



## ROMA REGIONAL NEWSLETTER

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*In April 2004, the National Democratic Institute launched a National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funded program in Slovakia and Bulgaria to increase Roma participation in electoral politics and representative government. In 2006 the Institute expanded its core Roma programming to Romania with funds from the Open Society Institute. This newsletter highlights important news from NDI's program participants and Roma activists from throughout the region.*

### ELECTIONS SHOWCASE ROMA ADVOCACY SKILLS

In the June 2006 Slovak parliamentary elections, political parties took unprecedented steps toward addressing Roma issues during the campaign. Almost all major political parties included Roma-related policies in their election platforms. This is in sharp contrast to 2002, when Roma issues were almost entirely absent from the campaign dialogue.

These positive developments were in large part due to the advocacy efforts of Roma civic and political activists such as the New Roma Generation (NRG) and Jozef Cervanek of the Roma Civic Initiative. Articles detailing their election-related efforts can be found on page two of this newsletter.

*Smer's* choice of the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) as coalition partners raised concerns about the new government's interest in promoting minority rights. Roma activists are renewing their advocacy efforts to ensure that Roma inclusion policies are implemented and minority rights protected. In part due to these efforts, when the new government released its official program in August, Roma issues were prominently featured.

Despite these advancements, Roma were still



NRG members conduct a press conference to publicize their open letter to the government. The press conference was attended by more than 20 journalists.

unable to win elected office on the national level. The number of Roma candidates on mainstream party tickets increased slightly from 2002, but they were still unable to secure electable positions on the tickets of parties passing the five percent threshold.

NDI has produced a full report, analyzing the election results, the role of Roma in the campaign, and the continued problem of vote-buying in Roma communities.

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### ROMA ACTIVISTS COLLABORATE ON POLITICAL STRATEGIES

Coinciding with the International Day of the Roma and the launch of NDI's Roma initiative in Romania, NDI held its second annual Roma political leadership



Activists from Spain, Romania, Moldova and Serbia discuss the best avenues for Roma electoral success.

academy in Bucharest on April 7-10. The event assembled 24 emerging Roma leaders from eight countries throughout Europe. The Academy was designed to heighten the acumen of Roma political activists while providing an opportunity for regional collaboration and the sharing of best practices.

With trainers from the United States and Europe, training was focused on developing methods of government accountability and leveraging political capital. Speakers such as Valeriu Nicolae of the European Roma Grassroots Organization and Claude Cahn of the European Roma Rights Center, focused on personal experi-

ence and case studies to illustrate the importance of using solid research to strengthen political arguments. The event concluded with an election simulation of five mock political parties competing against each other in a mayoral election campaign. To help participants strengthen their skills, their performance was judged based on clarity of message, creativity, teamwork, and timeliness.

#### 2007 Roma Political Leadership Academy

February 22-25  
Bratislava

## NRG: ADVANCING ROMA ISSUES IN SLOVAK POLITICAL DIALOGUE

By New Roma Generation

The NGO New Roma Generation (NRG) is currently engaging in activities to promote the integration of socially marginalized groups by strengthening the advocacy abilities of civic organizations. NRG believes that such measures are the best way for such communities to enhance their economic independence, and protect their rights.

In February 2006, New Roma Generation intensified its efforts to develop solutions for Roma issues after learning that early parliamentary elections were scheduled for June 2006. NRG representatives

**A**s part of [the multiethnic Slovak Republic] we consider solving the situation of Roma...our priority”

~Deputy PM  
Dusan Caplovic

provided parties with analysis of the current situation and proposed possible solutions that the parties could incorporate into their platforms. In addition, NRG prepared an open letter that was sent to all political parties. The letter called for dialogue and collaboration with Roma activists to identify solutions for Roma inclusion and to incorporate these policies into their platforms.

Previous elections taught us that it was necessary to devote more attention to election campaigns and activities of political parties. In hopes of preventing political parties from obtaining votes through the exploitation of the poor socioeconomic status of many Roma, we developed a code of ethics. The code asked party campaign management to indicate their willingness to abstain from vote-buying in Roma communities by signing the code.

During the election, at selected localities throughout Slovakia, NRG, in cooperation with many other trained activists, monitored elections with a view to documenting cases of unethical practices including vote-buying or undue influence of voters at the polls.

Following the formation

of the new government, NRG, joined by Milan Šimečka Foundation and 13 other signatories, prepared another open letter to the government to include policy solutions for Roma issues in its program. During a press conference on July 13, 2006 it was endorsed by 50 organizations. The action was met with a positive response and precipitated a meeting with vice-chairman of government Mr. Čaplovič and was later reflected in the government program. The government lists solving Roma issues as one of its priorities and the program contains a number of political commitments in this regard. NRG will continue to monitor the progress of the government towards fulfilling its commitments.

### Excerpts from the Declaration of the Slovak Government 2006

•Special attention will be paid to the support of marginalized Roma communities

•The Government will provide for the support of culture of national minorities and ethnic groups

•The Government will create conditions for the real integration and inclusion of the Roma ethnic group, with the objective to increase its standard of living - on the basis of the broadest consensus on the one side and the political will on the other.



Stefan Sarkozy of NRG, speaks with a reporter during a press conference



Peter Pollak of NRG with Slovak President Ivan Gasparovic



ROI members, including Jozef Cervenak, meet to discuss strategy.

## ROI PARTNERS WITH SMER

By Jozef Cervenak

Political transformation is a very important part of the integration of the Roma national minority in Slovakia. Such participation includes continuous engagement of Roma to build awareness of their responsibilities in public life. In the first phase of social changes since the velvet revolution, Public Against Violence (VPN) was willing to include selected Roma experts to resolve Roma issues, even though they were then known to have cooperated with the Communists. The situation then changed, and no Slovak political parties have shown interest in reaching out to Roma activists, though they have often claimed to do so. For a number of reasons, following the Czechoslovak divorce, ROI was not successful.

Elections to the regional parliaments in 2005 were a challenge for us as they required a change in strategy and cooperation with non-Roma political parties. The agenda of the previous right-wing government had included drastic social and economic programs which resulted in social unrest among Roma. In contrast, the program of the party *Smer* is a program of solidarity for all socially marginalized groups of the population, so we entered into regional cooperation with the party. The collaboration resulted in the creation of a regional working group to resolve Roma issues and was a political success, resulting in one Roma candidate on *Smer's* regional party list.



## BULGARIA ASSUMES PRESIDENCY OF ROMA DECADE

On July 24 2006, Bulgaria took over the rotational presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) from Romania. Ms. Mariea Ionescu, the Romanian national coordinator of the Decade, officially handed over the Presidency to the Bulgarian national coordinator Mr. Yavor Dimitrov, Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Policy. Bulgaria's main priority will be "employment together with education" while it will also pursue the main priorities of the Decade: educational integration, health, housing, and employment. The ceremony was attended by the President of Bulgaria Mr. Georgi Parvanov, Bulgarian Prime Minister Mr. Sergey Stanishev, and Minister of Labor and Social Policy Mrs. Emilia Maslarova, as well as an array of other public figures.

In preparation for the transition, the Bulgarian Council of Ministers initiated a number of meetings. Young Roma activists, NGO representatives and representatives of the state administration brainstormed about possible actions for the period of Bulgaria's presidency.

Additionally, the "Decade Club" was established by the Open Society Institute – Sofia (OSI) to provide a space for open discussions. The club brings together individuals with different experience and background including experts, social workers, and NGO activists. Membership is open and anyone is allowed to

attend the meetings. Three meetings have been organized to date where three topics were discussed: attitude towards Roma people in Europe; the opening of the secret files of the Bulgarian former State Security services; and Housing problems of the Roma in Sofia.

The Decade was launched last year in Sofia and represents the first collaborative, multinational initiative to improve the socioeconomic status and social integration of Roma in Europe. The Decade countries are Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Macedonia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Support is provided by the international community, including OSI, OSCE, UNDP, the World Bank, and the Council of Europe.

**T**he majority has just limited knowledge about the Roma culture, and as a result, we are separated from each other — something we must overcome."

~Emilia Maslarova,  
Minister of Labor  
& Social Policy



Ms. Mariea Ionescu hands over the Presidency to Mr. Yavor Dimitrov at the ceremonial event in Sofia.

## ROI CONT'D...

*Continued from the previous page*

Early parliamentary elections showed the need to continue this local collaboration at the national level. Our meetings with *Smer* party leader Mr. Robert Fico, and with the leader of the Socialists in the European parliament Mr. Martin Schulz, showed that this cooperation was the correct political direction for *Smer* and ROI. *Smer* agreed to solve the priorities of the Roma minority and such policies were approved at the party's program conference.

While ROI did not have a single Roma parliamentary candidate, we developed an election campaign with the motto "legalization of land in Roma settlements". We visited Roma settlements in hopes of convincing Roma of the need to vote and to support the program which ROI submitted and *Smer* subsequently adopted.

After the elections, this policy concerning legalization of land in Roma settlements was not included in the final government program. At the moment we do not have a chance to influence the program, though we believe that collaboration with the party *Smer* will continue. Since we successfully had Roma policies addressed in regional and parliamentary elections, we still consider it to be useful to cooperate with *Smer* in the upcoming local elections for mayors and councilors, which will take place by the end of 2006.

To conclude, we would like to say that our work is about breaking barriers, hard work, and forming an interest among Roma so that they want to assume responsibility for public affairs in the state. We believe we can overcome this social barrier as was done in our neighbor state Hungary and in other states.

## ROMA ACTIVISTS IDENTIFY LOCAL BUDGET PRIORITIES IN ALBANIA

In 90 communities in Vlore, Shkodra and central Albania, current and former participants of NDI's Civic Forum program, together with other residents of their towns and communes and local NGO groups, conducted informal surveys and discussions to gather citizen input on the most important budget priorities for the 2007 municipal budget cycle. Three of these citizen action groups have been formed in Romani communities.

In total, the groups identified 236 key priorities, including: roads and infrastructure; waste management; facilities for cultural and youth activities; water supply; and improved educational facilities. Citizens compiled these findings into a "budget platform" to present to local governments and advocate for their inclusion in the draft budget for 2007.

Roma civic activists in Shkodra municipality were particularly successful, gaining the adoption in the 2007 budget of funds to build a school for Roma. The local government also allocated a special reserve fund in order to begin construction in 2006.



A Roma civic activist surveys fellow community members on their priorities for local projects to be implemented out of the 2007 budget.

## SERBIAN LEAGUE ADVANCES ROMA RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY

This spring, the Serbian League for the Decade of Roma Inclusion utilized training from NDI to increase its skills in advocacy and negotiation, coalition building, and goal setting to push for the adequate funding of national action plans in the local budgets. The Institute conducted a training session for Roma leaders who are part of the League, which was formed in order to take advantage of the opportunities engendered by the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

The League was initiated in October 2005 by the Open Society Institute, and comprises a coalition of NGOs led by coordinator Osman Balic, former vice president of the Nis city government and member of the Democratic Party of Serbia. It serves to aid and monitor the Serbian government in its design and implementation of action plans in accordance with the Decade goals for education, housing, employment, and health care.

The organization is a collaboration of the founding NGOs: OSI, Minority Rights Center, Roma Children Center, Civil Initiatives, Yugoslav Association for Culture and Education of Roma, Roma Student Union, Yurom Center, and the National Council of the Roma National Minority.

The League will be working to monitor specific government action plans and cooperating with municipalities to administer more Roma programs, drafting an anti-discrimination law and working for its passage, and developing a visible and active media presence. Additionally, the League hopes to facilitate work among the various Roma organizations to develop a broader system of Roma rights and advocacy throughout Serbia. The League plans to pressure the government to move past mere words and achieve concrete results through adequate funding and implementation of its policies.



Participants at Romania's first training session hear from speakers including President of the National Agency for the Roma, Maria Ionescu and Liberal MP Mona Musca.



## NDI TRAINING SERIES EXPANDS TO ROMANIA

This spring, NDI was pleased to welcome a third round of participants to its Roma Political Participation training series, which held its first sessions in Slovakia and Bulgaria in May. With funding from the Open Society Institute, NDI also saw the expansion of the training initiative into Romania where, with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, it is also working with the Center for Urban and Regional Sociology to conduct polling on Roma political attitudes. Results are currently being prepared for publication this fall.

Following a call for applicants, which led to 62 submissions by May 31, 25 Roma political activists were invited to participate in the training. The first session was held in Bucharest from July 14-16 with an aim to give the participants the opportunity to network with high profile politicians, and also to familiarize them with the functions of political parties, organizational issues, and the institutional environment in which they operate.

This first session included presentations by members of parliament as well as Maria

Ionescu, president of the National Agency for the Roma. Both spoke of the need for Roma involvement in politics in order to increase minority representation. They also encouraged Roma to advocate for the government support necessary for implementing the national strategy proposed to improve the Roma situation in the country.

Mr. Enrico D'Ambrogio, head of the Information Office of the European Parliament in Romania, spoke about the opportunities that accession and representation in the European parliament presented for Roma. In particular, he highlighted European legal methods of combating discrimination, and the EU's public acknowledgment of the chronic barriers to adequate representation of Roma in state governments.

The training program also focused on the fundamentals of political party internal organization and fundraising, the role and function of parties outside of election campaigns, and the importance of community activism. Romania was pleased to include one international trainee from the Republic of Moldova in its training session.



Romanian participants engage in a campaign simulation exercise during the Roma Political Leadership Academy.

### Upcoming Romania Training Sessions

**\*Session 3 (Oct. 21-22)\***  
Media, Marketing, &  
Public Outreach

**\*Session 4 (Nov. 18-19)\***  
Coalition Building, Negotiations and  
Conflict Resolution

## AMALIPE: ADVOCATING TO IMPROVE ROMA EDUCATION

By Teodora Krumova

In November 2005, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science (MES) announced the Program for Development of School Education (2006-2015). The Program was a serious setback for Roma as it did not include major elements from the Framework Program for Roma Integration which outlined primary methods of increasing the integration of Roma children within the educational system. It was also a retreat from plans previously negotiated by Roma NGOs.

The MES is predicted to result in an overall deterioration in the educational situation of Roma communities. Provisions in the program would raise the number of Roma drop-outs, lower the upper boundary of primary education from eighth to seventh grade, eliminate classes with students under the regular minimum, abolish many rural schools as well as vocational training after the fifth grade, and remove requirements for entering intercultural education. According to Amalipe Center educational experts, the government program would exclude approximately 30-40,000 Roma children from the educational system.

In January, Amalipe Center for Inter-ethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, supported by NDI, commenced a campaign to publicize the expected consequences of the current proposal and push for reforms. Through meetings with President Par-

vanov and Deputy Minister of Education Atansov, support from numerous NGOs and institutions--such as Ethnic and Demographic Issue Directorate of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy--and an intense publicity initiative, the Center successfully gained the support of the government. In addition to letters of support for their proposed changes from Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Policy Yavor Dimitrov, Advisor for the Social Policy of President Parvanov Nikolay Nikolov, and several municipalities and district councils on ethnic and demographic issues, the group also secured the backing of the President.

In May, representatives of the Amalipe Center and other NGOs observed the discussions in the Parliamentary Commission on Education. Mr. Mestan, Chair of the Commission, agreed with the majority of points presented by Amalipe's representatives Deyan Kolev and Teodora Krumova. He further indicated that the Program was meant only as a loose framework to be filled in by laws and reforms to existing laws, and stated that his commission *would* approve the program, which still contained many valuable policies, but would reject laws that could cause deterioration for Roma within the educational system. Despite these

promises, the Bulgarian parliament adopted the program on June 7 without significant discussion. This has left the Roma community with the impression that the issues of Roma education will remain peripheral in Bulgarian education policy.

Nevertheless, the campaign waged by Amalipe Center had numerous successes by involving ministers, state officials, and the head of state in direct communication with Roma NGOs and by gaining the inclusion of Roma representatives' statements in the parliamentary transcripts and thus accessible to all citizens. While not a win *per se*, the strong campaign will serve to strengthen and empower Roma NGOs and activists in the future.



The author, Teodora Krumova, canvasses individuals as part of a Get Out the Vote campaign.

## BULGARIAN ROMA NGOS UNITE TO MONITOR GOVERNMENT

**O**n June 11, 2006 the Union for Change and Roma Unity (OPRE Roma) was established in Sofia by a coalition of leading Roma NGOs representing the diverse regions of Bulgaria. Romart Union, Association Drom, Association Center for Multiethnic Dialogue and Tolerance--Amalipe, Foundation Resource Center Sam, Association of Roma Youth Organizations, Foundation for Regional Development of Roma - Plovdiv, District Roma Union, and Association New Way comprise the Union, which is chaired by Vashil Chaprasov and Deputy Chair

Deyan Kolev.

The Union aspires to become a rallying point for active Roma organizations and intellectuals throughout the country. It plans to monitor and assess government actions and policies that affect the Roma population, as well as to devise a collaborative expert statement for the broader Roma mission. OPRE Roma also hopes to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Decade of Roma Inclusion and Bulgaria's European integration to enhance its initiatives in targeting issues of concern to Roma in Bulgaria.

As one of its initiatives, in May OPRE Roma prepared a detailed analysis of the Operational Program for Human Resource Development (OPHRD) and the way in which it addresses Roma issues. Several drafts of the program displayed an alarming trend, as they demonstrated a serious underestimation, and continued marginalization, of Roma issues. As a result of this analysis, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Disaster Management Policy Emel Etem issued an official letter promising a broad public discussion in order to discuss the Roma-related policies of the OPHRD.



ROMA PARTIES INCREASE REPRESENTATION IN MACEDONIA

Funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), NDI conducted a wide range of activities with Roma political parties in Macedonia in the months prior to the July 5 parliamentary elections - from the "Community Challenge" simulation to targeted consultations and hands-on election campaign assistance. The "Community Challenge" brought together 66 prominent Roma representatives from political parties, nongovernmental organizations, media outlets, and other professions. Sessions were designed for participants to acquire and apply skills such as budgeting

and locating financial resources in simulations relating to their roles in their parties or organizations.

In May, NDI provided tailored campaign assistance to the leadership of the United Party for Emancipation (OPE) as part of a larger multi-party training workshop for election campaign managers. NDI also worked with the Union of

**T**he "Community Challenge" brought together 66 prominent Roma representatives from political parties, nongovernmental organizations, media outlets, and other professions.

Roma Forces (URF), the Party for the Integration of Roma (PRI), and OPE to improve the parties' ability to structure election teams, reflect voter priorities, and strategically engage in coalition discussions.

NDI conducted consultations and training sessions on topics such as election cam-



Using media skills gained from consultations with NDI, URF candidate Saban Saliu speaks at a rally in Shuto Orizari.

paign techniques, organizational development, public speaking skills, media strategies, and voter targeting initiatives. For the first time, URF and the other minority parties used Get-Out-The-Vote initiatives, such as door-to-door canvassing and direct mailing.

With NDI assistance, URF also developed and distributed voter education leaf-

lets for the Roma community. On July 5, Saban Saliu won his first mandate for the URF. Nezdet Mustafa from the OPE was also re-elected to parliament, thus securing Roma representation in both government and opposition parties. NDI looks forward to continued work with them in their capacity as members of the Macedonian Parliament.

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