



ROMA REGIONAL NEWSLETTER

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In 2004, NDI launched a National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funded program in Slovakia and Bulgaria to increase Roma participation in electoral politics and representative government. The program has now expanded to Romania and the Western Balkans. This newsletter highlights important news from NDI's program participants and Roma activists from throughout the region.

RPPI ADVOCATES ETHNIC DATA COLLECTION

By **Peter Pollak**

Roma Public Policy Institute

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The Roma Public Policy Institute (RPPI), in cooperation with the Milan Simecka Foundation (MSF) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), organized the seminar “Ethnic Data Collection as a Public Policy Tool” at the Slovak parliament. The seminar was held under the auspices of the Committee for Human Rights, Minorities and Status of Women to increase awareness of and build public support for the need to collect ethnic data in Slovakia.

Presently, data is lacking on the problematic issues that challenge Romani communities in Slovakia. To solve these challenges, ethnic data is critical to determining how many people need help and who they are. RPPI initiated this debate about ethnic data collection following statements by public representatives that a lot of money had been invested into projects on Roma without any positive effects.

Experience indicates that the absence of ethnic data hinders the design, monitoring and evaluation of various measures for improving the living conditions of Roma. Clear indicators are a necessary prerequisite for effective targeting of funds and evaluation of programs’ effects on marginalized Romani communities in areas such as employment, housing, education and healthcare. We are currently unable to determine the number of uneducated children or the number of Romani children in special schools, or how many Roma have no access to running water or are unemployed. Prior to the upcoming new financing period of European structural funds which prioritizes Roma issues, we must find a better way to define target groups and evaluate individual projects. Despite the fact that collection of ethnic data evokes negative historical connotations for many Roma – and was fatal for many of them during World War II - RPPI believes that it could be one of the tools capable of improving the reliability of statistics on Roma. According to the last census, from 2001, Slovakia has no more than 90,000 Roma, but the real estimates are much higher.

RPPI, together with its partners, believes that broader public discussion on ethnic data collection will be initiated in Slovakia and will result in suggestions for collecting ethnic data without compromising the protection of personal data. Security measures will be necessary in any ethnic data collection program in order to prevent misuse of information. From this perspective, RPPI is very pleased with the resolution adopted unanimously by the Committee demanding that Deputy Prime Minister Dusan Caplovic allocate financial resources for an interdisciplinary working group on ethnic data collection.

Save the Date

Advanced Roma Political Leadership Academy

**January 22-25
Belgrade, Serbia**

Public Policy & Project Development



Left, a panel of speakers, including (from left to right) Peter Pollak, Daniel Skobla of the UNDP, Laco Oravec of MSF, and state school inspector Anna Dluhosova (not pictured) present policies on ethnic data collection from across Europe to MPs and government officials.

ROMA NGOS PROMOTE ELECTORAL CODE OF CONDUCT

Throughout May 2008, as a response to early parliamentary elections, NDI ran a campaign entitled “WE CAN AND WE MUST – Fair Elections 2008”. This campaign started with a ceremony at which 36 leaders of political parties, including five Romani political party leaders, signed a code of conduct. Following the signing ceremony, NDI launched a high-profile media campaign involving newspaper ads, over 4000 television ads, billboards throughout the country and over 100 interviews in both national and local media outlets. In addition, NDI distributed promotional materials in eight languages including Romani.

NDI staff also conducted a field campaign, supported by parliament’s 65 constituency office assistants, to promote the code of conduct to party members and supporters, students, and marginalized groups. As part of this campaign, NDI and its partners held more than 500 meetings and events throughout the country with substantial support from the international community including more than eight ambassadors from various European embassies. These events not only introduced the communities to the electoral code of conduct but also included information sessions regarding voting rights, documentation requirements, and prohibitions against vote-buying and other illegal activities.

A significant number of the meetings focused on women, youth, and first-time voters in Romani communities. NDI partnered with local Roma and women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs,) including the Association of Roma Women—Daja, the Association of Roma Women—Esma, and the Association for Youth and Women—Luludi, to lead Roma-targeted meetings in municipalities in Skopje and eastern Macedonia including the Suto Orizari municipality, Topana, Dukjandzik, Ciglana, Gjorce Petrov, Zlokukjani, Delcevo, and Stip.

At meetings that did not specifically focus on Roma, NDI and its local partners took steps to ensure that the Roma community was represented. These efforts resulted in significantly reduced voting problems among the Roma population both in terms of pre-election incidents and on voting day. The elections also resulted in the appointment of the first Romani minister, although unfortunately only one Romani member of parliament was elected as compared to two in the last mandate.



Above, Romani women participate in a meeting in Dukjandzik, Macedonia hosted by NDI and local partners to promote the code of conduct ahead of 2008 parliamentary elections. Below, Roma attend a similar meeting in Ciglana. The code of conduct was translated into Romani, and meetings to explain the code were held in conjunction with local Romani organizations.



Post-Elections, Roma See Continued Challenges*

“Even though the Romani political block acted together, the power of the whole block did not appear greater than the sum of its parts. This problem was specific to Roma and largely due to pre-election negotiations that were done individually. This only shows that the Romani political block’s biggest problem is its disunity, despite an appearance of a unified front for the benefit of the community.”

“The participation by all six Romani parties in one coalition that consisted of 21 parties made it seem like the Romani parties have solved their biggest problem – the problem of unity. But a very important point is the question: Who has gathered these Romani political parties together? Why did Roma gather together and are those reasons sustainable, or just a temporary alliance for political benefit?”

“What have Romani people achieved in this election? Only one member of parliament, one minister without portfolio and one director of a state agency at the central level. All this is the result of poor coordination and non-cooperation among the parties in the coalition. This shows that Roma politicians in Macedonia are still unable to secure the representation necessary to represent their communities.”

*The comments are indicative of the majority of opinions expressed to NDI in its post-election conversations with Roma active in political parties. These comments were not made for individual attribution and do not necessarily represent the opinions of NDI.

ROMA ORGANIZE ALBANIAN INTER-CITY EXCHANGE



Above & below, Youth from Pogradec and Llakatun, Albania outline differences in the challenges and opportunities Roma face in each of their respective communities. The workshop focused on the exchange of best practices to foster greater long-term cooperation among Romani youth.



By **Adriatik Hasantari**

Roma Active Albania

Romani youth in Pogradec and Llakatun recently organized an exchange between the two cities. The exercise was designed to strengthen and broaden youth skills in arranging logistics, sharing responsibility for organizing travel, publicizing joint activities such as a friendly football match in their communities, and compiling the discussion agenda for a public seminar on issues facing Roma in both communities.

Additionally, youth discussed the broader situation of life for Roma in each community, including specific challenges faced by their towns, and the two groups' approaches to addressing these issues. Both groups agreed on the need to empower themselves within their communities in order to showcase their ideas and strategies and increase their level of influence among both local youth and older generations.

Workshop participants noticed that the youth group of Llakatun maintained effective collaboration with their municipal board and consequently held a better position in their community, whereas the youth of Pogradec had greater organizational capacity but less overall influence in the community. Members of the Llakatun group stressed the value of cooperation with and assistance from their local municipal board and advised their colleagues to expand their activities to include older generations of community members.

Youth participation in the exchange fostered important discussion, information exchange, and comparative learning between the communities' divergent experiences. But more importantly, the exchange strengthened the relations between youth activists in Llakatun and Pogradec with both groups expressing eagerness to collaborate in the future. In addition to the impact the exchange had among the youth organizers and participants, it also raised the profile of the organizers in the eyes of their communities, who now view the youth activists as capable and professional organizers who have the capacity to assist in the implementation of other activities in the community.

NGO Profile: Roma Active Albania

Roma Active Albania (RAA) is a professional NGO working to unite local Romani and Egyptian communities through cooperative networks in order to develop a movement to fight against discrimination and improve the position of these groups in society. RAA is currently implementing a three year program funded by the Dutch NGO SPOLU International Foundation as part of its larger Strengthening the Roma Voice program framework.

RAA is supporting Romani leaders and

regional networks to mobilize Romani citizens into active community development through activities such as workshops, advocacy, fieldwork, and public campaigns to build greater understanding and knowledge of Roma among the non-Roma population. As a priority, RAA is building the capacity of Roma grassroots leadership; developing representative structures to raise the Roma voice; collaborating with local and central governments to make them aware of their responsibilities towards the Roma minority; supporting coop-

eration among Romani organizations; and creating a strategy to build an Albanian grassroots Roma movement. RAA has carried out activities including small-scale projects and the establishment of local Roma boards in nine cities so far, and reached over 2600 Romani families in Tirana, Lezha, Durrës, Akerni, Llakatun, Elbasan, Pogradec, Pojan, and Mbrostar-Ura.

NDI PARTNERS REPRESENT BULGARIA AT OSCE MEETING



Above and below, Romani activists protest ethnic profiling in Italy during an OSCE convention.



Below, demonstrators in Vienna hold a sign, "I am a person" to protest a new Italian law seen as discriminatory toward Roma.



From July 10 to 11, several NDI program partners including George Krastev (from the Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate at the Council of Ministers), Deyan Kolev (from Center *Amalipe*), Nikolay Kirilov (from *Roma-Lom* Foundation), and Radostin Manov (Diverse and Equal Foundation) represented Bulgaria at the Supplementary Human Dimensions Meeting on Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration in Vienna. It was organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship. The event brought together more than 200 participants from across the OSCE region to discuss the role of local authorities in integrating Roma and to examine municipal-level best practices. Special focus was placed on ways to improve equal access of Roma to education and social services.

One of the meetings' conclusions was that OSCE participating states should step up their efforts to end widespread discrimination against Roma and Sinti. The OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti and national Roma strategies are good benchmarks for promoting integration, but better implementation is needed to bring genuine improvements to the local Roma communities in areas such as education, housing and health care. The participating states should invest efforts and funds in engaging regional and municipal authorities as well as civil society organizations and the

Roma community as equal partners in the integration process.

Roma organizations from the region took an active role in workshop discussions, preparing a joint statement to call upon participating states, the OSCE, and EU to improve policies and implementation regarding equal access of Roma and Sinti to public services. Romani civic activists also used the high profile conference to organize a side demonstration on June 11 against the ethnic profiling of Roma in Italy, which some see as a result of laws aimed at fingerprinting undocumented individuals.

The Bulgarian representatives also presented best practices and persistent problems related to Bulgarian policies and their impact on Roma integration. NDI graduate Radostin Manov presented the case of the Sofia municipal public council and its implementation of a special program for Roma integration. The Sofia municipality dedicates an allotment of its budget for this Roma program and Roma participate in this process through the public council. Recently, Roma achieved a historic victory with the election of the first Romani candidate to the Sofia municipal council. Additionally, Milen Milanov, a participant in NDI's governance training workshops, became the first Rom appointed as Deputy Mayor of a Sofia city district.

For more information on the meeting and the Bulgarian participants, please see Center *Amalipe*'s website <http://amalipe.com/en/?nav=news&id=78>.

DON'T FINGERPRINT ME!

By **Tina Tita**
Roma Access

In July, *Realitatea TV*, in partnership with Press Monitoring Agency, Romani Criss Foundation and Together Agency launched a campaign called "Put Your Fingerprint". The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of the decision by the Italian authorities to fingerprint and document Romani individuals of Romanian citizenship living in camps in Italy. The law was billed as a response to the number of undocumented and illegal migrants living in the country, and the government has argued that fingerprinting will help to ensure that Roma who are living in Italy legally will have the necessary documentation to access social services. However, many human rights organizations fear



Members of NGO Roma Access collect signatures to protest Italy's new policy of fingerprinting Roma, many of whom are Romanian immigrants.

ACADEMY BUILDS MEDIA, CRISIS COMMUNICATION SKILLS

On June 27, NDI gathered 14 Romani activists from six countries in Senec, Slovakia for a workshop on media communication. For two days, participants engaged in intensive and interactive training on public speaking and communication with the press. Led by renowned Slovak journalists Richard Direr and Nora Gubkova, the agenda emphasized practical application of media techniques. The seminar included simulation exercises to test participants' ability to respond professionally in stressful situations, effectively combat stereotypes, and avoid conflict situations.

Direr, who is the editor-in-chief for *TA3 News* in Slovakia, and Gubkova, the chief video editor for *SITA News*, designed and conducted the workshop based on their own experience. NDI began cooperating with the two journalists recently to develop the skills of long-time civic partners in Slovakia interested in taking a more prominent role on the national policy stage.

Direr and Gubkova began the workshop modules with an overview of do's and don'ts for press conferences, interviews, television debates, panels, discussions, and press releases. Following each discussion, participants had the chance to respond to on-the-spot interviews designed to off-foot them with awkward questions about a negative and prejudicial news item related to Roma. Later, Gubkova paired participants for mock television debates. In each exercise, Direr and

Gubkova developed questions and debate topics based on participant biographies to purposefully test their meddle and challenge them on issues important to them. Each simulation was videotaped and the group later watched, critiqued, and discussed each others' performances. Direr also led participants off-site to the *TA3* studio where they were able to enter a news set, sit under the bright lights, and imagine themselves as television news anchors. Participants described the training as one of the most effective workshops they had attended, particularly because of its practical focus.

From September 25 to 28, participants reassembled in Predeal, Romania for a second workshop focused on building negotiation and conflict resolution skills. Trainers for the event included Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly Stephen Farry, who participated in the negotiations leading to the 1998 Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement, and Eamon Rafter, Education Development and Training Officer at the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. Farry and Rafter led participants through interactive discussions on conflict analysis and management at the personal, community, and organizational levels. They also led a simulation exercise featuring mock negotiations between non-Roma local officials and Romani constituents over a housing dispute.



Above, Trainer Nora Gubkova (left) interviews participant Tina Tita (right). Below, Erion Jakupi (center) discusses his experiences with the media in Albania.



Below, participants Dzulieta Memedova, Dimitrinka Borisova, and Detelina Hristova sit behind the anchor's desk at the studio of TA3, Slovakia's largest national news channel.



A Romani child sports the campaign's t-shirt with the logo, "Don't fingerprint me". Similar campaigns were conducted throughout Romania by local Romani NGOs.

that the legislation has the potential to help authorities to single out the Roma minority for harassment and deportation.

On July 12 and 13, Roma ACCESS, an NGO led by NDI program graduates, initiated a similar campaign in Constanta in solidarity with the Bucharest initiative, under the slogan "Put your fingerprint, be proud you are Romanian". The campaign sought to raise awareness among both Roma and non-Roma of the racist actions against Romanians who are living in Italy. Roma ACCESS members and volunteers arranged a tent at the entrance of Mamaia resort where they collected over 1,200 signatures and fingerprints from Romanian citizens who demonstrated a strong support for their compatriots in Italy. The campaign was particularly important because it helped to bridge the Roma / non-Roma divide in responding to legislation that affects all Romanians, regardless of race.

ROMA WIN AMENDMENT TO SLOVAK LAW ON EDUCATION

By *Stano Daniel*

Roma Public Policy Institute

As a result of a series of events and high profile publications in fall 2007, the national debate on discrimination against Romani children within the Slovak education system intensified in late 2007 and early 2008. Coinciding with this debate, the government also began preparing a new law to stimulate school reform.

Unfortunately, most of the discussions pertaining to the new act took place behind closed doors, and the document made available to the public was a completed draft. As the public draft required many changes, a number of NGOs submitted

recommendations to the law. The majority of the recommendations were not implemented, leading to deteriorating communication between the authors of the bill and civil society.

From April 5 to 6, Amnesty International responded by initiating a roundtable involving representatives of Roma and pro-Roma NGOs focusing on education of Romani children. The objective of the meeting was to develop a common strategy for putting the array of recommendations from research reports into practice. As participants were already aware that it was

too late in the legislative process for radical changes, they agreed to focus only on changes that would not require large edits to the law. The group designated me to prepare a draft letter criticizing the preparation process of school reform, identifying weaknesses in the draft law, and recommending the necessary changes to ensure the availability and accessibility of

quality education to Romani children in socially excluded communities. Our letter, including six specific amendments to the draft law, was submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Education, and all members of parliament.

The Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and the Minister of Education both issued responses expressing their awareness of the problems. Nevertheless, only one out of the six recommendations - an explicit prohibition of segregation - was incorporated into the final School Act passed by parliament. Signees of the letter therefore agreed that the final Act fails to adequately secure access of Romani children to quality education and that civil society must persist in drawing public attention to the pitfalls in the Slovak school system.

Only one out of the six recommendations - the prohibition of segregation - was incorporated into the final School Act passed by parliament."

RPPI Recommendations on the School Act

- 1) *Inclusion of a specific prohibition of discrimination and segregation*
- 2) *Provision of pre-school classes and teaching assistants, in all districts in which a reasonable number of children requiring them, including Roma, are present*
- 3) *Clearly defined status of teacher assistants and the required employment of teacher assistants everywhere that they are needed*
- 4) *Definition criteria for placement of children in special schools and classes in a manner that does not leave space for arbitrary interpretation or discrimination*
- 5) *Removal of the category of "socially disadvantaged children" from the list of those with special educational needs and a decoupling of the term from mental disability*
- 6) *Composition of the structure of the curriculum committee reflective of the composition of Slovak society, including members of national minorities.*

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