



NDI Brings Together Bulgarian President and Top Officials to Address Roma Education

Eleven Recommendations Forwarded to Parliament

Under the patronage of the President of Bulgaria, Mr. Georgi Parvanov, NDI conducted a National Forum on Roma Education on May 13, 2005 in Sofia. The event culminated not only in President Parvanov's words of unabashed support, but also in a set of 11 recommendations that the participants will distribute to parliament, relevant ministries, local governments and the media. The recommendations include: the establishment of a body to coordinate the government's work on Roma education; the creation of a special department within the Ministry of Education for Roma education; the development of a mechanism to share best practices among municipalities; and the creation of Romani working groups at the municipal level to analyze education in their communities and suggest solutions.



President Parvanov addresses the Forum.

The forum was the first public event to bring together such a broad range of senior Bulgarian governmental and political leaders to discuss the thorny issues surrounding Roma education. In addition to the President, the forum's 80 participants—more than 40 percent of them Roma—included Chairperson of the National Council on Ethnic and Democratic Issues Filiz Hysmenova, Deputy Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Education Tatyana Kalkanova, Chairperson of the newly appointed National Committee for Protection Against Discrimination Kemal Eyup, Roma Member of Parliament Toma Tomov, Executive Director of the National Association of Municipalities Ginka Chavdarova, and mayors, local councilors and NGO representatives from throughout Bulgaria.

“As head of state, I guarantee that within my constitutional prerogatives I am ready to cooperate in establishing appropriate forms of coordination. Be sure that in my person you have a loyal supporter.”
--President Parvanov

The presence of local government representatives at the forum was particularly significant. While 95 percent of Bulgarian schools are municipally administered, this was the first time that local government representatives were invited to a national forum to discuss education.

The Forum was first conceived during a November 2004 meeting between President Parvanov and 20 participants in NDI's Roma Political Skills Building Program. The Forum's participants agreed to hold a follow-up event on the recommendations in September 2006 to monitor the implementation of the recommendations.

In April 2004, NDI began working in Slovakia and Bulgaria to increase the participation of Roma in electoral politics and representative government. The program consists of three main components: a six-month leadership series to develop the political skills of 20 up-and-coming Roma party activists in participating countries; public opinion research on Roma political attitudes and priorities, which will be used to inform Roma policy and encourage political outreach to Roma; and a regional academy in the summer of 2005 to unite Roma across borders for networking and advanced political leadership training. NDI's Roma program is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy. For more information on the program, please email Roma@ndi.org.