



What happened in “Ti Izbirash”

With the approach of the Election Day – October 26th – the National Voter Education and GOTV Campaign “*Ti Izbirash*” enters its most dynamic phase. The local election campaign is the crucible that will shape the local agenda of our municipalities, and voters have the important role of deciding who will set that agenda. The civic organizations partnering in the campaign are focusing their efforts to create links between their grass-roots community work and the political decision-making process. They engage candidates in discussing local priorities. One of the key results of this work is to give their fellow-citizens important reasons to vote.

Voter attitudes are the biggest challenge for the *Ti Izbirash* campaign. The most important factor that needs to be considered is a low level of voter engagement with the political process, and in particular the local elections. In order to address this problem, civic organizations first identified public attitudes and priorities of targeted voter groups. This allowed them to focus their efforts on voters who are considering voting. At the same time, local campaigns mobilize public support through visible events and voter contacts. Apart from persuading voters how important it is for their voice to be heard, equal attention is given to remind them to vote on October 26. This work will become increasingly intensive as Election Day approaches reaching its peak on the 26th, with a big push to encourage people to vote for the candidate of their choice.

Volunteers are at the heart of the *Ti Izbirash* campaign, as well as every democratic process. They not only help to get in direct contact with a significant number of Bulgarian voters, but with their enthusiasm they also turn the message for increased turnout into a Bulgarian success story. We want to salute the nearly 700 Bulgarians who already wear the *Ti Izbirash* volunteer hats.

Local campaigns to encourage local election turnout are being conducted in 30 communities throughout the country. But, like what often happens in countries around the world, these efforts are having an effect beyond the local level and are drawing upon a broad spectrum of participants and allies with different perspectives and resources but with common vision for citizen participation.

Sevdalina Voynova
Program Director, NDI

“Ti izbirash”: facts and figures

- 45 local CSOs
- 600 volunteers
- 50,000 direct contacts
- 1 national TV spot – bTV and 1 national radio spot – “Horizon” Program of the National Radio
- 3 local TV spots, 4 local radio spots
- Over 50,000 copies of local print materials
- DOOR-TO-DOOR canvassing in 16 communities
- PHONE BANKS in 8 communities
- Information centers (tabling) in 8 communities
- 2 internet forums
- 5 town hall meetings
- 17 candidate debates
- Voter education in 15 high schools
- 7 concerts
- 22 press conferences

From the press

Television spots with questions from voters to candidates for mayor will be broadcast as an element of the national campaign Ti Izbirash, which was launched today. That was announced by the spokesperson of the campaign, Dimitar Sotirov. The campaign is initiated by 45 local non-governmental institutions, 8 national civic networks and is conducted with the media support of BTV and the Bulgarian National Radio.

In the 30-second motivation spots voters play the role of employers and interview the candidates for mayors asking questions like: “What salary do you expect us to pay you?”, “Why did you decide to run?”, “What day-care does your child attend?”, “Do you have a dog?”

The field and media campaign is financed by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). “For the first time campaign participants are networks that represent the youth, roma and people with disabilities,” explained Sotirov. The objective of the campaign is to inform the citizens what rights and what choices they have, and to teach them how to exercise civic control over the elected mayors and councilors after the vote on October 26th.

The national campaign will use different methods to encourage voter turnout – direct contact with voters, phone calls, print materials. Approximately 600 volunteers will work to achieve the objectives of the campaign.

www.vsekiden.com



National Press Conference: 24 September 2003



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VOLUNTEERS

Women Alliance for Development (WAD), Soifa

A volunteer training took place on 26th September 2003 in the office of WAD Foundation. The volunteers will take part in the door-to-door campaign in Students' Town in Sofia. Eleven students and 2 representatives of Equal Opportunity Network organizations took part in the training. According to the trainees, the experience they gained from campaigns such as "Ti Izbirash" will be extremely important and useful for the future activities of their organizations.



Participants in the volunteer training of WAD Foundation.

The volunteers were given guidelines to which to adhere when they conducted surveys on people's attitudes and issues, as well as instructions on how to establish direct contact with students and conduct door-to-door canvassing without jeopardizing their personal safety.

A message for the local campaign in Students' Town was developed at the training through brainstorming. WAD's team had initially chosen "I know what I am voting for, what about you?" as a working message which turned out to be not efficient enough. The message directed to young students-mothers was tested with representatives of the target group and after heated discussions it was modified to "Go vote, it depends on you!"

At the end of the seminar there was a role-play exercise to train volunteers how to deal with different types of reactions and attitudes they could expect from friendly, hostile, nervous, or curious potential voters. The role-play turned out to be a team-building experience for the pool of volunteers. The overall impression of the participants was that in addition to being responsible, door-to-door campaigning could be fun as well.

Judging from the results of the first wave of the campaign, the training can be evaluated as extremely useful. After a period of only 4 days, direct contact was established with more than 540 students. The volunteers had the opportunity to ask people whether they plan to vote and what they expect from the new local government, as well as to convey the message of how important it is for their voices to be heard through the vote.

Elitsa Sokolova

United Nations Association of Bulgaria, Sofia

ONE DAY IN STUDENTS' TOWN

As a volunteer in the "I also live in this town" Campaign which aims at increasing voter turnout among students, I am doing door-to-door campaigning in the dormitories in Students' Town. When I started doing this I knew that I was taking on great responsibility and my expectations were that the people we were going to meet would welcome us-- if not with understanding, at least with a smile.

Now I can proudly say that all the people we met with welcomed us with both understanding and a smile. Once they saw the green cylinder saying "TI IZBIRASH" and once they heard our detailed explanations, they all seemed to agree that it was a worthy cause. Some of the people even expressed their readiness to participate in the campaign with the sole purpose of getting one of the hats as a trophy.

What is more, the students we met with showed great interest in the voter education parties organized at THE MASQUE Club, especially after they were told that there was no entrance fee and that the bands invited to participate were among their favorites.

I talked to students who were highly motivated to vote, but who did not have proper information about the registration procedure. In such cases I would start explaining on the spot what the procedure was, and I was really pleased that there were people who thought about their future. Some of the people I met expressed the opinion that elections and voting were "sheer nonsense" and that they did not want to participate in it.

I agree that most of the young people in Bulgaria do not believe that they can prosper in Bulgaria. But I am also convinced that young Bulgarians are very talented and determined to achieve success in many different spheres of life. So, if we want to take part in the process of building our own future and the future of our country – this is our chance to contribute to the writing of the 21st century history.

I feel like the little match-seller from the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen we have all read... I want to give people some warmth and to inspire their hope that tomorrow will be better than today. I don't think that this flame will die down, and kindling it preserves ourselves as personalities in a civil society.

Vassilena Vizeva

IKAR Association, Haskovo



The volunteers of IKAR Association in the streets of Hskovo

Labor Confederation PODKREPA, Sofia

The seminar for PODKREPA activists took place from 2 to 4 November, 2003 in the town of Pravets. About 30



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representatives of the Youth Union, PODKREPA, from various professional structures of the confederation on the territory of Sofia, as well as first-time voters from several high schools in the capital, participated in the training.



Participants on the training for coordinators for "Ti Izbirash" Campaign.

The following topics were discussed at the seminar: the Law on Local Government; the functions of the local government; the Law on Local Elections; communication skills; volunteer recruitment; canvassing techniques, interviewing.

At the end of the seminar the participants discussed suitable canvassing sites in Sofia. With a view to the target group (first-time voters), the main canvassing activities will be done by both coordinators and volunteers, and carried out in and around high schools. The canvassing materials will be distributed in METRO and BILLA supermarkets, as well as in public transportation vehicles, resident districts (Liulin, Drizhba, Lagera, Pavlovo, Slatina, Goe Milev), and also in some tax directorates.

Georgi Ivanov

BAFE Pleven

Interactive presentations in civic education were given to 600 first-time voters in 11 high schools in Pleven. A specially designed Ti Izbirash educational video film, developed by BAFE Plevan campaign volunteers, was shown to the students. The video film aims at acquainting the audience with the Bulgarian election procedures, as well as with the types of electoral systems functioning in Bulgaria and all over the world. The students were acquainted with their rights as voters and the choices they have. They also had the opportunity to see real ballots for the first time.

Proicho Karaivanov



High school students – first time voters at the interactive presentation on civic education. .

Informal Group of Young people living on the territory of Sevlievo Municipality

The campaign "You are Young. Choose Your Future!" for increasing voter turnout among young people living on the

territory of Sevlievo Municipality was launched with a press conference on 25 September, 2003.



The Informal Group of Young People living in Sevlievo Municipality presents to local media the objectives of "Ti Izbirash" Campaign on both national and local level.

The press conference, which was given by representatives of the local team and NDI's regional coordinator for North Bulgaria, was attended by six local media. The overall concept behind the National "Ti Izbirash" Campaign was presented, as well as the objectives of the project on the territory of Sevlievo.

The journalists were mostly interested in the difficulties the local team faced in recruiting volunteers, as well as in the activities envisaged on Election Day. Valentina Nedelcheva, project coordinator in Sevelivo, explained that a sufficient number of volunteers had been recruited already and that the campaign activities on both national and local level had been previously negotiated with the Central Electoral Commission and the District Electoral Commission.

The press conference received same-day coverage as a headline in the evening News Bloc by the two local cable TV channels. The same information was broadcast by Gabrovo Cable TV Channel, which covers the events being held on a district level. Three days later the press conference was covered by two local newspapers "Rossitsa" and "Razvitie".

Valentina Nedelcheva



Ti Izbirash volunteers in Kazanlak

Association of Parents of Children with Cerebral Paralysis, Varna

Parents, young people, and people with disabilities from Varna initiated the signing of a Memorandum. The Memorandum is a



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publicly announced document recognized by the major candidates for mayor and municipal councilors --as well as by some of the local CSOs-- and distributed among the citizens of Varna. The Memorandum aims at encouraging people to vote and convincing them that by voting they are supporting the efforts of children and young people with disabilities to live a worthy and "normal" social life.

Sixty-seven parents of children with disabilities took part in the development of the document. They conducted 6 meetings to draft the final version of the text and to discuss thoroughly every single detail. The young people from the Daily Center for people with disabilities were also invited to participate in the process of developing the Memorandum.

Ten individual meetings with candidates for mayor were carried out. They had the purpose of arriving at a clear picture of what was the situation with the social sector in Varna. Possible future changes as well as possible solutions to the most pressing problems of people with disabilities were discussed at those meetings.

The dialogue focused on the specific problems of people with disabilities. Each paragraph of the Memorandum was illustrated and supported by a concrete social practice example in order to prevent the notorious practice of making empty promises that are never kept.

All invited people and organizations signed the Memorandum that consisted of two parts: general principles and concrete commitments on the part of the candidates. The major objectives of the Memorandum are:

- change social policy in the direction of developing services for independent life in the community through improving social services
- change public attitudes towards people with disabilities
- publicizing and scaling up best practices of the organizations of the disabled

The whole text of the Memorandum, together with the signatures of the candidates for mayor, is printed on a leaflet which will be distributed among the citizens of Varna in the week before the election.

Ekaterina Georgieva

Chitalishte LIK, Pleven

Young volunteers of Chitalishte LIK Pleven (participating in "Ti Izbirash") started a survey on the attitudes of their peers: first-time voters for the local elections. Four-hundred and two boys and girls aged 18 will be reached through the campaign. The fourteen volunteers will talk to those young people on the phone and special attention will be given to the undecided students, as well as to those who need more information on the voting procedure.

A second wave of the phone banking will be conducted a week later when undecided young voters will be contacted again. In this way the volunteers can find out to what extent they have motivated the young people to vote.

The "Ti Izbirash" Campaign has been carried out in 29 towns in the country and involves 50 Bulgarian CSOs. This is the third "Ti Izbirash" Campaign. The other two took place ahead of the last parliamentary and presidential elections respectively. "Ti Izbirash" is a non-partisan campaign that aims at informing voters and increasing voter turnout on Election Day.

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In support of "Ti Izbirash"

"In a series of regional and national representative surveys on socio-political topics Alpha Research had the opportunity to take account of a disturbing contradiction.

On the one hand, our surveys register a low level of readiness for participation in the upcoming local elections – both on the national and on the regional level. On the other hand, the polls, group discussions, and individual interviews we conducted with citizens show that people think that the institutions of the local government are extremely important for the future development of the communities they live in.

Therefore Alpha Research is absolutely convinced of the need of a GOTV campaign in advance of the local elections and salutes "Ti Izbirash".

*Stanislav Stoyanov
Executive Director, Alpha Research*



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