



**What happened in “Ti Izbirash”**

One more week full of events and activities for “Ti Izbirash” National Voter Education and GOTV Campaign has passed. It could be called “the week of public forums” because 10 round tables, candidate debates, and town hall meetings have been held the last seven days, at which specific local issues were raised for discussion. The civic organizations partnering on the campaign focused their efforts on making these forums more than a stage for empty promises; instead, they sought focused, concrete commitments from the candidates for mayor and municipal councilors.

In the last days before the Local Elections, a second wave of direct contacts was carried out focusing on undecided voters. Methods of voter contact included telephone banking, door-to-door canvassing, direct mail, and self-addressed post cards.

The Campaign is enjoying extensive coverage both on the national and on the local level. A number of interviews and pieces of reporting have been broadcast on the national TV channels bTV and MSAT, as well as on the Bulgarian National Radio. In addition, local electronic- and print- media showed great interest in covering the activities of the civic organizations partnering in the campaign. Many journalists, TV hosts, and public figures gave their support to the campaign and its message by putting on green cylinder hats that read “TI IZBIRASH”.

In the third issue of “Ti Izbirash” Newsletter, we provided the civic organizations with the opportunity to share what they have achieved throughout the campaign as well as what lessons they have learned.

**NDI Bulgaria**



*Print materials produced by the civic organizations partnering in Ti Izbirash Campaign*

**“Vassil Levski” Human Rights Center, Karlovo**

On 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2003 five candidates for mayor in the Municipality of Karlovo took part in a debate “Elections 2003 – a vote accessible to everyone”. The problems of people with disabilities, young people, and the Roma community were discussed at the debate. The forum was organized by Vassil Levski Human Rights Center, Dialogue- today newspaper and Sky TV Channel.

Dimitar Katsev (Bulgarian Social Democracy), Toshko Stoev (National Movement Simeon II), Branimir Botev (IMRO), and the independent candidates Bozhidar Leonov and Ilija Pirinchev, presented their platforms and answered questions asked by representatives of the three target groups.



*Participants in the debate “Elections 2003 – a vote accessible to everyone”, which was held in Karlovo*

Branimir Botev impressed all participants by presenting approved projects for opening a Youth Center, creating new jobs, and building a canteen for the poor. Bozhidar Leonov officially announced that as a rector of Karlovo College he would work in the direction of making admissions accessible to people with disabilities and the representatives of minority groups. Dimitar Katsev said that he had plans to restore the Daycare Center for people with disabilities. Ilija Pirinchev didn’t make any promises.

From a total number of 14 candidates for mayor in the Municipality of Karlovo, 4 submitted written apologies that they wouldn’t be able to participate in the debate because of previous commitments.

**DIALOGUE Today, Regional Daily  
Karlovo-Sopot**



## VOTER EDUCATION AND GOTV PROGRAM

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2003

### Foundation National Alliance for Volunteer Action, Plovdiv

"Be different, be yourself, go vote!" is the message of the local campaign carried out by National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA). The organization has recruited 70 young volunteers to participate in the campaign, which aims at increasing voter turnout among first-time voters in Plovdiv.



NAVA organized two volunteer trainings during which the volunteers were trained how to conduct two of the main activities of the local campaign: door-to-door canvassing and tabling.

Teams of trained volunteers conducted interviews with first-time voters from several high schools in Plovdiv. In most of the cases conversations turned into lively discussions. Among the questions students most often asked were: "What would I achieve if I vote?", "Who should I vote for provided that I don't like any of the candidates?", "Why shall I vote, if nothing gets better?".

It's hard to change the attitudes of those who are convinced that participating in the election process is pointless. The volunteers tried to strike up a conversation with their peers by asking questions like: "What arguments do you have in favor of your decision not to vote?", "Please give examples of alternative ways through which you can participate in the decision-making process on the level of local government!", "Do you know what will happen to your potential vote, if you don't cast a ballot?" Although some of the young people were very skeptical, but there were some very enthusiastic people as well. The interviews with the people belonging to the second group were naturally easier. The young people were given information how to vote and what choices they have.

The volunteers of NAVA distributed more than 7000 copies of information brochures in 16 high schools in Plovdiv and established direct or indirect contacts with about 5000 high school students.

Information centers were opened in key locations in Plovdiv at which citizens could get more information about the voting procedure. Two of these centers work with students from the six schools of higher education in Plovdiv, among whom there were first-time voters.

For the three days before the elections, Plovdiv will wake up with color posters posted up all over the city saying, "Be different!", "Be yourself!", "Go vote!" and indicating the date of the Local Elections: 26<sup>th</sup> October. The campaign message aims to challenge young people and all other citizens to vote. We hope that in the end our efforts will achieve the desired results: the young people of Plovdiv will realize that it is important for their voice to be heard and that they have to vote for their future.

**Daniela Tepavicharova**

*"The most interesting thing for us this year was the volunteer training under "Ti Izbirash" Campaign. We had the chance to work with young volunteers and to strengthen the volunteer network. We are very happy that there are young people enthusiastic about their own future and about the future of Bulgaria."*

*Yordanka Germanovaa  
PODKREPA, Dupnitsa*

### Interethnic Partnership Association, Varna

On 20 October 2003, a meeting was held between the candidates for mayors in Varna and the citizens of Asparuhovo Residential District. All candidates who attended the meeting presented their platform and shared their views on the future development of the Residential District.

In the course of the meeting volunteers were gathering "ballots" on which citizens participating in the debate have written some of the most pressing problems the community faces in special urns. After the "ballots" were counted, it turned out that the poor condition of the road system, the dirty streets, the streetlights, as well as the stray dogs were among the most pressing problems of Asparuhovo.

In the evening there was a cocktail party at which people ate from a cake with the logo of the National "Ti Izbirash" Campaign.

**Gergana Toncheva**



## VOTER EDUCATION AND GOTV PROGRAM

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2003

### PROXEN Women's Union, Kazanlak

On October 14, 2003, the Youth group of the Women's Union, *Proxen-Kazanlak*, held a roundtable. 13 youth organizations, 6 candidates for mayor and local media were invited to participate. The main objective was to conduct an open dialogue between candidates for mayor of the Kazanlak municipality, the city youth, and its civic organizations.



Participants in the round table organized by PROXEN - Kazanlak

The forum was attended by a representative of UDF caucus and the independent candidates Donchev, Piskova, and Chichekov.

Every participant in the round table received information materials: *Ti Izbirash* leaflets and a questionnaire to local candidates focusing on local youth issues in Kazanlak. The questionnaire was designed based on a survey with 950 young respondents and 35 working meetings of the 13 organizations-members of the Union of Youth Organizations in Kazanlak.

Among the topics discussed were education, unemployment, fulfilling spare-time, and youth violence. The demands and expectations of the young people were presented first, and afterwards that the candidates had the chance to express their position.

Special attention was given to the problems of the Roma youth in the city. All candidates agreed that efforts need to be made leading to Roma integration at all levels, as well as offering them different opportunities for development.

The event stirred the interest of both participants and media.

The roundtable was held as a follow-up to the spectacular rally of young people and youth organizations on October 14, in which more than 110 people marched along the main street of the city and provoked the interest of the general public. The high-visibility event aimed to mobilize youth and demonstrate their strength. The march --in which more than 110 young people participated-- was led by the Women's Rocker Club "Tender Roses" and the Men's Rocker Club "Black Roses". The most attractive element of the rally was the rocker motorbikes covered by campaign stickers.

The rally culminated at the Rozarium Park where it grew into a rock-the-vote concert. The event collected around 250 young people who enjoyed the performance of local bands, sketches with actors from the actors' club associated with the Lyubomir Kabakchiev Theater, and folk songs presented by Kazanlak high school students with national recognition. The concert ended with a discotheque for the youth.

Miroslava Chantova

### The Volunteers of "Ti Izbirash"



Volunteers of PODKREPA, Vratsa



Volunteers of Independent Living ROMA - Lom



## VOTER EDUCATION AND GOTV PROGRAM

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2003

### "Ti Izbirash" in the press

On 12 October – the Day of Bulgarian Municipality, a football competition gathered together candidates for mayors at Karlovo Stadium.

Football teams of candidates for mayors and municipal councilors supported by NMS, the Democratic Left, UDF, IMRO and a number of other parties responded to the initiative of Eng. Dimitar Katsev carried out under the auspices of "Vassil Levski" Human Rights Center – Karlovo, and took part in the football competition entitled "Let's revive Karlovo football".

*DIALOGUE Today, Regional Daily,  
Karlovo-Sopot*

The project for increasing citizen participation among young people who live in Silistra is directed to first-time voters. The Project envisages the establishment of a regional-youth lobby which will carry out election campaign for increasing future politicians' interest in and commitment to the problems of the young people in the region. According to representative of the youth organization partnering in "Ti Izbirash" young people have to realize that:

- quality local government can be achieved only by means of active citizen participation;
- participation in local government will broaden the foundations of democracy and will contribute the solution of regional problems;
- the institutions should work for the needs of the voters guaranteeing opportunities for improving their abilities and competencies;
- only through exercising their right to vote, they can stand up for their positions;

The message of the local campaign in Silistra is "The Future is Yours – express your demands!"

*USPEH Daily  
Silistra*

problems of their community; 3) giving 20 Roma women activists from Pernik the opportunity to apply in practice the theoretical background they have received under previous projects, and to build on it practical community organizing skills;



*Participants in the candidate debate on the problems of the Roma community in Pernik*

The debate was attended by 200 representatives of the Roma community and by 11 candidates for mayor from the main political parties. The interest in the event, the engagement of the audience, and the responsiveness of the candidates exceeded the expectations of the organizers.

The project aimed at educating not only the Roma people but also local politicians on how to be less emotional, speak less, take on greater responsibility, show professional attitude to politics, and apply into practice new knowledge and skills enhancing the new political culture. This debate was the first visible step in that direction. It also proved to be a good practice that can be successfully applied in the future.

**Bistra Boneva**

### Gender Project for Bulgaria Foundation"

On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2003 the team working on "Ti Izbirash" Project organized a candidate forum on the problems of the Roma community in the city of Pernik. The debate was attended by candidates for mayor from different political parties. **This was the first debate of its kind ever in Pernik. Therefore it was a challenge not only for the Roma community and its leaders, but also for the team who organized it.**

The project aimed to: 1) helping the Roma people from Pernik make an informed choice for a mayor and municipal councilors through informing them on the role of local government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens; 2) improving the skills of the Roma people in Pernik for identifying and formulating the specific



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