

2003 Local elections Update

Bulgarian citizens went to the polls today to elect their local government for the term October 2003 – October 2007. Local elections combine two electoral systems: majoritarian for a mayor and proportional for representatives in the municipal councils which consist of 11 to 61 elected people depending on the population of the city. The electorate must vote for an entire party council list as one; there is no mechanism to express preference for individual candidates. Mayors are elected if they support from more than 50% of the registered voters. If that threshold is not passed by anyone, the two candidates that received the biggest shares of votes go to a second round the following Sunday. There is no threshold for the election of councilors, nor in the second mayoral round.



Sample council ballots displayed outside every polling station

The 2003 local elections mark an unprecedented number of local candidates and council lists. For example in Sofia voters had to choose between 39 candidates for mayor and 68 council lists. Therefore for the first time since 1989 we could expect “colorful” local government with representatives of multiple political formations.

Turnout appears to have been solid. Voting proceeded smoothly, only a few minor problems were observed by party poll watchers. Since one envelope is given to each voter in which to place one party council ballot and one mayoral ballot the potential for fraud is minimal. If an envelope contains ballots for more than one list or candidate, the ballot is invalidated.

Election Day marked the peak of efforts in the Ti Izbirash communities with a big push to encourage people to vote for the candidate of their choice and offer transportation and assistance to voters with disabilities.

Sevdalina Voynova

Independent Living- -Roma, Lom

NDI team went to Lom, a town situated 192 kilometers northwest of Sofia on the banks of the Danube River, to report on the Election Day activities carried out by Independent Living – ROMA – one of the civic organizations partnering in the *Ti Izbirash* Campaign – in an effort to increase voter turnout.

NDI local staff visited a school building hosting 5 polling stations in the biggest Roma residential district in Lom. Polling started at 7 a.m. in all five polling stations and the chairperson of one of the Section Election Commissions was proud to say that 4 voters turned out in the polling station one minute after the beginning of the Election Day was announced. As of 10 a.m., out of 556 registered voters, 70 have cast their vote. The building of the school was crowded with people from all ages and there were many impatient voters queuing in front of the polling stations. The final turnout numbers were expected to be around 50% by the end of Election Day. The people NDI representatives talked with pointed out that usually election activity was very high till 2 pm when it started to decrease gradually.

Poll observers of all political parties participating in the tickets for municipal councilors were present in the polling stations. By that time of the day polling was going smoothly, and there were no irregularities reported which had undermined the integrity of the voting process.



Ti Izbirash volunteers in Lom distributing balloons to people who have already cast their vote



## VOTER EDUCATION AND GOTV PROGRAM

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Coloring the school yard with the green cylinders, the 30 *Ti Izbirash* volunteers in Lom were distributing green balloons “*I already cast my vote*” to those who had already exercised their right to vote. In addition, a special minivan with a driver was providing transportation for people with disabilities. As of 10:30 am 20 out of 70 people with disabilities who had previously asked for assistance were transported to the polling stations.

Voters in Lom have to choose among 11 rivals competing for the mayoral seat and go through 26 tickets for municipal councilors. The NMS and BSP nominees, the major actors in the local elections, are expected to go for a second round.

NDI representatives talked to more than 30 *Ti Izbirash* volunteers most of whom aged between 17-19. When asked what motivated them to take part in the GOTV Campaign they answered with a smile that they wanted to show the future local government that the young people care about what was going on in their hometown.

*“You have to show that you are concerned about the problems of your town. Only then you can hold candidates accountable for what they have promised once they get elected”.*

*Ti Izbirash Volunteer*

**Lika Pishtalova**

*Informal Group of Young People on the territory of Sevlievo Municipality*

Sevlievo is a small town situated in the center of Bulgaria, famous for its rapid economic development and low level of unemployment. Over the last two months it became known as one of the most active *Ti Izbirash* communities due to an informal group “*Youth Sevlievo*”. Their local voter education and GOTV campaign had engaged numerous volunteers, whose green hats became familiar to almost every citizen. The youth group applied different methods of voter contact: survey of attitudes and issues, an all-candidate forum with youth focus and audience, literature development and distribution, youth discos attended by the candidates as well. Throughout their efforts the group had the media support of the local Sevlievo press and won the sympathy of the older population.

Today *Ti Izbirash* volunteers walked the street of the city to encourage their peers to exercise their right to vote and offer information and assistance if needed. The peak activity hours were 10 AM to 12

AM and 4 PM to 6 PM – regularly the time of highest turnout. As part of their efforts volunteers conducted a survey in front of the polls to determine what had motivated people to vote and if they were aware of the *Ti Izbirash* campaign. Most voters responded with pleasure, expressed their appreciation of the campaign on both local and national and congratulated the volunteers on their commitment and hard work for the development of their home town.

In the morning when the volunteers met for Election Day instructions Valja Nedelcheva, project coordinator, surprised the young activists with nice campaign pens with a sign “*Volunteer*”.



*Ti Izbirash volunteers in Sevlievo conduct an exit survey*

All members and volunteers of “*Youth Sevlievo*” evaluate their efforts as very positive and effective and believe they have achieved good results in encouraging the young people in Sevlievo to cast a ballot and thus participate in the decision-making process in their community.

**Teodora Runtova**

*Association of Parents of Children with Cerebral Paralysis, Varna*

The Association of Parents of Children with Cerebral Paralysis provided assistance to people with disabilities to exercise their right to vote in municipal elections.

The organization advertised a telephone line at which a total of 50 people with disabilities submitted transportation requests during the week before the elections. As of 1 p.m. on Election Day another 23 people with disabilities approached the organization with assistance requests.

Three specialized minivans and four cars were rented to take the voters with disabilities to the polls and back. The transportation effort aimed at increasing turnout among disabled voters followed a specially planned schedule.



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One of the elderly women who was accompanied by Ti Izbirash volunteers was impressed by their hats and exclaimed that the hosts of bTV morning show wear the same green cylinders. The volunteer action was covered by Varna local TV MSAT. When asked why they cast their vote, the volunteers answered that they are not indifferent to the problems of their city.



*Ti Izbirash volunteers providing assistance to voters with disabilities*

On Election Day the volunteers of *Ti Izbirash* campaign were also distributing post cards saying "Thank you for exercising your right to vote".

Interethnic Partnership Association also provided assistance to people with disabilities registered in four polling stations in Asparuhovo Residential District in Varna. The volunteers of *Ti Izbirash* Campaign gave to all voters who had already exercised their right to vote a sticker with the words "I made my choice, what about you". As of 10:30a.m. on Election Day 16 people with disabilities had submitted transportation requests.

**Gergana Toncheva**

### *Human Rights Center, Karlovo*

On Election Day the Human Rights Center in Karlovo focused its efforts to provide voters with disabilities with free access to the polls. This is the main obstacle to overcome in order to raise the turnout of people with disabilities. The Center advertised a telephone line for transportation requests. They had provided a minivan with appropriate equipment and a driver to take voters from their homes to the polls and back. Trained assistants are available at the center to accompany voters with disabilities in the booths. The organization additionally has poll watchers observing and reporting the accessibility of the polling stations in the town.

The Human Rights Center volunteers had prepared a list of 423 people with disabilities who had been contacted directly through other campaign activities and who might be expected with transportation and assistance requests. One of them was Kolyo, who at the age of 55 was able to exercise his right to vote for the first time without pleading for help to neighbors and relatives.

Of all polling stations in Karlovo only one is made accessible to people in wheelchairs, and the turnout in it seems to be higher than in the neighboring ones.

**Miroslava Chantova**

### *Preliminary Election Results*

#### *Voter Turnout Nationwide*

**32, 9 % (according to data provided by the Central Election Commission at 10 PM)**

**33% BSP**

**20% UDF**

**10% NMS**

**10% MRF**

**5, 5% Free Democrats Union**

**3, 5% Gergiovdin**

### *"Ti Izbirash" District Cities*

**Community Name: BLAGOEVGRAD**

**Turnout: 29, 9%**

**Mayoral Race: Lazar Prichkapov BSP- 37%**

**Radoslav Taskov UDF - 17%**

**Community Name: HASKOVO**

**Turnout: 28,6 %**

**Mayoral Race: Georgi Ivanov –independent 37%**

**Zlatka Islamova, BSP 12 %**

**Iuzhel Atila, MRF 12%**

**Stratimir Dimitrov, UDF 12 %**

**Community Name: KIUSTENDIL**

**Turnout: 30, 8%**

**Mayoral Race: Kiril Alexov BSP – 38,8 %**

**Liudmil Stoyanov NMS, Gergiovdin–**

**22 , 6%**



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**Community Name: PERNIK**  
**Turnout: 35, 3%**  
**Mayoral Race: Simeon Vassilev BSP – 33, 18%**  
**Antoaneta Georgieva UDF - 25, 40 %**

**Community Name: SOFIA**  
**Turnout: 31, 5%**  
**Mayoral Race: Stefan Sofianski 31%**  
**Stoyan Alexandrov 27%**  
**Nadezhda Mihailova 24 %**

**Community Name: PLEVEN**  
**Turnout: 18 %**  
**Mayoral Race: Naiden Zelenogorski UDF – 46, 8%**  
**Hristofor Dochev BSP – 32, 5%**

**Community Name: VARNA**  
**Turnout: 35, 6%**  
**Mayoral Race: Kiril Iordanov BSP – 59 %**

**Community Name: PLOVDIV**  
**Turnout: 28 %**  
**Mayoral Race: Ivan Chomakov UDF – 34%**  
**Zahari Georgiev BSP – 30 %**

**Community Name: VRATSA**  
**Turnout: 43, 3%**  
**Mayoral Race: Roumen Stomaniarski, BSP**  
**Plamen Petkov, UDF**

**Community Name: RAZGRAD**  
**Turnout: 34 %**  
**Mayoral Race: Venelin Uzunov BSP – 59, 7%**

**Community Name: SILISTRA**  
**Turnout: 52, 6 %**  
**Mayoral Race: Ivo Andonov, NMS, MRF – 62 %**



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