



## **Roma Participation in the 2006 Slovak Parliamentary Elections**

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## Summary

Slovakia's large Roma population, which some sources estimate is as high as 360,000, or seven percent of the general population, has been politically marginalized and continue to lack representation in the national and regional governments. As a result, Roma activists have been unable to play a role in shaping policies to address such pressing problems as employment, education, healthcare and housing. As part of its program to increase Roma political participation<sup>1</sup>, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has prepared this report to analyze the role Roma played in the June 2006 parliamentary elections. Through a series of meetings with Romani activists and politicians throughout Slovakia and reports from the local media, NDI examined the performance of Romani candidates and parties, the activities of Romani civil society and the campaign conduct of political parties in Romani communities. NDI's conclusions include the following:

- The greatest advancement in Roma political participation in this election cycle was the increased visibility and influence of Romani civil society. Due to the advocacy efforts of Romani activists, led by the New Roma Generation, a political advocacy non-governmental organization (NGO), almost all mainstream 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. After Direction Social Democracy (*Smer*) formed a governing coalition with the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HzDS) and the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS), Roma activists continued their advocacy efforts to hold the new government to pre-election promises. When the new government released its program in August, Roma issues were prominently featured.
- Despite the unprecedented achievements of Romani civil society, Romani political parties continued to play a marginal role in the elections, with none contesting the elections. In a positive trend, some parties, such as the Roma Civic Initiative (ROI) realized that they could more effectively promote their policy agenda through cooperation with mainstream parties.
- The election also showed that Romani candidates are still not positioned to run nation-wide campaigns. While there was a slight increase in the number of Romani candidates on mainstream party tickets, they were unable to secure electable positions on candidate lists or run campaigns capable of garnering significant numbers of preferential votes<sup>2</sup>.
- Romani voters continued to be manipulated in these elections. While not sanctioned by political parties, many candidates in search of preferential votes took advantage of the poor socio-economic conditions in many Roma communities to successfully buy votes.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2004, the National Democratic Institute has worked with Roma in Slovakia as part of a regional initiative to increase Roma political participation. Through individual skills training, public opinion research, and mainstream party engagement, the Institute seeks to give Roma the knowledge, skills and experience to become strong political leaders able to competitively contest elections and advocate for the needs of their community more effectively.

<sup>2</sup> Voters chose a party list and have the option of casting preferential votes for up to four candidates. If candidates receive more than three percent of the votes cast for the party, they improve their position on the list.

## **Electoral Framework**

Slovakia's unicameral parliament is elected through a proportional representation system with a five percent threshold. There is one nation-wide electoral district, with a polling district for every 1,000 people. Slovakia has a party-list system with preferential voting. In addition to choosing a party list, voters have the option of casting preference votes for a maximum of four candidates. For candidates to improve their position on the list they must receive at least three percent of all the preferential votes cast for candidates from their party.

In 2004, the government adopted a new election law, which decreased the two-day voting period to one day, allowed voting by mail, and lifted previous bans on campaigning on election day and through private media outlets. Additionally the new law decreased the preferential voting threshold from ten to three percent, significantly magnifying its effects. The reduced threshold resulted in seven candidates being elected due to preferential votes, compared to only one in the 2002 parliamentary elections. While currently there are no Romani candidates with the experience necessary to garner nation-wide support in Slovakia's single electoral district, this preferential voting system may be a useful tool to Romani candidates in future elections.

In an effort to limit the number of parties running the elections, the amended election law regulated that parties make a deposit of 500,000 Slovak koruna (Sk) (approximately 13,000 euros) to the state, which they recover only if they pass a three percent threshold. Changes to the political party law in 2005, requiring parties to reregister, also led to the dissolution of many small and ethnic political parties. According to information from the Ministry of the Interior, there is now only one Roma party registered in Slovakia, the Slovak Roma Initiative (RIS). Prior to the re-registration period there were 17 Roma parties.

## **Election Results**

Early parliamentary elections held on June 17 provided the left-wing Direction- Social Democracy (*Smer*) a predictable parliamentary majority with 29.14 percent of votes and 50 of the 150 seats. In a stronger than expected performance, former Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda's Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU) won 18.35 percent of the popular vote and 31 seats. The HzDS received 8.79 percent of the vote and 15 seats, down from more than 19 percent in the 2002 elections. The Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) performed above expectations with 11.69 percent of the vote and 20 seats, whereas the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) received fewer votes than it expected with less than nine percent of the vote. To the concern of many in Slovakia and the international community, the extremist Slovak National Party (SNS) re-entered parliament, managing to receive 11.73 percent of votes and 20 seats. In the 2002 parliamentary elections SNS failed to pass the five percent threshold. The turnout for the election was only 54.76 percent, the lowest in post-communist history and significantly lower than the 70 percent turnout rate in 2002.

### *Summary of Results:*

\* Note: Coalitions need to have 76 seats in the 150 seat legislature in order to form a majority government.

<b>Party</b>	<b>Vote %</b>	<b>Parliamentary Seats</b>
SMER- Social Democrats	29.14	50
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU)	18.35	31
Slovak National Party (SNS)	11.73	20
Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK)	11.69	20
Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HzDS)	8.79	15
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	8.31	14
Free Forum	<5	0
Slovak Communists Party (KSS)	<5	0

On June 28, *Smer* formed a government with SNS and HzDS. Despite *Smer's* extensive articulation of Roma issues in its election platform, its selection of governing partners raised serious concerns about the promotion and protection of minority rights in the new government. Highlighting international concern for *Smer's* choice of coalition partners, the Party of European Socialists (PES) temporarily suspended *Smer's* membership in the organization after the formation of the government. *Smer* had only recently been admitted into PES<sup>3</sup>, which is the organization of Socialist, Social Democratic and Labour parties in the European Parliament.

The unexpected rise in popularity of the SNS is of particular concern to minority groups. One of the party's main messages was the removal of the SMK from the future government. This resonated with many voters because, while in government, the SMK implemented a number of policies favorable to Hungarians, which stirred resentment among many Slovaks. The SNS also attracted disenchanted voters who felt that other conservative parties, such as the SDKU and HzDS, had moved too far to the center. While the SNS has not officially pursued anti-Roma policies and formed a pre-election coalition with Roma parties in the 2005 regional elections, its nationalist and anti-Hungarian positions, as well as anti-Roma statements made by Party President Jan Slota, raise serious concerns about policies that it may try to pursue in government.

## **Roma Parties and Candidates in the Elections**

### *Challenges to Roma Participation on the National Level*

Many Romani politicians opted not to run in the elections, realizing that they were not in a position to gain any parliamentary seats. This is due largely to the fact that few Roma candidates currently have nation-wide appeal, which is necessary given the single electoral district, and the fact that Roma voters have little trust or interest in national level politics and as a result have relatively low turnout<sup>4</sup>. The disparity between votes cast for Romani candidates in regional and national elections is evident from the 2005 regional and 2006 parliamentary election results. In 2005, Roma candidate and member of NRG's leadership board Peter Pollak gained 1,757 votes in a single district of approximately 66,000 eligible voters, almost double the number of votes secured by the top Roma candidate in the 2006 parliamentary elections. Recognizing that it was not feasible to gain representation in parliament, Roma activists instead focused their efforts on

<sup>3</sup> Smer was admitted to PES in May 2005.

<sup>4</sup> There is no official data available on Romani electoral turnout. For the purpose of this report NDI collected information from NDI program participants monitoring the election processes and other local representatives.

encouraging mainstream political parties to address Roma-related issues in their election platforms. These efforts are detailed in the next chapter of this report.

In addition to promoting Roma inclusion policies, Romani activists are focusing their efforts on gaining elected office on the regional and local level. Since the inception of regional governments in 2001, there has yet to be a Romani MP in any of the eight regional parliaments. The 2005 regional elections, however, saw a significant improvement in the quality of campaigns of Romani candidates and the votes they were able to garner<sup>5</sup>. This trend of improvement is promising for the 2009 regional elections. Roma activists are beginning to prepare for the December 2006 local elections, with many Roma planning to run, and groups such as the New Roma Generation (NRG) organizing training schools for Romani candidates.

### *Roma Parties in the Parliamentary Elections*

No Roma parties contested the 2006 parliamentary elections due to a combination of factors including the following:

- The new requirement that parties submit a 500,000 Sk (approximately 13,000 euros) deposit with their candidate list, which they lose if they do not receive at least three percent of valid votes, prevented many small parties, both Roma and non-Roma, from running in the elections. Two Roma parties ran in the 2002 parliamentary elections, *Roma* and the Roma Civic Initiative (ROI), but both performed poorly receiving .21 and .29 percent of the vote respectively.
- As the performance of Roma parties in 2002 illustrates, Roma parties have not been able to garner the nation-wide following necessary to succeed in Slovakia's single electoral district. This is due largely to the fact that Roma do not vote for Roma simply because of their ethnicity. In NDI's polling on Roma political attitudes in 2005, when respondents were asked if they preferred to support Roma or Non-Roma parties, only 5.8 percent of people said they favored Roma parties, compared to 55 percent who preferred mainstream parties.
- In 2006 there was only one Roma party, RIS, eligible to contest the elections. The other Roma parties, many of which existed primarily on paper with no field operations, failed to reregister in 2005.
- Some Romani parties realized they could run in conjunction with mainstream parties. While ROI did not contest the elections and failed to re-register in 2005, it continues to be politically active through cooperation with *Smer*. This cooperation began during the 2005 regional elections when ROI formed a pre-election coalition with *Smer*, in which ROI agreed to support *Smer* in return for the inclusion of Roma-related policies in *Smer's* election platform. ROI leader Jozef Cervenak was also a candidate for *Smer* in the regional elections. This cooperation continued into the parliamentary elections. ROI

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<sup>5</sup> Candidate Peter Pollak was only 179 short of winning a seat in the Kosice regional parliament, finishing eighth out of 54 candidates in a district that elects seven MPs. As first runner-up, if an MP steps down, Pollak will receive a parliamentary seat. This is the closest a Roma in Slovakia has come to winning elected office on the regional or national level. In total five Roma candidates in the Slovak regional elections garnered more than a thousand votes, an increase from only one in the previous regional elections. Of the five, three were NDI program participants (Peter Pollak, Jozef Cervenak, Ladislav Conka).

voted at its party convention to support *Smer* and Cervenak served as a senior member of *Smer's* campaign team, helping to develop the party's Roma-related policies.

### *Roma Candidates*

While Roma parties opted out of participating in the elections, the number of Roma candidates on mainstream party lists increased from five in 2002 to 12 in 2006<sup>6</sup>. However, of these 12 candidates, only three ran with a party that had a chance to enter parliament, the Free Forum (FF). The Movement for Democracy (HZD), established by Slovak President Ivan Gasparovic, included several Roma on its candidate list, but according to all pre-election polls the party clearly had no chance to pass the electoral threshold. Among HZD's Romani candidates was the famous musician Jan Berky, who was tenth on the party list. This marks the highest position a Roma candidate has ever held on a mainstream political party ticket. Roma running on the HZD list were not from a single Roma faction or united around a set of issues; they were instead local leaders and activists representing various regions and backgrounds. Two Romani candidates also ran on the Association of Workers in Slovakia (ZRS) ticket and one ran with the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS). Neither party was close to passing the parliamentary threshold.

Below is a list of the known Romani candidates running in the elections, with their party affiliations, place on the list and results of preferential voting (number of votes gained):

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Place on Party List</b>	<b>Number of Preferential Votes</b>
<b>Free Forum (FF)</b>		
Bohus Kotlar	57	491
Florian Racz	125	189
Emil Solcansky	97	154
<b>Movement for Democracy (HZD)</b>		
Jan Berky	10	897
Alexander Patkolo	150	835
Vaclav Kappel	145	728
Jozef Berki	112	555
Adam Cibula	80	483
Vojtech Kokeny	128	Withdrew his candidacy
<b>Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)</b>		
Vasil Grundza	126	
<b>Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS)</b>		
Jozef Pecha	54	82
Michal Conka	110	13

### **Roma Policies and Principles in Campaign Dialogue**

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that it is impossible to identify the exact number of Romani candidates, as no such statistical information exists. Only candidates that officially declared themselves as Romani are included in these figures. All of the information NDI offers in this report was gathered through personal contacts, *Romani Nevo Lil* paper (nr. 552-556) and other additional sources and as a result may be incomplete.

In past elections Roma issues went almost completely unaddressed by mainstream parties. To prevent a recurrence, many Roma activists focused their efforts on advocating for greater campaign dialogue on Roma issues. At the forefront of this effort was the NRG. In the run-up to the election campaign, NRG issued an open letter to all mainstream political parties encouraging them to incorporate policies for Roma inclusion in their election platforms. In its efforts, NRG sought, and received, extensive coverage by mainstream media to increase pressure on political parties to address their priority issues. Many of the parties responded by inviting Roma politicians and activists to help them develop specific policy recommendations and to take part in their official program development conferences.

In its open letter and subsequent meetings with political parties, NRG promoted a series of Roma inclusion policies in the areas of housing, education, employment, the representation of Roma in government, and human rights. In part a result of these efforts, almost all parties included Roma-related policies in their election programs, many of which were developed by the NRG and other Romani political activists such as Jozef Cervenak. This is a sharp contrast from 2002 when only two parties (SMK and *Ano*) mentioned the plight of Roma, but failed to offer any concrete policies. The only Roma-related policy articulated in 2002 came from *Smer*, who pledged to “influence the uncontrolled growth of the Roma population, which has been caused by the irrational state policy of supporting families with many children in which parents are not held responsible for the quality of upbringing and standard of living of their children.” *Smer’s* platform in 2006 marks a significant change in approach with policies geared toward Roma inclusion.

### *Roma Issues in Political Party Platforms*

Below is a summary of Roma-related policies in mainstream party platforms. Full translations of the relevant platform sections are included as an appendix to this report.

#### Housing

The most defined housing policies were outlined in the electoral platform of SDKU, who addressed not only the existence of segregated settlements, but offered measures to improve Roma housing such as the need for recipients of social housing to participate in the construction of their home. As urged by NRG in their advocacy efforts, SDKU, KDH, SMER and HzDS supported the construction of apartments for socially disadvantaged groups in their election platforms.

#### Education

While not singling out Roma students, the HzDS and SKDU developed policies to assist children from disadvantaged environments. The HzDS offered detailed policies on pre-school education, including making it accessible and free of charge, and compulsory for children from at-risk groups. The SDKU proposed policies such as scholarships to primary and secondary schools for disadvantaged students, support for pre-school education, subsidization of boarding costs, and

the use of assistant teachers. The HzDS, SDKU, KDH and SMK, all identified the need for integrated and quality education for Roma in their platforms.

### Employment

Both SDKU and HzDS offered well-developed policies to address Roma unemployment. The SDKU outlined a new “labor inter-market” policy designed to increase the employment of disadvantaged groups. As part of the program, the government would subsidize workers who accept a job paying less than the minimum living wage by providing them with social benefits to bridge the gap. The HzDS supported programs for additional training for unskilled Roma in segregated settlements, assistance to Roma willing to move to find work, and the expansion of welfare work programs. *Smer* and the SMK briefly mentioned the need for improved employment opportunities, but did not articulate specific policies.

### *Post-Election Advocacy*

Following the creation of the Smer-HzDS-SNS government, NRG and its more than 50 NGO partners renewed their advocacy efforts to ensure that the policies outlined in *Smer’s* platform are implemented and minority rights protected. To launch its post-election work, NRG and its partners held a press conference to publicize an open letter to *Smer* and its government. The letter encouraged continued dialogue with Roma civil society and the inclusion of Roma-specific employment, anti-discrimination, housing and education policies in the government’s program and mission statement. NRG’s efforts and its national media presence captured the attention of the government. NRG was granted meetings with several senior government officials, including Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and Minorities Dusan Caplovic. The new official governance program, which was released in August, cites Roma inclusion as one of its priorities and contains many Roma-related policies outlined in NRG’s open letter. Translated excerpts of the program are included as an appendix to this report.

### **Vote-Buying in Roma Communities**

In the run-up to the elections, NRG organized the anti-vote buying campaign “*Let’s not turn votes into goods!*” The campaign included an election monitoring effort in Romani settlements on election day and during the campaign period, an open letter to parties encouraging them to campaign responsibly and a code of ethics for free and fair campaigning. The code was signed by the SDKU, KDH, Civic Conservative Party (OKS), and Mission 21–New Christian Democracy. This is the first code of ethics for campaigning in minority communities. NRG organized the initiative to address the fear of many Roma activists that some politicians would take advantage of marginalized communities to secure political victory.

Despite this initiative, NRG, along with the NGO Civic Eye, observed unethical behavior and criticized the parties’ attempts to buy Roma votes. Candidates primarily offered money or alcohol, but also offered food, coffee, and cigarettes to Roma in exchange for their votes. Most of these activities took place in the Spis and Kosice regions. Although unethical, such behavior is not illegal according to law. Generally, the vote-buying was conducted by individual candidates



trying to secure preferential votes, and was not sanctioned or organized by the national or regional branches of political parties.

A Free Forum candidate, for example, is alleged to have offered 100 (Sk) for a single vote in the municipalities of Bystrany and Zehra in the Spis region. He obtained 165 out of 167 Free Forum votes (53 percent of all the cast votes), and also received a suspiciously high percentage of votes in the villages of Markusovce, Novacany, Turna and Bodvou, Velka Ida, and Jasov in the Kosice district. An SDKU candidate is alleged to have offered sausages, coffee, and cigarettes to Roma voters in Krompachy. Candidates from HZD, SMER, HzDS, and SNS also offered discount checks up to 5000 Sk if elected.

Only one small political party organized vote-buying as a part of its general parliamentary campaign. *Nadej* (Hope) had a large organized vote-buying campaign. Days prior to the election, *Nadej* advertised in regional newspapers that they would pay 100 Sk for every vote cast for the party. Party workers stood in front of polling stations offering the money in many Roma settlements in Spis and Kosice. Some of party members tried to intimidate and control voters through the use of marked ballots. According to NRG, *Nadej* activists were active in Letanovce and Spisska Nova Ves as well as other villages in the Spis and Kosice regions.

Vote-buying tactics were effective in Roma communities. *Nadej* received only 0.63 percent (14,595) of votes nationwide. In some villages with high percentages of Roma *Nadej* achieved much better local results.

**Local results for *Nadej* in districts with a high concentration of Roma voters:**

<b>Districts</b>	<b>Vote %</b>	<b>Number of Votes</b>
Kosice (multiple districts)	3.36%	1512
Backovik	22.9%	33
Boliarov	14.41%	31
Drienovec	29.3%	229
Jasov	31.25%	316
Kecerovce	27.4%	202
Medzev	15.35%	180
Letanovce	4.94%	32
Betlanovce	15.31	34

The phenomenon of buying Romani votes occurred only in the poorest Romani communities in the Spiš, Prešov and Košice regions. In some other localities in western Slovakia with a high percentage of Roma (Zlate Klasy, Samorin, Dunajska Luzna, Skalica) candidates did not attempt to buy votes.

**Conclusions**

*Romani parties are not currently viable at the national level*

As highlighted by the choice of Romani parties not to contest the 2006 parliamentary elections, Roma parties are not in a position to gain representation on the national level. This can be attributed to multiple factors:

- Romani political parties lack the organization and experience to run professional national campaigns. Prior to the required re-registration of political parties in 2005, the majority of Roma parties existed only on paper. Currently, the only functioning Romani parties are RIS and ROI, the latter of which failed to re-register in 2005 as required by law.
- Slovakia's single electoral district and nation-wide five percent threshold pose severe challenges for Roma, as they are geographically concentrated in central and eastern Slovakia.
- Ethnicity is not a decisive factor for Romani voters when they cast their vote. While there is no exit polling to detail which parties Romani voters supported in these elections, NDI's polling in 2005 on the political attitudes of Roma in Slovakia confirmed the tendency of Roma to support mainstream parties. When asked if they preferred to support Roma or non-Roma parties, only 5.8 percent of respondents said they favored Roma parties, compared to 55 percent who preferred mainstream parties.

Given these challenges and voter preferences, Romani parties and politicians would be best served to cooperate with mainstream parties rather than run as independent Romani parties.

*Romani candidates are not in a position to run successful campaigns on the national level*

While some Romani politicians are in the process of strengthening their relationships with mainstream parties, they are still not in a position to negotiate for top positions on candidate lists. Candidates can attempt to win preferential votes to boost their position on a party ticket, but this is difficult for Romani candidates, because as previously mentioned, they cannot rely solely on Romani votes.

Roma place a high level of importance on a candidate's reputation in his or her local community, making it hard for a relatively unknown Roma candidate to launch a national campaign. While there is no public opinion research on what influenced voters' choices in 2006, NDI's polling showed that in the previous parliamentary elections, reputation was the single most important factor to Roma voters when they decided for whom to vote. Approximately 36 percent of respondents cited reputation as the most decisive factor, with a party or candidate's program ranking second as the top choice of approximately 19 percent of those polled.

Roma are not a homogenous community and are traditionally gathered in local communities and family clans. They feel a close affiliation with their own family, clan or local group, but do not have strong bonds with other Roma communities or the same level of respect for representatives from other regions. In practice, this means that a Rom from one municipality would not vote for a Romani candidate from another municipality simply because he/she is Roma.

To build their reputation and name recognition, Roma candidates must work to expand personal contacts with local Romani representatives and through them earn the trust of the voters. Regional elections are a natural first step for Romani politicians with national political ambitions. As a regional MP, Romani activists would have strong competencies to address the

most pressing Roma issues, gain region-wide recognition and build leverage outside of their home region.

### *Roma voters continue to be manipulated*

While generally elections in Slovakia are free and fair, as discovered through NRG's monitoring of select polling stations in the parliamentary elections, vote-buying is still prevalent in poor Roma communities in central and eastern Slovakia. NRG and Civic Eye already have plans to conduct targeted election monitoring during the December 2006 local elections and promote a code of ethics for campaigning in minority communities among political parties.

To help curtail vote-buying on the part of individual candidates seeking preferential votes, political parties should take a stronger stance against vote-buying. The parties should monitor the actions of their candidates more closely and institute penalties for unethical campaign behavior.

### *Romani civil society is increasing its influence and visibility on the national level*

The elections showcased the unprecedented advocacy efforts of Romani NGOs, in particular the New Roma Generation. Through its variety of activities, NRG was able to encourage a number of mainstream parties to address Roma-related policies in their election platforms.

In this election cycle Romani activists also proved that they can work together. Following the elections, NRG and the Simecka Foundation assembled more than 50 NGOs that endorsed an open letter to the new government encouraging continued dialogue with Roma civil society and the inclusion of Roma-specific employment, anti-discrimination, housing and education policies in the government's program and mission statement. This type of broad cooperation among Romani activists around shared priorities is a new and positive development in Slovakia.

Romani civil society should build on its momentum and increased influence to encourage the government to pursue policies for Roma inclusion. In addition to continued advocacy, Romani activists could build their influence through the creation of think tanks able to develop and research policies, analyze the impact of proposed legislation, and comment on the legislative process.

### **NDI's Roma Political Participation Initiative in Slovakia**

Since 2004, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has worked with Roma in Slovakia as a part of a regional initiative to increase Roma political participation. Through individual skills training, public opinion research, issue advocacy, and mainstream party engagement, the Institute seeks to give Roma the political skills to become strong political leaders able to competitively contest elections and advocate for the needs of their communities more effectively.

To ensure that Roma issues were addressed during the campaign, NDI assisted program participants in generating consultative relationships with major political parties and intensifying political and public pressure to acknowledge and address Roma policy priorities. The Institute

worked extensively with the New Roma Generation, providing strategic guidance to NRG as it developed a code of ethics, organized and recruited election monitors, networked with political parties, and drafted an open letter to all participating political parties on the importance of including Roma issues in party platforms. The Institute also conducted targeted campaign training for Jozef Cervenak and the Roma Civic Alliance (ROI) as it forged its cooperation with *Smer*, and Roma candidate with Free Forum Bohus Kotlar.

A number of participants in the current round of Institute's political leadership training series were active in the parliamentary elections. Four participants—Peter Hugya, Milan Pesta, Mikulas Estocak and Viera Kroskenova—were election commissioners in their home municipalities. Other participants worked on the campaigns of different mainstream parties, including Franitsek Godla (*Ano*) Maria Pulisova (HZD), Maria Medvecka (HZD) and Laco Duda (Free Forum). Almost all participants monitored for vote-buying in Roma communities on election day.

Graduates of the first two rounds of NDI's political leadership training series were also very active in the election campaign. The leadership of NRG is composed of NDI graduates, who formed the organization while participating in NDI's program and graduate Jozef Cervenak served as a senior member of *Smer's* campaign team, playing a large role in the incorporation of Roma inclusion policies in the party's election program.

NDI's work with Roma in Slovakia is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). For more information on NDI's Roma program please contact Zuzana Dzurikova in Slovakia at [zdzurikova@ndi.org](mailto:zdzurikova@ndi.org) or Megan Volk Unangst in Washington DC at [munangst@ndi.org](mailto:munangst@ndi.org).

## APPENDIX I

### EXTRACTS FROM ELECTION PROGRAMS OF POLITICAL PARTIES DEALING WITH SPECIFIC PROBLEMS OF ROMANI COMMUNITIES

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2006

#### **HZDS (The Movement for the Democratic Slovakia- Peoples Party)**

##### SOCIAL POLICY

“We shall pay special attention to education and training of job seekers in the labor market. Our party will support further expansion of welfare work as an important tool of active labor market policy, especially in regions with a high unemployment rate.”

“The aim of ĽS-HZDS is to increase the poverty allowance so it can reach, together with other benefits, the minimum subsistence figure, mainly by introducing a new category of poverty allowance recipients for individuals or couples with one or more children, where at least one of these children must be a university student. We consider the policy of supporting the increase of activity allowance for citizens in poverty as a positive step.”

“We will support programs for additional training of unskilled Roma living in segregated settlements, as well as the assignment of financial means within the active employment policy for Roma businessmen, who will find job opportunities or provide jobs for other individuals, or a group of economically active people. We also want to support young Roma, who are willing to move to find work in other regions where industrial parks are to be built and new important investors arrive. And we will also support the self-made construction of apartments of a different standard with the help of Roma workforce.”

##### EDUCATION

- To enforce full integration of pupils with special educational needs and pupils from a handicapped environment
- Measures against social selectiveness

“We will support pre-school facilities so that pre-school education, including preparatory classes, is generally accessible and free of charge, as it should become compulsory for kids with recognized potential threats (such as social and cultural handicaps, health handicaps, or learning and behavioral disorders). We shall enforce state’s shared responsibility in co-financing.”

#### **KDH (The Christian Democratic Movement)**

##### Family

“Through the Public Fund for Housing Development we will increase the support for the construction of rental apartments, particularly the support of social housing for risk groups, where either one or both parents are unemployed.”

## SOCIAL POLICY

“We shall pay greater attention to social issues governed by regional authorities, especially those related to families within marginalized groups.”

“We will propose and change the system of social aid allowances to reduce poverty especially among long-term unemployed and one-parent families. We will focus on decreasing the unemployment rate. Unemployment is the main risk factor of poverty, threatening mainly people with insufficient education and those who live in the poorest regions.”

“In the area of social aid, we will create a favorable environment for private entities operating in the social sphere (both commercial and non-profit) to implement natural (voluntary) forms of solidarity. We shall put our effort into a more accentuated implementation of material, rather than financial, forms of aid, as well as into conditioning the receipt of benefits for employable citizens by activities (work for the community and voluntary work).”

“In supporting handicapped groups we shall focus on addressing aid to integrate them fully into life and society through proactive programs aimed at: securing equal access to education (e.g. also through pilot projects of ‘basic boarding schools’), as well as at increasing qualifications and skills necessary for the positioning on the current labor market, and finally, at improving work coordination of relevant ministerial departments in this area. We will support the improvement of housing in segregated Roma settlements (basic infrastructure) and a deeper involvement of church, missionaries and third sector institutions in solving the Roma issues. Fighting total poverty, in collaboration with self-governing units and non-profit sector, we shall support the establishment of appropriate social network (asylum centers, shelters) for the most socially challenged groups, so that no one remains ‘homeless’”.

## **SMER-SD (SMER- The Social Democracy)**

### SOCIAL POLICY

#### The reform of social aid

- Focus on solidarity, eradication of social exclusion and poverty, and to create conditions for a decent standard of living, especially for handicapped groups and elderly people
- Fight for social inclusion and against poverty shall be the key priorities of the party SMER – Social Democracy, while maintaining interdisciplinary, multisectoral, cross-industrial and multi-level approach in solving the issues.
- With the aim to eradicate poverty, the party SMER –Social Democracy will:

- enlarge the scope and increase the quality of social work;
- adjust the parameters for benefits and allowances in poverty aid;
- restructure and adjust the minimum subsistence figure, so it can truly reflect basic vital needs;
- transfer responsibilities regarding poverty to municipalities, while regulating payment of poverty allowances and introducing non-cash aid, as well as significantly adjusting the possibility of using an extraordinary beneficiary when providing poverty aid;
- secure full compliance with the ‘subsidiarity principle’, as well as material, technical, personal and financial support for exercising the responsibilities transferred to regional self-governing units;
- in order to find a systematic solution for the social situation of handicapped people, SMER – Social Democracy will adjust the system of state aid to people in social need, which will be based on addressed financial benefits and social services. In this context, we shall develop social ‘entrepreneurship’ based on a non-profit approach and create a legislative environment to support and develop social services;

SMER –Social Democracy does not want and cannot resign to solve acute problems concerning the status of the Roma minority. The right-wing government has, through its hypocrite policy, deepened social exclusion of this minority and deferred any remarkable shift in the quality of their living.

SMER –Social Democracy perceives the status of the Roma minority as being incompatible with the status of the Slovak Republic in the European Union. Without an active aid from the state and European institutions, there is no solution for this issue. Current initiatives are not able to solve the key problem – the integration of Roma into Slovak society. Most of the activities have no general effect, they are merely efforts to reduce social impacts. SMER –Social Democracy will initiate the elaboration of a project, which will introduce systematic and complex solutions.

SMER –Social Democracy is aware of the fact that this is a difficult, long-lasting issue, but will find ways how to support it, in collaboration with other political parties. It is also important to have representative Roma organizations to participate in the process of finding relevant measures and decisions, always following the fundamental principle of no rights without duties and responsibilities.

SMER –Social Democracy will as well be ready to assess proposals of Roma organizations and to accept following measures:

- to consistently link a significant part of the state social aid with the Roma minority to satisfy specific duties, especially the duty to secure a due care for pre-school and school children (including school attendance), the duty to be active in job seeking and in the appropriate care for the environment where this minority is living;

- to amend the legislation concerning material motivation for those Roma minority representatives who will be active in getting jobs;
- to start making changes in the ownership of properties in Roma settlements;
- to establish regional offices with relevant responsibilities;
- to carry out audits of specific projects concerning aid to Roma minority in order to stop inefficient spending;
- to support the construction of social housing assuming active collaboration of stakeholders from the Roma minority;
- to initiate the amendment of the so-called 'anti-discriminatory act' in order to achieve compliance of positive discrimination with the ruling of the Slovak Supreme Court.

#### REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SMER –Social Democracy foresees Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov as particularly problematic regions. SMER –Social Democracy will enforce approval governmental projects for development in these 'risky' regions.

SMER –Social Democracy will promote the establishment of a coordinating body at the governmental level to fight poverty and secure development in regions that are lagging behind.

#### **SMK (The Hungarian Coalition Party)**

##### EQUAL RIGHTS TO ROMA

SMK wants all the Slovak citizens, including Roma, to have equal opportunities secured for finding their place in the society via proactive (supporting) programs aimed at:

- Securing equal access to quality education;
- Improving qualifications and skills necessary for the positioning on the labor market;
- Increasing living standards.

Special attention needs to be paid to improve the quality of housing, exclusively in Roma settlements.

We believe that solving the issue of Roma settlements will be the key element of Roma policy in the upcoming period.

It is vital to enforce measures to support employment of Roma in civil and state service, as well as in the private sector. We believe that the state should not revoke the creation of new job opportunities for socially challenged groups, especially the Roma, as well as to solve the issue of housing.



It is necessary to continue the project of Roma assistants in schools, health care and social spheres.

SMK will continuously fight against all forms of discrimination, even by strengthening competencies and capacities of special institutions, so that protection against discrimination is available anywhere in the country. Therefore, it is important to increase and reinforce competencies of the governmental Agent for the Roma minority.

### **SDKU-DS (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union)**

#### EDUCATION:

“We will put into practice the a system of education and support for children from disadvantaged environment, not only by subsidizing of boarding, scholarships, utilization of the institute of assistant teachers and zero classes, but also by significant support of pre-school education, accessibility and quality of which must become a priority. That is why we will elaborate proposal for introduction of gradual compulsory school education in last year of nursery schools so that children would be well prepared for primary school. Because only the country that gives an opportunity to use the maximum of potential to all children (and adults) regardless social environment that they come from can be successful.”

#### SOCIAL AFFAIRS:

-creation of the “labour inter-market”

“Therefore we see a role of social policy in support of those who don’t work so that they aren’t only passive receivers of social security support and so that they aren’t excluded from classic labour market. Because for society as whole it is more just – and for each individual it is better – if she or he works, creates worth, and not if she or he just get social security support for non-activity.

Therefore our aim is to support employment and to decrease unemployment through utilization of a system that will guarantee sufficient income by the combination of social security support and wages. Citizen will accept any work while the state will guarantee that his or her net income cannot fall under minimum income (living wage), or any other set amount. In this way each citizen will take part in creation of national fortune, improve his or her personal dignity and keep real work habits, and increase living standards more than one that is based on life from social security contributions.

Such a “labour inter-market” is successfully functioning – in smaller or larger scope – in all countries of EU; except for that in Slovakia there is real social demand for it. Labour inter-market enables development of employment, development of social services for family, spare time and developing needs for children and aged people, harmonization of parental, school or work duties in accordance with local needs, development of civic society, development of tourism, protection of the environment, improvement of the quality of infrastructure but also better protection of historical sights and monuments. New model of labour support will create

jobs mainly for long-term unemployed, for citizens with low qualification, graduates, older citizens, parents that are taking care of children and therefore they didn't come back to labour market, handicapped citizens.

We will also increase protection of low-income families – those families and workers that are more threatened by the loss of a job – by projects of employment services, by activation of unemployed, by support of their further qualification, by support of life-long and integrated education, by support of opportunities for employment of endangered groups.

#### SOCIAL INTEGRATION:

We will support socially endangered families not only by utilization of a system of family and social services, but also by utilization of special tools aimed to increasing the level of education. Such tools will be e.g. scholarships on primary and secondary schools for children from socially weaker families (*see 1.2.1 Primary and Secondary Education*). School attendance as well as results at school would be supported also through community social work and fieldwork in cooperation with communities, self-government and non-governmental organizations.

One of the most serious problems of both social and economic policy is the position of the Roma community and existence of segregated settlements. We consider as indispensable to protect families and individuals from this group of our citizens, but at the same time we respect experience that says that without their own activity, strive for education, strive for integration into society it is hardly and not-systematically solvable. We see the solution of this situation in purposeful and coordinated assistance with utilization of EU tools and resources, in transfer of responsibility under resort of labour, social affairs and family, implementation of model of labour inter-market, suitable housing policy and field social work so that it all would gradually contribute to diminishing segregated settlements.

#### REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

In regions with higher proportion of unqualified labour force and consequently higher unemployment rate we will concentrate tools of social integration (mechanism of labour inter-market, support of social and community work of municipality, education activities) for improving their qualification, and for human resources development.

#### HOUSING:

“We will continue supporting the construction of apartment houses and for socially disadvantaged groups that are taking part in constructions and maintaining of these houses. “

#### **SNS (The Slovak National Party)**

- Minority rights

SNS is convinced that the Slovak Republic guarantees minority rights for Roma ethnic groups as on the level of international community standards.

SNS considers the particular attention and consequent solving of Roma issues in accordance with the EU international law standards and the relevant Slovak legislation as being warranted.

SNS believes that in order to tackle Roma social issues efficiently it is neither acceptable to reduce them into minority nor racial problems. On the contrary, to associate racial background with social handicap is in fact one of the basic manifestations of racism. Based on this, we are against the positive discrimination of Roma people in the social area. We see a successful solution in creating effective and systematic tools of the state's social policy that need to become more efficient in relation to all socially challenged and poor citizens of the Slovak Republic.

SNS will initiate the actions of the governmental Agent for Roma issues to be directed towards gradual solutions of the issues concerning Roma settlements, their backwardness and crime rate in collaboration with numerous Roma civil movements, and their voluntary and charity work in the settlements.

## **HZD (The Movement for Democracy)**

### ROMA IN SLOVAKIA

According to official statistics, there are 380 to 400.000 people claiming to be a part of the Roma ethnic group, whereas the Roma officials speak of 600.000 people, and half of them are unemployed. Only 10% have the chance get a job. Almost 200.000 live in settlements under horrific conditions. This constantly unresolved issue is seriously threatening not only the ethnic group, but the majority of citizens as well. After 15 years of 'reforms' we have reached the existential boundary of the solution. The role of state was to prepare Roma to changes in the social security system. We are now short of social, integration and educational programs for Roma. In our program's objectives, we rely on transferring this issue from the government to municipalities. However, we are convinced that main responsibility for solving and resolving this serious social problem is the Slovak government.

### Solution

HZD shall enforce specific solutions in order to help this ethnic group, but without future negatives impact on majority citizens. We are ready to discuss a very sensitive method of positive discrimination – we must consider the fact that this is a specific ethnic group, therefore it requires non-standard procedures. We understand that without the collaboration of Roma activists no solutions will be efficient. Only by the involvement of state (in strategy, concept, methodology, financial means), self-governing units, Roma activists and volunteers are we capable of finding solutions to this serious social and demographic problem. HZD is committed to take a reasonably responsible approach to these solutions.

## APPENDIX II

### DECLARATION OF THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT 2006

EXTRACTS FROM THE DECLARATION OF THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT DEALING WITH SPECIFIC PROBLEMS OF ROMANI COMMUNITIES

#### 2.6 Housing Construction and Regional Development

##### Housing Construction

The Government will create conditions for construction of social service facilities for the elderly and severely handicapped and for marginalized population groups.

##### Regional Policy

To an increasingly greater extent, the social and economic problems of the Roma community will be addressed in the development of regions, with an emphasis on the comprehensive nature of the measures adopted to comprehensively respond to the broader area in which these communities are located.

#### 3. Social Policy

The Government's priorities include, besides initiating the knowledge of economy and prosperity, also making the reform changes socially bearable, achieving social stability, and maintaining social peace. All corrections and changes to the present social system will be carried out with this objective in mind, particularly eliminating its non-systematic, destabilizing and discriminating elements.

##### 3.1 Employment Policy

The Government will adopt vigorous measures to enforce a programmatic and projective approach, focused on strengthening social inclusion, prevention of exclusion from the labor market, and support of disadvantaged groups' integration in employment, particularly concerning graduates, persons with disabilities, mothers with children, and persons close to retirement age. Special attention will be paid to the support of marginalized Roma communities' members; reduction of regional differences in employment, unemployment, and labor productivity; particularly in regions lagging behind with high unemployment. We will also strengthen the scope and financial provisions for programs and projects.

Within the framework of active labor market policy, we will specifically address the support of employing graduates, namely by supporting employers with incentives as a form of relief on mandatory payments when hiring, particularly to support acquiring practical experience and good working habits. Special measures will be focused on increasing the employment opportunities of young people without completed elementary education, in the form of 'second-chance education'.

When addressing these problems, the Government will work closely with the social partners and with territorial self-government bodies. In areas with high unemployment and a poor population, the Government will adopt projects supporting creation of new jobs, projects and programs to acquire and maintain working habits, particularly for the marginalized groups.

The hiring of poorly qualified long-term unemployed persons will be supported by the Government through a compensation benefit scheme. It will be designed to increase the attractiveness of employment for low-paid jobs, as well. Additionally, new working programs for the unemployed will be introduced, aimed at increasing their living standard.

Provision of benefits in the field of social assistance will continue to be conditional upon the active involvement of the unemployed in the activation works.

....

Employment support policies will be enforced with an emphasis on the principles of equal opportunities while consistently ensuring the prohibition of discrimination of persons based on gender, religion or faith, racial origin, national or ethnic origin, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

### **Support for Social Inclusion**

The Government's priority will be to reduce, as efficiently as possible, the extent of Slovakia's poverty rate, which is one of the highest among EU states. The Government rejects the claims that deepening poverty is the result of individual failure. It will therefore provide maximum support to combine the responsibility of each individual's destiny and that of his or her family, with social solidarity and assistance from the state, territorial self-government bodies, churches and religious associations, institutions, and civil society, including self-support groups.

In connection with addressing the poverty issue, the following concepts will have to be defined in legislation: minimum living allowance, social minimum, condition of material need, condition of social need, and social housing.

The Government will reconsider the establishment of the subsistence minimum so that subsistence minimum will be the basic amount from which the measures of financial nature are derived, reflecting the actual basic subsistence needs and, at the same time, the efficient means to resolve situations requiring financial intervention.

The Government will reconsider the parameters of the benefit and contributions towards addressing material need so that the assistance is adequate to basic subsistence needs while maintaining the principle of dedicated provision and subsidiary, motivational elements aimed at activation, and joint responsibility of individuals and families in dealing with their unfavorable situation and poverty prevention.

To eliminate the causes of poverty and social exclusion of individuals and groups, including marginalized Roma communities, the Government will adopt measures with an emphasis on creating conditions for implementation of non-financial measures such as social services, social

and legal protection measures, social guardianship, community development, support of local partnership of social inclusion, subsidy programs to improve equal opportunities, motivation and support for access to education and health care also with the objective of realistic strengthening of social cohesion. At the same time, the Government will consequently require adherence to the principle of subsidiary and performance of competences by all responsible entities.

The Government will pay due attention to improving quality in the social work field, support professionalism and increasing the status of field social workers.

The Government will create the legislative environment for the development of social services, which will guarantee their beneficiaries dignified living conditions and will be aimed at their activation. The Government will ensure the interlinking of social services and health care and modify the system of their funding. The Government will make an effort to create the conditions for the development of businesses in the field of social services, based on the non-profit principle. Special attention will be paid to the elderly and to the disabled who are dependent on assistance from another person, so that they can remain in the family environment as long as possible and it will make an effort to improve the financial situation of their care provider.

The Government will ensure the handing over of competencies in the area of material need to the municipalities as the transferred performance of state administration, limiting the general payment of the benefit in material need and introducing addressed and cash free assistance, while at the same time also making more prominent provisions for the possibility of using the institution of special beneficiary in provision of the assistance in material need.

### **3.5 Support of Gender Equality**

The Government when implementing its policy shall strictly observe the principle of the same treatment of men and women, and implement steps to eliminate any forms of discrimination. Inclusive in this are reasons of sex, religious conviction or belief, racial origin, national or ethnic origin, disabled from the aspect of their health, as well as ageism or sexual orientation.

### **3.6 Institutional Effectiveness**

Completion of the interconnected support information systems in the provision of individual types of services and creation of the quality standards for the services provided and further education of employees as well as of field social workers will increase the level of services provided in the framework of the entire system of the social sphere.

### **Regional System of Education**

....

Elementary education is "the gate of entry" into the system of education. The level and quality of secondary schools, apprenticeship schools and other higher learning institutes depends on its level. The Government will create a legislative framework for the reorganization of the content of instruction and education at elementary and secondary schools. The Government will support

the pre-school preparation of children. It will assess the exclusion of kindergartens from the legal Act on School Establishments and its insertion into the School Act as the first level of the system of schools. While doing so, it proceeds from the knowledge that the kindergarten is irreplaceable in preparation of children from the cognitive, physical, social and emotional aspects. It plays an important role for children from a socially poorer family environment and for children with special needs.

## **6.4 Local and Minority Culture**

The Government will provide for the support of the culture of national minorities and ethnic groups and disadvantaged groups of citizens by means of a system of grants. It will at the same time also support the development of the Slovak culture in territories with mixed languages.

## **7.1 Democratic State**

The Government acknowledges the solution of the Roma problems is its priority. It will support and implement all programs of development with the objective to improve the life of the Roma and integration of the Roma community into society, while efficiently using funds that are target-oriented in the fields of education, culture, health care and social care, infrastructure and housing.

The Government shall prepare the continuation of the strategy for solution of the Roma national minority. In the interest of more operative efficiency of implementation of the respective intents it will finalize building of specialized and specific capacities directly in those regions where citizens of the Roma nationality predominantly live. 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 one side and political will on the other.

## **2002 DECLARATION OF THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT**

### **Democratic State**

...

The Government sees the resolution of the Roma issue as a matter of priority and will continue to support specific development programmes and provide appropriate funding to ensure that the situation and integration of Roma into the society improve. The Government will deliver a continuation of strategy to address the situation of the Roma community and complete the expert and specific capacities directly in regions with large Roma populations in the interest of reinforcing the efficiency of implementation of individual objectives. The Government will continue to implement successful projects in the field of education, culture, housing and infrastructure, as well as in the social area, while paying attention to the aspects of harmonic co-existence between Roma and non-Roma citizens.

...

### **Regional education**

The Government will promote pre-school education of children as a service to the family, while giving priority emphasis to the utilisation of pre-school education in the integration of Roma pupils and other disadvantaged groups.

The Government will also create conditions to provide education in mother tongue for the Russyn and Roma minorities and, at the same time, ensure that the standard of state language training improves. The Government will renew minority and church education units at the Ministry of Education.