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In April 2004, the National Democratic Institute launched a NED funded program in Slovakia and Bulgaria to increase Roma participation in electoral politics and representative government; NDI plans to expand the initiative to Romania in the coming year. This program builds on the Institute's past work with Roma political and civic activists throughout the region and on an Open Society Institute-funded assessment of the political challenges and opportunities facing Roma.

ROMA ACTIVISTS HONE CAMPAIGN SKILLS

From July 14-17, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted the first annual Roma Political Leadership Academy in Ohrid, Macedonia.

The event brought together the rising stars from the Institute's political skills training series for Roma in Bulgaria and Slovakia, as well as other up and coming Romani activists from Macedonia and Romania. Political party organizers and trainers from the U.S., Great Britain, and several countries in the region led sessions on how to get Roma issues onto mainstream party platforms, conduct public outreach, and monitor government performance.

The four day gathering culminated in a campaign simulation that allowed the participants to practice the skills they had gained through the earlier academy sessions and previous NDI

training. This exercise helped prepare the participants for future campaigns by building their confidence in public speaking and campaigning abilities, teaching them to work in a fast-paced



Participants plot their campaign strategy as part of an election simulation during the Roma Political Leadership Academy.

environment, and showcasing the importance of teamwork and delineation of roles among a team.

Macedonian Member of Parliament Nezhdet Mustafa, one of the few Roma in Europe to hold nationally elected office, attended along with representatives from the Stability Pact, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Centre for Minority Issues. One participant's reflection on the academy is on page six. Look for a full report on the activities and successes of the academy in the coming weeks.

ROMA GET OUT THE VOTE IN BULGARIA

By Teodora Krumova

In the runup to the Bulgarian election on June 25, the Roma NGO *Amalipe* conducted a Get Out The Vote (GOTV) campaign in Bulgarian Roma communities. The campaign's principle goals were to educate youth on the changes in the new electoral law and motivate young Roma to make their voices heard at the ballot box.

More than one hundred volunteers from *Amalipe* and its Roma partner organizations carried out the campaign. GOTV activities included candidate debates, concerts and door-to-door voter education on the use of the new integral ballot. One of *Amalipe's* proudest moments was the gathering of more than 250 young people

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SLOVAKS GET CLOSE UP LOOK AT BULGARIAN CAMPAIGNS

By Stoyanka Sokolova

From May 13-17, at the height of the parliamentary campaign in Bulgaria, five Slovak Roma from NDI's Regional Roma Political Participation Program arrived in Sofia to learn more about conducting election campaigns that target Roma voters. The Slovak participants were selected based on their intentions to run in the upcoming regional elections in the fall. They came from different regions in Slovakia and their



Slovaks meet with Roma NGO to discuss their GOTV campaign

professional backgrounds varied from local or regional public administration to NGO activism to political party leadership. According to the Slovak Roma, political participation among Roma in Bulgaria is significantly higher. They also saw differences in the labor, social, and educational conditions of the Roma in the two states. The years of transition have been equally tough for Roma in both countries, but the Slovak Roma experience more poverty and hardships and face stronger discrimination.

The visiting Slovak Roma as well as the Bulgarian Romani hosts—representatives of NGOs and political parties—agreed that the Decade of Roma Inclusion is a great chance to unite efforts. They emphasized, however, that the Decade programs should not be implemented solely by international donors. The respective states

should participate as the key initiators and implementers, engaging Roma in every phase of the programs as co-authors, not only as beneficiaries.

'States should participate as the key initiators and implementers in Decade of Roma Inclusion programs, engaging Roma in every phase of the programs as co-authors, not only as beneficiaries.'

All of those involved in the study mission are determined to make great strides toward Roma representation at all levels of government in both Bulgaria and Slovakia.

This is a translated article by Stoyanka Sokolova, published in Akana newspaper in July 2005.

ROMA GOTV, CONT'D

to partake in a voting simulation. The event was popular among participants and garnered significant press coverage. The National Democratic Institute sponsored the campaign as a part of the USAID-funded *I Am Young and Vote!* national GOTV effort.

Four principle challenges to Roma in Bulgaria could be drawn from *Amalipe's* GOTV campaign:

- ^a The Bulgarian mainstream parties lack a clear vision of how to interact with their Roma constituents. Most parties perceive Roma as a problem (social, ethnic, criminal), not as full members of the Bulgarian state.
- ^a Few mainstream parties agree that new legislation is required to stimulate Roma integration.
- ^a Nationalistic statements are on the rise within mainstream parties.
- ^a Activities are more successful when directed at not only Roma youth but all young Bulgarians. Youth in Bulgaria, Roma or not, face similar challenges, and are similarly under-represented. A youth coalition stands to be a reliable counterforce to anti-Roma xenophobia.



Amalipe conducts door-to-door GOTV campaign

Teodora Krumova works for the NGO Amilpe and is also a participant in NDI's political leadership training in Bulgaria.

TALES FROM THE TRAIL: ROMA RUNNING FOR PARLIAMENT

By Fanya Gadularova

I have committed the last 10 years of my life to my Roma community in the municipality of Karlovo in Bulgaria. I learned through doing and everything I did was demand driven: I established the first NGO to represent the interests of rural Roma in Bulgaria, negotiated benefits for long-term unemployed Roma, and joined our local school board. My work led me to join and eventually become a leader of EvroRoma – the largest Roma political party in Bulgaria. In the June 2005 parliamentary elections my party ran independently for the first time. I was nominated to rank first in the closed party list for one of the 31 electoral districts – Plovdiv.

During my election campaign I used many of the skills I picked up during NDI's training series. I am particularly happy with the door-to-door effort in the villages of Rozino, Iganovo, Hristo Danovo and Karlovo. In those villages, ninety percent of Roma vot-

ers are illiterate. As a result, we needed to recruit and train canvassing teams to reach out to them in a way that they would understand and explain to them the new ballot and voting process.



Supporters at an EvroRoma Concert in Bulgaria

As a candidate, who doubled as my own campaign manager, I learned first-hand several lessons. First, the importance of coordination between national and local election headquarters; second, the necessity of effective communication; third, logistics will fail you unless carefully planned; and most importantly, raising funds and managing them is a real art.

More than just practical lessons,

I learned many life lessons as well. First, life does not start when the election campaign starts. You are still the same person, and if people know you and trust you, you can always build on this and return to it. Second, when the resources are limited, be innovative; instead of rallies or media spots, I founded a Roma football team and a folk dance group who toured the region contributing to my campaign. And finally, build and maintain networks. I was lucky to be able to ask for assistance from fellow participants of NDI's Roma program.

Despite Evroroma barely missing the four percent threshold, I am content with my campaign results. I received the ballots of more than 8,000 people, and I will continue to work for addressing their needs and voicing their concerns.

Fanya Gadularova, head of the NGO Roma in the Village also serves as a local councilor in Karlovo. She shared her experiences as a candidate at the Regional Roma Political Leadership Academy.

POLLING CAPTURES ROMA POLITICAL ATTITUDES

In spring/summer 2005, NDI conducted public opinion research in Bulgaria and Slovakia to outline Roma political attitudes and policy priorities. It has used this research—the first of its kind—to encourage outreach to Roma by political parties and to inform their policies and platforms. Sur-

vey questions probed Roma opinions about Roma parties, Roma communities, mainstream parties' Roma policies, social and economic priorities, and national and local government performance on Roma issues.

The surveys found that at this point, no clear preference for

Roma parties exists over mainstream parties. Rather, one of the most important factors to Roma voters is the reputation of the candidate. The poll also provided valuable insight into which forms of information Roma voters most often use and trust, allowing parties to more effectively target vot-

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POLLING, CONT'D

ers.

In both countries, voter turnout is the highest at the local level and citizens put more trust in these local structures, where they have more representation, than in the national parliament. Slovakia has

no Romani representatives in its National Assembly and Bulgaria

has only two.

Since no clear preference was indicated for a party on a national level, each of the mainstream parties possesses a unique opportunity to integrate Roma issues into their platform and appeal to this portion of the electorate.

More than 77% of Slovak Roma feel that they have no influence on national level policies that effect them, but 60% believe that if Roma get organized they can change that.

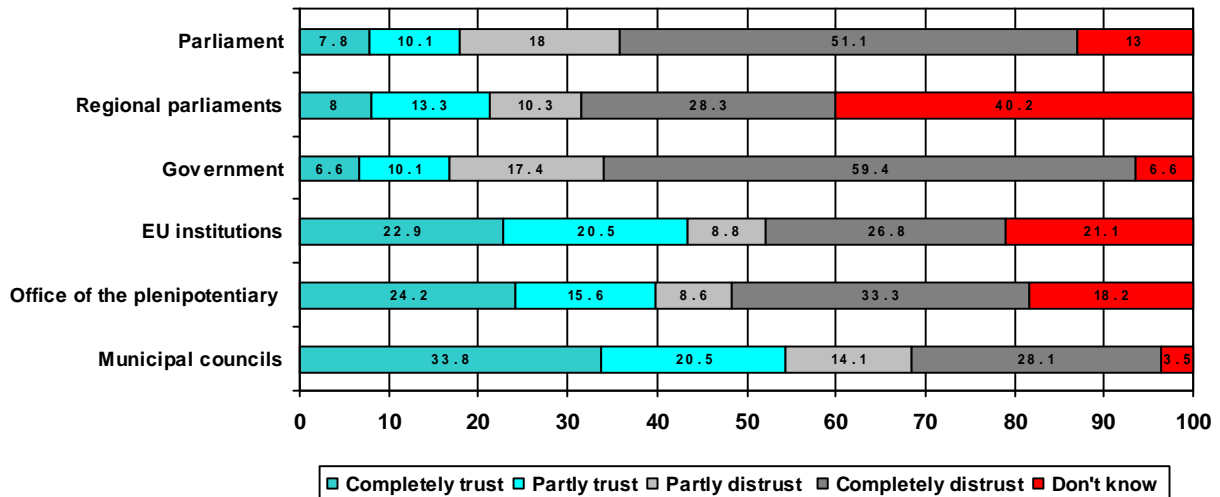
stream parties possess a unique opportunity to integrate Roma issues into their platform and

NDI presented the research findings to Roma organizations, mainstream political parties, and relevant international organizations, and released a report on the findings to national and local media in both countries.

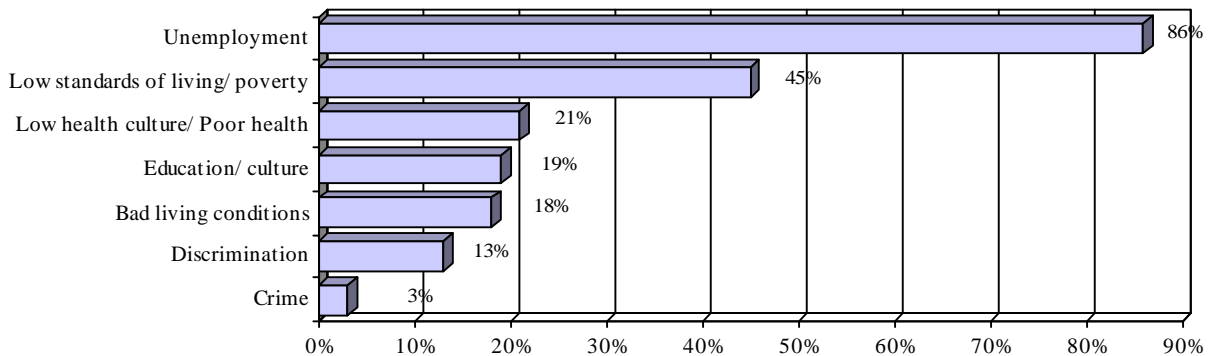
The research was funded by the National Endowment for Democracy.

Full results from NDI's polling in Bulgaria and Slovakia can be found at <http://www.ndi.org/worldwide/cee/roma/roma.asp>

Slovakia Polling: Trust in Governing Institutions



Bulgaria Polling: Most serious problems facing the Roma community



ROMA CIVIC GROUPS EDUCATE VOTERS IN ALBANIA

In preparation for the July 2005 parliamentary elections, the NGO *Romani Baxt* led four partner organizations in a voter education initiative in the Korca region of Albania. They delivered leaflets, hung posters, and televised discussions in both Albanian and Romani, all to increase Roma participation in the elections. Volunteers verified that 1467 Roma citizens were on the electoral registration list, and helped others register for the first time. The volunteers also visited Roma families in Maliq, Sovjan, Pjan and Rembec to highlight the importance of participation in the upcoming elections. This initiative was funded from the small grant component of the USAID-funded Democracy and Governance in Albania program implemented by NDI, Partners for Democratic Change and IREX.



Roma in Albania receive voter education material.

PETER POLLAK MAKES BID TO BE FIRST ROM IN A SLOVAK REGIONAL PARLIAMENT

By Peter Pollak

The problems of ordinary people in Slovakia, including those of the Roma communities, are often solved by the governments we elect. I decided, after seven years of experience helping Roma in my region, that I could address their challenges more efficiently through politics. I received support through an organization of young Slovak Roma called New Roma Generation.

Since it began four years ago, New Roma Generation has developed a clear message: the solution to Roma issues is grounded in Roma political participation. Therefore, most of New Roma Generation activities are focused on building human resources in order to gain seats within municipal, regional, and national assemblies.

Over the last few weeks I have had the opportunity to participate in an NDI training program that taught both the theoretical and practical skills of campaigning.

This complimented over three years of experience working with NDI.

"I decided, after seven years of experience helping Roma in my region, that I could address their challenges more efficiently through politics."

Four months have passed since I decided to run in the regional elections in Košice. With the support of New Roma Generation, I think we are following the right track. Recently we have hired a campaign manager, analyzed the previous election results, built my campaign team of six members, found three volunteers in each village to support my campaign, and organized the first meetings with my potential donors. The whole campaign team has, up to now, 67 members. The volunteers

are currently generating a list of potential voters and campaign donors, creating a media campaign plan, and devising a campaign strategy.

One of the most severe problems we face is the lack of resources to finance the campaign. So far, our campaign has a budget of SKK 40,000 (approximately \$1,300), comprised of a SKK 30,000 contribution by the candidate and a SKK 10,000 contribution by the New Roma Generation.

We truly believe our first journey into politics is going to be successful, but even if we do not win our contest, we are ready to learn from our mistakes and keep moving toward political participation in Slovakia.

NDI continues to work with Mr. Pollak and his campaign team to help him prepare for the November 2005 Regional elections in Slovakia.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

By *Deniza Memedova*

I am 28 years old, and hold a university degree in pedagogy. Apart from my professional career, I work as an assistant to the Macedonian Roma MP, Mr. Nezhdet Mustafa, as well as on a mentoring project to Roma university students, implemented by *100 Foundation* – Macedonia. As a member of the NGO sector for the past 10 years, I have worked steadfastly in the area of Roma inclusion. When I attended NDI's Roma Political Leadership Academy, I found that many of the participants shared similar backgrounds as my own. Many of the other participants however had also gained experience in direct political participation in parties and elections. The diverse views, lessons learned and opinions of the Roma representatives of dif-

ferent countries were one of the biggest achievements of the academy.

I am impressed that a regional cross-country program decided to hold their annual advanced training in a third country – Macedonia. I learned a lot from meeting and working with the participants, trainers and presenters from all over Southeast Europe. The opportunity to meet people from other countries who were young, full of energy, politically savvy and committed to work for fair and transparent elections, voter registration and motivation, and meaningful participation and representation of Roma women in the political and social life was an invaluable experience.

I am proud to have participated in the Institute's Roma Political Leadership Academy. I sincerely hope that this program will ex-

pand to Macedonia and other countries as well because I believe that together we can advance our cause better.

NDI is working with Ms. Memedova in her capacity as an assistant in Mr. Mustafa's Shuto Orizari office to pilot a new database, tracking constituent assistance.



Deniza Memedova with Nezhdet Mustafa, Member of Parliament of Macedonia.

CONNECTING ROMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN SLOVAKIA

By *Radoslav Ščuka*

Being a nephew of Emil Ščuka, the president of the International Romani Union, I always knew that I wanted to dedicate my life to helping the Roma community end discrimination and create opportunities for a better life.

In 2003, while I was a law student and a member of the political party Roma Civic Initiative, I was asked to serve as a city manager of Bystrany in Eastern Slovakia and provide help and advice to the newly elected Roma mayor, Mr. Pačan and other Roma city coun-

cilors. I became very fond of this job and I started thinking of how I could expand my involvement in the work of municipalities run by Roma mayors and predominantly Roma city councils.

To do this, in 2004 I helped establish *Spolužitie-Jekhetane Roma-Slovakia* (Together Roma), an association of Roma municipalities, which includes Jurské, Bystrany, Stráne pod Tatrami and Lomnička. Our association serves as a forum for exchanging experiences in governing predominantly

Roma municipalities and providing peer assistance to each other.

Since I became the city manager, I experienced the struggle of my people on a daily basis and I became aware of the problems the Roma community is facing. My ambition is to provide solutions on the local level through assisting Roma councilors, Roma mayors and employees of the municipal council offices. I believe that we are capable of

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CONNECTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT, CONT'D



Radoslav Ščuka (second from left) with Jozef Cervenak, Vladimir Sendrej and Peter Pollak on an NDI-sponsored study trip to Bulgaria.

addressing many issues and providing solutions if we become more organized and more competent on the local level, in the field of municipal governance.

The next step I intend to take is to run for the position of regional councilor in the November 2005 elections in Slovakia. Thanks to NDI's political skills training and especially its campaign management portion, I am confident to run as an independent candidate in the district of Kežmarok.

Radoslav Ščuka is a participant in NDI's political leadership training in Slovakia. The Institute continues to work with Mr. Ščuka as he runs for Regional Councilor in the November 2005 elections.

AND YOUR VOTE COUNTS!

By *Gruia I. Bumbu*

To help raise the participation of Roma in the parliamentary electoral process, the Democratic Union of Roma in Alba County, Romania organized the seminar, "And Your Vote Counts," in November 2004. Our workshop trained 25 participants on observing elections, working as a team, public speaking and voters' rights.

The participants used their newly acquired skills to form local groups in their communities to conduct voter education activities. Half of the participants were women, and almost all were under 30 years of age. This balance helped us raise awareness among these two groups, who have been largely ignored by Roma communities. In addition to the workshop, we created 500 brochures, 400 posters, and 5,000 flyers

that provided information on voting procedures to over 20 Roma communities.

As a result of this initiative, the number of invalidated ballots in these communities was significantly reduced. The workshop and subsequent activities and publications, along with the media attention they generated, raised awareness among Roma about election day and voting procedures. Additionally, our project educated non-Roma about minority rights, significantly improving the relations between Roma and non-Roma NGOs in these areas. We saw an exchange of ideas and good teamwork across ethnic lines.

Roma in these communities are now more aware of their voting rights and the influence that they can have by participating. Furthermore, the participants from the seminar came away with energy and drive to go out into the Roma com-

munities and are now part of local initiative groups that have established a partnership with local authorities.



Gruia Bumbu, in addition to serving as Vice-President of the Democratic Union of Roma, also is an advisor to Romania's deputy prime minister. Mr. Bumbu attended NDI's Roma Political Leadership Academy in July 2005.

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