Oktobarska nagrada) of the City of Nis,
- Medal of merit (Orden zasluge za narod) with golden rim.

Reformer and "Baro Rom" Sait Balic died on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1998 in Nis and was buried in the Roma cemetery in Nis.