



2030 M St, N.W., Fifth Floor
Washington, D.C. 20036-3306

Roma Political Participation in Romania

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NDI Assessment Team Members

Michael G. Brown
James Denton, Report Author
Vicki Robinson
Iulius Rostas
Rumyan Russinov

National Democratic Institute

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I. Introduction

Roma populations have been largely left out of political and economic transitions throughout Central and Eastern Europe, discriminated against and marginalized through poverty, social ills, and, for many Roma communities, physical isolation. If Roma are to advocate for better opportunities and solutions to their communities' problems, they will need to strengthen their level of participation in the political processes of their countries. As few Roma have political experience, they will need strategies that address both external and internal barriers to Roma political participation and the development of organized Roma political leadership.

In February and March 2003, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted assessments in Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia to analyze the salient challenges and opportunities to increase Roma political participation. Funded by the Open Society Institute (OSI) and in cooperation with OSI's Roma Participation Program and the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), this project reflects the interest of both NDI and OSI to raise the issue of Roma political participation with relevant international organizations and to take the first step toward initiating strategic blueprints for Roma communities to enhance their political participation, representation, and influence. Three separate reports will offer the key findings and recommendations of the NDI assessment team in each country; this report covers the Romania assessment.

During the two-month assessment period, NDI teams traveled to the three countries to meet with a wide range of Roma and non-Roma political and NGO leaders, elected and appointed government officials, as well as policy and opinion makers, researchers, journalists, educators, project leaders, analysts, and ordinary citizens. The group also met with representatives of international organizations active in Roma-related issues. The assessment teams spent one week in each country, visiting the capitals and other large cities, smaller towns, villages, and Roma communities and settlements. The team often divided into two groups in order to broaden its scope and perspective. The list of the meetings in Romania is found in Appendix 1.



The membership of the assessment teams varied with each country visited. Three "core team members" participated in the assessment in all three countries. Each core

team member contributed his/her experience and expertise in human rights, political organization and strategy, democratization, and Roma and related regional issues. The core team included a representative of the Open Society Institute in Budapest. In each country assessment, this core group was supported and augmented by in-country team members, including a respected Roma leader, who provided relevant experience, expertise and knowledge.

The Romania assessment was conducted from February 9-15, 2003. The team visited Bucharest, as well as Filipestii de Targ, Nocris, Ploiesti, Prahova, and Sibiu. Members of the team included Michael Brown, James Denton, Vicki Robinson, Iulius Rostas, and Rumyan Russinov, as well as local support from Vera Cimpeanu and Dana Diaconu.

II. Background

Roma issues in Romania touch upon all levels of society: political, social, educational, and economical. The challenges facing Roma are exacerbated by the poor economic conditions of the country as a whole and the lack of a coordinated response to ameliorate Roma conditions, not only by government agencies and leading political parties, but by Roma organizations as well.

Economic Conditions. Major economic challenges include low education levels within Roma communities and a high percentage of Roma workers in low-skill occupations. Roma generally work for lower than average wages as unskilled laborers in agriculture, construction, and heavy industry, such as steel production. The Roma economic situation has reflected – and been further exacerbated by – the overall economic difficulties facing the entire country. Insecurities brought on by repeated economic crises, land privatization, the shutdown of technologically obsolete basic industries, and the furlough of unskilled workers in many sectors have had a particularly deleterious impact on the Roma population. Inter-ethnic competition and prejudices towards Roma can also play a role in employment decisions, with common practice holding that, when applicants have similar skill sets, preference is given to non-Roma candidates. The National Council for Combating Discrimination has monitored cases and applied fines in certain circumstances.

Education Levels. High official levels of unemployment in Roma communities are closely related to low levels of education among Roma and persistent shortcomings in the entire educational system. Poor school attendance related to conflicts between Roma and non-Roma children and a lack of Romanian language skills, learning difficulties tied to a lack of parental support, and difficulty with such regulations as purchasing appropriate clothing have further limited already constrained education opportunities. Obstacles to education are nearly endemic in some quarters of Roma society.

Social Conditions. Social difficulties have an overall more dramatic impact on the Roma than on other communities. Poverty rates are estimated at more than twice the national average. The high levels of disease and infant and general population mortality rates are in stark contrast with the country as a whole.

An outgrowth of these factors, and one that compounds existing challenges, is the difficulty in gaining official recognition of Roma communities and citizens. Beyond the reluctance to self-identify as Roma, many Roma cannot obtain government identification documents, with 20 percent of the Roma population not having government ID cards. This causes difficulties in applying for employment, qualifying for social assistance, educational benefits, and, significantly, voter registration. A number of Roma NGOs have implemented projects aimed at issuing legal documents to Roma.

Government Response. The Constitution stipulates equality for all citizens, regardless of ethnicity. Under intense international criticism, the government has taken measures to limit discrimination against Roma and increase their opportunities. It enacted anti-discrimination legislation in August 2000, but this law was not implemented for over two years because of the failure to establish the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD), the body tasked with implementing its decisions. As this body was finally created in August 2002, reliable, independent data on its implementation is not available. According to a government report, of the 44 complaints sent to the NCCD by April 2003, four resulted in imposed sanctions. The government's efforts to link constitutional rights and legal protections have not noticeably benefited the socioeconomic situation among Roma.

A recent UNDP report found that many Roma participate in elections but few vote for Roma parties.

Political Participation. Although several Roma-based political parties emerged in the aftermath of the 1989 reforms, the political organization of Roma communities is underdeveloped. Compared to other ethnic minorities in Romania, particularly the ethnic Hungarian minority, Roma political organizations and parties are neither as powerful nor as well developed. A UNDP study shows a distrust of – and lack of support for – Roma-based NGOs, despite the fact that numerous NGOs have been formed since 1989 to represent Roma concerns.

The obstacles to broad-based Roma participation in the political arena are many. Primary among these, however, is the lack of an open and fair environment that welcomes Roma political organizing and encourages vigorous participation. While Roma-based parties and NGOs must seek the legitimate support of their own communities, Romania's mainstream political parties must be partners in activating Roma political participation.

III. Major Findings

A. The Roma Population: Size and Diversity

A basic understanding of the size, nature, and diversity of the Roma population is fundamental not only to determine the degree to which they are under-represented in government, but also to design strategies to correct this under-representation.

Roma Population Size. As in other Eastern European countries, the size of the Roma population in Romania is a subject of considerable disagreement. According to the recent national census, about 535,000 Romanians identified themselves as Roma (or less than 2.5 percent of the country's population of about 22.5 million). Although the team is unaware of any formal challenges to the census results, various government, NGO and

Given the five percent threshold for entering parliament in Romania, the relative size of the Roma is relevant when considering political strategies at the national level.

Roma political activists, researchers and social scientists, as well as international institutions, believe that this official number significantly understates the country's Roma population. Indeed, a 1994 Helsinki Commission report estimated that the Roma population exceeded 2,000,000—nearly four times the official count or about 9 percent of the country's population. The European Union estimates between 1.1 and 1.5 million Roma or about 6 percent of the total population.

With respect to this report, the explanations for the undercounting are more instructive and considerably more relevant than the actual size of the Roma population.

Political and Ethnic Identities. The Roma community's high poverty and illiteracy rates – as well as the confusion, inefficiency, and reportedly fraudulent manipulation connected to the issuance and distribution of national identity cards—undoubtedly contributed significantly to the undercounting. Some reports indicate that censors were reluctant to go to segregated residential areas consisting solely of Roma.

However, most Roma and non-Roma experts say the undercounting is mostly attributed to an undocumented but widely acknowledged practice whereby many Roma deny their ethnicity to census takers to avoid the stigma of being attached to the bottom rung of the social hierarchy. Some Roma in Transylvania were reported to have claimed status as Hungarians as a means of gaining from Hungary's laws benefiting Hungarian minorities abroad, although this was not verified by the team. While some Roma may deny their ethnicity because they consider themselves to be assimilated into society, one common belief is that many do so to enhance their prospects for an improved socioeconomic status. As one expert put it, "If Roma can 'pass' for Romanian and get a better job, why wouldn't they?"

Educated, urbanized and financially independent Roma—and those of dual ethnicity—tend to identify themselves as Romanian or non-Roma minorities.

Roma collective memory is another factor: their history of slavery, the Holocaust, and abusive confiscations of goods counts in the individual's decision to openly declare his or her ethnicity. In May 1942, the Government led by General Antonescu, organized a national census that served as a base for deporting Roma. In the minds of many Roma, their ethnicity remains a potential threat to their very survival.

Diversity and Divisions. Roma throughout the region share a common ethnicity, history and culture that can be traced back hundreds of years. In Romania, they also share

the legacy of slavery (outlawed in 1856), poverty, pervasive racial discrimination, cruelty, joblessness and dependency that continues today. However, they do not seem to share a common sense of purpose or ethnic identity in the political context, especially at the national level. Such a breakdown within an ethnic minority decreases its political leverage and representation, as well as its ability to advance public policies that expand opportunities in education, employment, and quality of life.

Political Orientation and Dependency. Though largely undeveloped, uninformed and probably tenuous, the political orientation of most Roma leans to the center-left. Not surprisingly, this is especially true among the older, rural, and poorer populations—who are nostalgic for the days when the government is perceived to have provided their financial needs. Romanian experts estimate that about 80 percent of the Roma probably support a left-socialist “cradle to grave” political agenda.

Indeed, committed government and outside intervention is necessary to help solve the institutionalized poverty seen by the NDI assessment team. Still, the team heard many Roma call for more government and international assistance even in instances where basic community needs could be addressed and steps taken by self-help efforts.

B. Roma Political Experience

Following the fall of the Ceausescu regime and benefiting from the new regulations regarding political parties that required 251 founding members, between 1990 and 1992 Roma registered several political parties. In February 1990, a group of Roma activists established the Democratic Union of Roma as a national political organization, and three Roma were included in the interim government, the Provisional Council for National Unity (CPUN). In the first elections, held on May 20, 1990, candidates from different Roma political organizations ran for offices, but none received enough votes to gain a seat in the Constituent Assembly. However, like other national minorities, they automatically received one place in the Constituent Assembly.

Lack of political experience and differing visions among Roma activists led to a fragmentation of the newly emerged Romani movement. Some Roma activists founded new political organizations and NGOs. After the 1992 elections in which Roma failed to win a seat in the Parliament and the Roma Party was given the one reserved minority seat (having received the highest number of votes relative to other Roma groups), many Roma oriented their interests to the non-governmental sector where it has proven easier to attract resources for projects in Roma communities. In 1993, the Government established the Council for National Minorities, a consultative body for the Government where all minority organizations in Parliament are represented.

In the 1996 election, three Roma organizations competed, including the Roma Party, the Alliance for Roma Unity (ARU), and Roma Ethnic Community. The Roma Party received 82,000 votes, again earning the one seat in the Parliament reserved for the Roma minority, but ARU was a strong contender, receiving only 10,000 votes less than the

Roma Party. In the second round presidential elections, the Roma Party supported the Democratic Convention candidate who became the President of Romania.

The coalition government that resulted after the 1996 election was overtly more sensitive to Roma than the previous governments but was largely inefficient. It established a National Office for Roma inside the Department for Protection of National Minorities, began work on a national strategy for improving the situation for Roma, and adopted anti-discrimination legislation. These measures were insufficient for tackling the complex problems facing Roma, and Roma organizations were unsatisfied with the government's efforts.

Following the results of opinion polls and the Party of Social Democracy's (PSD)¹ agenda that was more appealing for Roma, the Roma Party signed an electoral agreement with PSD before the 2000 elections. As a result of this agreement, the Roma Party received a position in the state administration as undersecretary of state and head of the National Office for Roma within the Department for Inter-Ethnic Relations, as well as one role of advisor to the President of Romania. The candidate of the Roma Party again won the seat in the Parliament reserved for the Roma minority, but another Roma Party member was elected on the PSD list of candidates. The Roma Party also negotiated with PSD the appointments of Roma advisors in the Prefectures' offices in each county and of Roma experts in the mayors' offices throughout the country.

Roma Political Parties and Leadership. The Roma Party's dominance of the Roma political scene² in Romania is less attributable to broad support from the Roma population than to its relationship with the ruling PSD. Because of its victory over other Roma parties in the elections, the Roma Party receives government subsidies not available to other NGOs, allowing it to strengthen its network and better prepare for its electoral campaign. Other Roma political groups exist, but none has the national reach or vote getting strength of the Roma Party.

Roma political organizations are not guided by a set of political or philosophical principles or values, though this characteristic is not dissimilar to many non-Roma parties within the region. Not surprisingly, the Roma organizations failed to offer a political platform in either the 1996 or 2000 election. In addition, most of these Roma organizations appear to exist primarily to advance the business interests of individual party leaders (which are often formed around the interests of a particular family business), not the interests of the larger Roma population. One young Roma in Sibiu remarked that "People go into politics to make money"; from the number of late model

Apart from the Roma Party, all other political Roma groups are weak. As one EU official noted, "There are many Roma voices, but only one political party."

¹ The PSD was previously known as the Party of Social Democracy with the acronym PDSR. It changed its name in summer 2001 following its merger with the tiny Social Democratic Party of Romania.

² At the time of the assessment no legally registered Roma political parties existed in Romania. However, Romanian law permits all national minority NGOs to participate in electoral politics. Of the politically active Roma NGOs, the Roma Party is dominant.

luxury cars that the assessment team observed among Roma political circles, it was not difficult to imagine why this remark was made.

Most of the Roma political activity takes place on the local level. While only two Members of Parliament are Roma (out of a bicameral Parliament of 485 members), some 160 Roma serve as city councilors in local jurisdictions around the country. On a relative scale—considering there are about 3,000 councils and 39,718 councilors nationwide—the percentage of Roma councilors is as insignificant as the Roma MPs. However, the numbers are increasing, and in some regions where the Roma population is concentrated, Roma councilors exercise relative leverage.

By most accounts, the Roma exert increasing influence in local politics as Roma county offices and local “experts” are assigned. Yet, among the local Roma candidates elected to serve in office, few are reelected. While this reflects a common trend throughout many parts of the region among non-Roma candidates as well, it does suggest that Roma leaders, like many of their non-Roma counterparts, are often unprepared to govern once elected. Indeed, after meeting with perhaps a hundred Roma and non-Roma officials, political and NGO activists, and ordinary citizens alike, NDI concluded that the traditional Roma political leaders—with a few exceptions—are unskilled and inexperienced. Based upon the testimony of the Roma who met with the team, which fully confirms the findings of various surveys and polls, NDI concluded that Roma politicians have largely discredited themselves among the Roma population.

Roma Attitudes and Perceptions.

Roma attitudes toward their political leaders and representation in government were divided between supporters of the dominant Roma Party establishment, those who reject it, and those who are apathetic and disillusioned.

Roma leaders are perceived to be disinterested, dishonest, and manipulative. Their lack of a coherent, articulated agenda, coupled with complaints of corruption and broken promises, have left the Roma electorate disillusioned, detached and in political disarray.

From what could be determined during visits outside of Bucharest, Roma attitudes toward their Bucharest-based leadership were marked by a sense of alienation and betrayal. These attitudes were best illustrated by the reply to a question posed to every Roma group with which NDI met during its visit: “What political party, group, or leader best represents the interests of Roma in Bucharest?” Except for a few Roma Party loyalists, the uniform reply was that no one represented Roma interests, and that politicians steal the international aid intended for Roma.

The following account could be instructive to understanding some of the attitudes voiced by Roma about their politicians:

The non-Roma mayor of one Roma community met with the NDI team in the company of five or six party and community leaders, including the Roma Party president, a Roma councilor, and the local expert in charge of implementing the government

sponsored *Strategy* (discussed elsewhere in this report). The mayor introduced the Roma present, including several women whom he introduced jovially as, “pretty, even though they are Roma.” The mayor described his close working relationship with the local Roma community (pop. 100,000), without whose support he said he could not have been elected in 2000. The mayor explained that he met with Roma at town meetings three or four times a year. However, 30 minutes later he said that he had held only one town meeting with the Roma community in the two years since the election. The Roma Party president and councilor appeared to have an excellent relationship with the mayor.

The biggest challenge to the Roma villagers, according to the mayor, was the lack of jobs. In his district, about 80 per cent of the Roma are unemployed. When listing his accomplishments, the mayor mentioned that, since being elected in 2000, hundreds of new jobs were created in his region. The mayor explained that he had attracted five or six new businesses to his district because of government-sponsored tax incentives available to companies that invest in qualifying economically depressed regions. The mayor’s region was eligible for these preferential tax holidays because of the depressed economic conditions in the Roma community. Yet, at most, only two or three of those hired to work in these newly opened businesses were Roma.

Following the meeting with the mayor, the Roma Party president and his colleagues led the team in a three-car caravan to tour a nearby Roma settlement. The local Roma Party president’s car was a large, brand new, black Mercedes Benz — offering a stark contrast between his financial status and that of his constituents whose interests he claimed to represent. Driving through this depressed village, the team immediately

Two elderly women, once out of ear shot of the Roma Party leaders, whispered, “The politicians steal everything.”

attracted small, curious, impoverished, but polite crowds. The uniform reply to the team’s questions was that they needed jobs and better schools with more books.

Family Finances and Politics. Studies show that a strong sense of common identity and purpose exists within the Roma family, and that family interests and loyalties are the unifying force within the community. Throughout the three-country assessment, NDI found that family links are usually at the core of Roma political interests, structures and activities. The lines that separate these political and business interests are blurred, often to the point where the two interests are indistinguishable. Not surprisingly, where Roma are concerned, real authority within political structures flows top-down. Political legitimacy is rarely based on the votes of a constituency.

Election Campaign Experience. The NDI team gleaned from its meetings, research and media accounts that Roma politics in Romania are conducted at a rudimentary level. NDI ascertained that no Roma party or groups have prepared or articulated a platform or agenda. But for a few rare and unique local exceptions, no organized or *ad hoc* voter education or get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns have been conducted. By all accounts, election campaigning in the Roma community consists largely of, and is typically derided as, base appeals for votes backed up by free alcohol, “passing around money,” etc.—

practices common in the world's more depressed, less organized, uneducated, and easily manipulated communities.

The level of Roma political participation is stronger at the village, city and town level where frustration levels seem higher. Voter turnout records and various reports (see UNDP Regional Human Development Report, 2002) indicate that Roma recognize that their political interests are best represented at the local level. However, regardless of the higher levels of engagement, NDI saw no indications that political participation was organized or effective, or developed to its potential.

Political Organizing Infrastructure. Roma political organizations lack a developed infrastructure beyond a handful of party leaders and activists who have limited influence in the larger Roma community. Only the Roma Party, in coalition with the PSD and partly as a result of government subsidies, provides a sense of structure and political

NDI found no authentic national or regional networks, associations, or organizations that promote or enhance a sense of identity, political development, communication, organization, mobilization, or participation at any level among Roma.

stability. As one observer remarked, "It is a party of local party presidents and vice presidents but few followers." The functional and structural linkages between national party leaders and the local Roma community consist largely of the link between the local Roma Party president, the prefecture's Roma advisor, and the party leadership in Bucharest.

Mainstream Parties. In Romania, generally speaking, the Roma with whom the team met appeared open to working with mainstream political parties, but all believed that only one party mattered, the PSD. The better educated Roma and non-Roma who identify with classical liberal values typically lament the failures of the previous Democratic Convention coalition government (1996-2000), adding that these political forces remain in disarray and cannot match the more professional and better financed ruling PSD.

Every indication in Romania is that an "anti-Roma" political agenda or message benefits the party or individual that espouses it. According to virtually every official with whom the NDI team met, a mainstream political party that advocates for the "Roma cause" risks alienating popular opinion and support.

The governing PSD reportedly has manifested critical attitudes and actions toward Roma, which contrast with the party's espousal of European, social democratic values. According to its critics, the PSD intends to co-opt the Roma Party and treats them as the sole political voice of Roma communities. The NDI assessment team encountered widespread claims that Roma advisors to county government on the funding and implementation of anti-discrimination and Roma development programs are poorly trained Roma Party operatives instead of bona fide experts. A senior Roma Party official disputed this charge, saying to the assessment team that only seven of 41 experts were party members and most had university degrees.

NDI was unable to examine the veracity of the above criticism. PSD representatives did not show up at a scheduled meeting with the NDI assessment team and a subsequent meeting was not able to be scheduled. However, from limited observation and the accounts of many well-informed Romanians, the structure created to administer the government's Roma development strategy (and the accompanying international development funds) appears vulnerable to political and financial manipulation and abuse. More favorable information was subsequently brought to NDI's attention regarding a government-initiated television advertising campaign encouraging Roma children to attend school, as well as a government-sponsored Roma job fair in Bucharest in May 2003.

Roma's Public Image. Roma are popularly considered to be the permanent occupant of the lowest rung of Romanian society, with 47 percent of Romanians having stated in an October 2002 opinion poll that they do not want Roma as neighbors³. By all anecdotal and research accounts, the preponderance of the country's politicians and media reinforce this image with an endless parade of negative rhetoric, articles and reports that highlight the social and economic problems, and the disarray of the political life within the Roma community. Stories about Roma crime, violence, corruption, dependency, and rising out-of-wedlock birth rates—all of which are legitimate concerns—dominate the media's coverage of Roma, and are rarely countered by positive news or images of Roma.

The Romanians also view Roma as tarnishing the country's international image and, in particular harming the country's prospects for integration into Europe. This was aggravated last year when high profile articles appeared in the French media claiming that Romania's Roma immigrants were responsible for rising crime rates in France. Other European media followed suit. As a result, the French government imposed stiff visa restrictions that affected all Romanians. The French government has since withdrawn these restrictions but damage to the Roma's image remains.

In a recent poll 70% said that Roma should be denied the right to foreign travel, even when all legal conditions are met.

Significant reforms benefiting Roma have not yet taken shape, and the government has reportedly demonstrated critical attitudes and actions toward Roma. The wide consensus among Roma and non-Roma alike is that the mainstream and yellow media reinforce the stereotyping and stigmatization of the Roma through a drumbeat of harshly negative reporting. NDI is aware of formal documentation confirming these anecdotal accounts that negative stereotyping is common. One of Romania's top journalists, and an editor of perhaps the most liberal and influential newspaper in the country, said that journalists at his newspaper were "strongly" reluctant to write a positive story about Roma.

The team also found extremely few Roma editors, presenters, producers, publishers, reporters, researchers, assistants or trainees present in the news rooms of the mainstream

³ The poll cited here is the Public Opinion Barometer that Open Society Foundation Romania conducts each year.

print or electronic media who could help balance the Roma's public image and diminish stereotypes.

C. Opportunities and Assets

As the Roma consider strategies to increase their political participation, they would be wise to take inventory of upcoming opportunities and assets that can be mobilized. For example, several upcoming events and issues being discussed in Romania, as well as strengths within the Roma community, could be incorporated into this strategy. Some of the more readily apparent opportunities and assets are mentioned below:

- The Parliament and Government may consider reforming Romania's electoral system to allow for some measure of direct representation. This constitutional reform could significantly increase the prospects for Roma representation in parliament.
- Nationwide local elections are scheduled for spring 2004 with presidential elections in fall 2004 and parliamentary elections possibly in early 2005. These elections could serve as an ideal testing ground to measure the effectiveness of short-term goals to increase Roma political participation.
- Romanian law allows national minority NGOs to participate in elections. A number of Roma issues-oriented NGOs in Romania conduct empowerment, advocacy, monitoring, and anti-discrimination initiatives to increase Roma access to education, jobs, political participation, health care, legal services, and so on. (NDI wishes to mention as especially impressive one of these groups, Romani CRISS and its executive director, Costel Bercus.) The highest concentration of young, experienced, educated, internationally connected, and motivated Roma leaders work in the NGO sector because it provides an opportunity to advance the Roma cause as well as financial, educational and travel opportunities that are otherwise scarce.
- *The Strategy of the Government of Romania for Improving the Condition of the Roma ("the Strategy")* is the final product of an evolving dialogue that took place between the Roma community and the former Romanian Democratic Convention government, and was eventually endorsed and adopted by the current government. The document articulates the Government's guiding principle and overall strategy to achieve the goal of "improving the condition of the Roma people in Romania." The *Strategy* is designed to bring Romania into voluntary compliance with international standards that address minority rights and obligations as articulated in various agreements and charters adopted by the Council of Europe, the UN, OSCE, and others. In addition, it outlines a strategy to address and solve a myriad of broadly defined problems and challenges to be accomplished in the coming ten years in the following categories: community development, housing, health care, economic steps, justice and public order, child welfare, education, culture and denominations, communication and civic involvement. The document also describes and assigns responsibilities within an institutional infrastructure charged with organizing and coordinating the *Strategy*. The

Strategy document offers no deadlines, no resources, and no mechanisms to implement or monitor the progress of the implementation.⁴

- *The National Council for Combating Discrimination.* This Council's purpose is to identify, prevent, and sanction discriminatory acts and practices and "to implement the principle of equality among citizens, as stipulated in the Constitution of Romania and codified by law, as well as in the international agreements to which Romania is party." The Council has a Steering Board, including seven people nominated by a government ministry and selected by the Prime Minister, which reports to the Prime Minister of Romania. Its mandate is broad and its authority, at least on paper, is far reaching, though the Prime Minister is tasked with ultimate decision making authority.
- Several international institutions, represented by embassies, multilateral governmental/financial institutions, and NGOs/foundations, are keenly interested in supporting efforts to enhance the Roma's economic, social, political and cultural life. Others can likely be recruited in light of the urgency of the need and the implications that failure will have on the expansion of Europe, and its economic stability. Indeed, Romania's application for EU membership will depend in part on its ability to satisfy certain criteria and expectations for improving economic opportunity, education, training, housing, health, etc. for the Roma community.
- Roma disillusionment with their political structures and leadership can be found at all levels, but most especially at the national level. While the Roma citizens recognize that these structures and leaders are weak and impotent, at the same time, they appear eager to learn the political organizing skills necessary to build proper structures and replace the leadership. The soft underbelly of the existing Roma political structures, including the Roma Party, is that these groups do not derive their legitimacy from the constituents they claim to represent.

IV. Objectives and Recommendations for Roma Political Participation

The purpose of this report is to recommend strategies that could be incorporated into a plan designed by Roma to increase the community's political participation and influence in Romania. With that in mind, NDI recommends that a Roma Political Participation Initiative be designed and launched to develop the human capacity, the political traditions, organizational infrastructure, and overall political climate needed to inspire, educate and mobilize a broadly defined "Roma constituency" to advance the community's interests.

1. Objectives. The Roma Political Participation Initiative should have four basic, long-term objectives:

⁴ On May 13, 2003, following the NDI assessment, the government launched "Partnership for Aiding Roma-2003," the next step in the *Strategy*. The program allocates \$1.78 million for local government initiatives towards improving the situation of Roma by creating jobs, renovating housing, and providing land for agricultural endeavors.

- **Develop a Cadre of Political Leaders, Managers, and Activists** trained and skilled in political organization and campaigns, as well as prepared to govern. One Roma Party leader asked that foreign support be used to, “Get us out of this political jungle. Education is key.”

The NDI team met some exceptionally talented, confident, and articulate young Roma activists. Most are in Bucharest, affiliated with NGOs. The enlargement of this cadre must be central to any strategy to increase Roma political participation and influence. NDI recommends that this training effort concentrate on a group of up to 100 young Roma and that the training, as described throughout this report, continue for at least two to three years. Over time, this talent bank will produce the candidates, campaign managers/organizers, activists and specialists to help develop the campaign platforms and themes, and deliver them to a mobilized constituency. NDI recommends that this cadre attempt to achieve a gender balance, as young activists at numerous meetings indicated this is currently a deficit that needs to be corrected.

At the conclusion of every meeting during the assessment, each individual present was asked to offer the most important recommendation that the team should include in the report. Among the many Romanians interviewed, over 70 percent responded with, “Political training.” The NDI assessment team concurs.

- **Establish Traditions, Structures, and Mechanisms** that facilitate and encourage on-going community outreach and education to develop an informed constituency and a coherent political culture. The Roma Party, for all its advantages and “dominance,” does not derive its legitimacy from the consent of a Roma constituency, but rather from the consent of the ruling PSD. One local Roma Party President expressed this vulnerability when he explained to the NDI team, “On the national level, the Roma Party has good support from the country’s president. But, the party does not have such good support at the local level.”

The defining characteristic of Romani political life in Romania is the disconnection between Roma political leaders and the constituency they claim to represent. If Roma are to develop a coherent political culture, they must bridge this gap by instilling traditions, structures, and mechanisms that link Roma leaders with their communities. These vehicles could take various forms, but some general suggestions are below.

Town Meetings. Regular town meetings that establish open, on-going two-way communication between the community and their elected and non-elected Roma and non-Roma leaders are recommended. Leading up to elections, for example, civic groups could use this opportunity to launch this tradition by organizing a series of educational forums to better inform the public, as well as introduce a new cadre of Roma political activists and candidates. Such forums should continue beyond election cycles as well.

A New Political Party? Given the disjointed and divided political environment, the lack of capacity, and the Romani public image, NDI strongly believes that the establishment of a new Roma political party is premature at best. The conditions are poorly suited, and the NDI team fears such an effort would fail—and, indeed, possibly create new rivalries and divisions among the new generation—setting the Roma movement back years. Further, the overall need in the region is for all parties to become more grounded in political ideology and less formally identified by ethnicity or other special interests.

Roma New Generation Coalition. NDI does propose that the Roma consider establishing a nationwide, membership-based organization comprising politically active and like-minded individuals and NGOs—primarily representing a new generation of Roma. Such a coalition could support the Roma Political Participation Initiative’s planning, training and education effort to build the political leadership and organizational capacities among Roma. In addition, and most importantly, such a structure should serve as a forum and networking vehicle to exchange ideas among new Roma leaders and the community, to develop an informed and coherent political culture and to link like-minded Roma groups around the country.

NDI proposes that such a coalition of politically active Roma NGOs be:

1. formed by a written Charter that clearly articulates a commonly held vision, along with a set of common philosophic values, principles, purposes, and achievable goals that unifies the members.
2. nationwide in its reach, open to legitimate groups and inclusive of key non-Roma NGOs that share the Charter’s expressed vision and values.
3. democratic in all respects, with all officers or representatives elected.

Although conditions and circumstances could change in the coming two or three years, at this time, the NDI team recommends that the coalition of Roma NGOs remain independent of the Roma Party.

- **Put Roma Issues into the Mainstream Agenda and Broaden the Constituency** to increase the quantity and quality of Roma representation in governmental councils and to reach the critical mass necessary to achieve the community’s public policy objectives. NDI believes that the Roma’s challenges are Romania’s challenges; and, that the issues of Roma concern should be developed and articulated in that framework, whenever possible. Likewise, the team believes that Roma politicians should seek political office not as “Roma candidates” per se, but generally speaking as candidates with a well-defined political ideology and platform (e.g., Social Democrat, Christian Democrat, Liberal), who also happen to be Roma.

The NDI assessment team believes that this pluralistic approach, working with and through existing mainstream and like-minded parties, including the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) will raise the country’s (including the

Roma's) common sense of purpose and identity to a higher plane. The team also believes this approach will appeal to the better instincts of the Romanian citizenry, and in the long term, ease tensions between the country's different ethnic groups, help de-stigmatize the Roma population, and help preclude potential civil strife.

Practically speaking, the team believes this approach is in the Roma's self-interest because of the likelihood that over the long term it could help consolidate opinion among this plan's target group—the more progressive Roma among the urban, better educated, under-40 generation. At the same time, the NDI team suspects that this broader approach—and the public policy agenda that it produces—will eventually broaden the Roma constituency, extending to those tens or hundreds of thousands who reportedly deny their Roma ethnicity and/or consider themselves assimilated into Romanian society.

Of course, NDI recognizes the complexity of this issue and that the stigma of being Roma is deep-rooted in centuries of discrimination that persists today. (The team heard reports of job openings in Romania still openly advertised with “No Gypsies Need Apply.”) Thus, the recommendations set forth in this report should be seen as merely a first step in designing the strategy to overcome these obstacles – not the least of which is the mindset of both majority and minority ethnic groups. The effort to mainstream Roma issues and reach out to those Roma who deny their ethnicity will require decades, not years, to reach its full potential and will require efforts targeted at the majority population as well.

- **Enhance the Roma Sense of Identity, Public and Self-Image** through a series of careful political positioning; policy agenda development; media outreach, training and integration; the implementation of self-help projects; and, the recruitment of qualified, respected, high profile Roma political candidates.

In the political arena. The Roma's image will be enhanced when a new generation of young, progressive, and articulate Roma political leaders emerges with thoughtful public policy agendas that define and link the Roma interests to Romania's interests, appealing to larger segments of non-Roma society. Training should support the development of a new class of Roma politicians, skilled in the art of political campaign. Perhaps less obviously, training should support Romani efforts to develop realistic, practical, and achievable policy objectives—especially in local communities. Platforms should be designed to unify and mobilize the immediate constituency around achievable goals—like building or repairing roads, improving sanitation facilities, job training, or securing books for local schools. In addition, the proposals and campaign themes should be developed in ways that reach out to the larger non-Roma community as well. This will have the effect of improving the Roma image—as well as enlarging the constituency and enhancing the prospects that the platform will be implemented.

High-Visibility Candidates. The team also recommends that respected and articulate Romanians of Roma ethnicity be recruited to run for highly visible

public offices, for example, the mayor of Bucharest or other large cities, particularly those with significant Romani populations. This candidacy, regardless of “long odds,” could be used to enhance the Roma popular image, get Roma issues onto the mainstream agenda, and create a larger sense of purpose, demonstrating that the Roma’s issues are Romania’s issues.

The candidate could come from academia, the cultural or literary world, as well as politics. The ideal candidate would prepare a professionally developed platform agenda intended to highlight the needs and promote the positive image of the Roma community. The point of this exercise would not necessarily be to win an election, but to gain practical experience and to enhance the Roma’s public and self-image in ways that give the community a sense of pride, dignity, and identity.

Given the cultural barriers facing Roma, the current context is not one that would guarantee impressive victories for Roma candidates in any of the upcoming elections. It is misguided to assume that these countries would quickly increase the number of Roma in parliament. Rather, Roma would benefit most from the opportunity to learn how to wage effective electoral campaigns while affording them decent visibility in the elections. At this stage, what is important is that Roma begin to be viewed as capable leaders and valuable partners from which government and political parties would benefit.

Media. The NDI team recommends that current efforts to balance the coverage of the Roma community be evaluated based on results, and that these efforts be replaced or redoubled as appropriate. The NDI team recommends a creative and proactive approach that, at a minimum:

- monitors and publicizes the ongoing stereotyping and stigmatization of Roma in the media;
- provides the mainstream media with alternative news sources on the Roma community;
- trains and places young Roma to work as professionals in mainstream media; and
- attempts to link public licensing to minority hiring for media broadcast and publishing outlets.

NDI also recommends that a cooperative effort, supported by respected Romanians and members of the international community, be launched to quietly encourage print and broadcast media owners/executives, editors/producers, and film makers to end the stereotyping and balance reporting of Roma. Part of this initiative must be to urge these executives to assist in the training programs and to hire qualified Roma journalists to work in their newsrooms and studios—all as a matter of national interest.

Self-help programs and identity. The NDI team visited several congested villages and settlements where the living and health conditions were particularly

impoverished. None of the roads was paved, electricity and running water were limited, and unemployment was virtually 100%. Certain basic self-help programs could likely improve services and conditions, as well as give the community a sense of accomplishment and pride. For example, access to simple medical services could be dramatically improved by a program (organized by a Romani community-based NGO, for example) that recruited a handful of medical professionals to visit a clinic for a morning once a month. Garbage clean-up, home repair, education-related job training and other projects could be organized by the community itself, in some cases without outside support. NDI recommends that emerging Roma political and civic leaders be trained in the organizing skills needed to develop such programs as a means to instill a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and identity in a community.

NDI believes local clan structures can yield to a genuine grassroots education, development, and organizing effort.

2. Activities and their Guiding Principles. As the Roma Political Participation Initiative is designed and structured, NDI recommends that it be guided by the following principles and priorities:

- **Be Comprehensive.** Like the political development and participation challenges before the Roma, the team recommends that the Roma Political Participation Initiative be comprehensive and carefully targeted to grassroots political organizing, strategic planning, civic education, community organizing, issue advocacy, and governance -- all well known to those institutions with relevant training experience in the emerging democracies, such as NDI.
- **Take a Longer Term View.** Assuming continued progress along a defined timeline, the team proposes that the Roma Political Participation Initiative be sustained for at least seven years in Romania. This term is necessary given the size and needs of the Roma population, and the vast training and development necessary to build a cadre of Roma leaders in the country. In addition, this term will be necessary to conduct the program's development and training efforts through a local and national election campaign cycle, allowing follow-on support to those Roma elected to office. Given the political and economic development needs of the Roma community, and that the community has been practically left out of comparable training since the Democratic Revolution of 1989, this seven year term is reasonable as well as necessary.
- **Focus on the Younger Generation.** The younger generation, under age 40, is generally speaking better educated and trained, more motivated and open, and less corrupted and tainted by and obliged to the past. The NDI team believes that the younger generation represents both the ideal and the only viable group to reorient and increase political participation in the country, and bring it to a coherent level.

As a side note, a prominent member of the Romanian Senate in the highly successful UDMR suggested that young, politically active Roma should consider ways to cooperate with their UDMR counterparts.

- **Destroy the Top-Down Mentality.** Perhaps nothing more distorts the Roma political culture than the degree to which those who claim to represent Roma interests, especially at the national level, do so without any legitimate basis other than being appointed or anointed—by themselves, or a political party, a foreign donor/NGO, an international body, etc. At every opportunity, the Roma Political Participation Initiative should reinforce the notion that political legitimacy and the right to claim “representative” status must be derived from the consent of those being represented.
- **Establish a Reputation for Integrity, Seriousness, and Open Competition.** Given the fragmentation, the corrupting role of family and financial ties, the private deals, and the levels of mistrust that characterize Romani politics—the Roma Political Participation Initiative should set the highest standards of professionalism, transparency, and openness. The recruitment and selection of training participants, for example, will be critical to the program’s integrity, public perception and success. The NDI team recommends that the training opportunities and selection process be publicly announced, open and competitive. NDI further recommends that neutral international and Romanian sponsors and organizers take a leading role in interviewing and selecting candidates for training.
- **Prioritize Local and Grassroots Development.** At the local level, a concerted effort to provide basic political education, organizing and leadership training will inject competition into the political arena. A successful training and education campaign will quickly reorient the traditional and distorted top-down political formulas that have poorly served the Roma population. Generally speaking, the ideal sites to launch a sustained training and organizational effort will be local cities and towns with a relatively high density of middle income and educated Roma.

The team believes the most lasting contribution and the quickest return on investment for the Roma Political Participation Initiative will be at the local city and town level. The 2004 local elections will provide an early and exceptionally good opportunity to jump start this initiative, and to test concepts, strategies, and plans. Given the shortness of time and the training needed, it may be unrealistic to wage a comprehensive national campaign to elect Roma to local councils in a year’s time. However, maximum effort should be made to identify and target those localities where the Roma have adequate population density, political leadership and organizing and governing talent, and infrastructure.

- **Prepare to Govern.** The NDI team recommends that the goal of “increasing Roma political participation” be defined more broadly than merely increasing the number of Roma voters or representatives in parliament, city and town councils. Once elected, the NDI team believes the newly elected Roma officials – men and women – must be

prepared to govern effectively. If newly elected Roma officials fail in their new positions, the goals of this initiative will be severely set back.

Therefore, NDI recommends that Roma political training include basic governance especially in public administration, legislative process, town budgeting, “enterprise zone” theory, public-private economic development partnerships, negotiation, and constituency relations.

NDI recommends that training include the substance of public policy philosophy/theory and alternatives that will help form the basis of a coherent set of policy prescriptions that would underpin future policy agendas and campaign platforms. This training could be university-based. Also, there are several exceptionally capable economic and social public policy research institutes in Romania that represent an important resource, and should be recruited to support the development of policy prescriptions, related data, and policy/political agendas. Further, successfully elected Roma mayors or councilors could be paired with Roma municipal politicians in other regions or countries to create a “buddy system” for mentoring, advice, and support.

Likewise, the US Embassy could sponsor International Visitor Programs for Roma analysts and political/community activists to observe relevant public-private redevelopment sites in the US, like the Inner Harbor Baltimore, and recent innovations (including self-help programs) in housing and education programs, etc., that might have application to the Roma. Other Embassies could organize similar visit programs to showcase successful public-private development, volunteer, and self-help initiatives in their respective countries.

- **Be Judicious in Selecting Issues, Choose Winners and Show Concrete Results.** There is no shortage of critical issues challenging the Roma community, which could make their way onto a Roma candidate’s political agenda and platform. The economic, housing, social, educational, and health needs are staggering. The stagnant world and regional economies, and the scarcity of financial resources available from government limits the funds and possibilities. And, while they could be extremely helpful, the anticipated EU assistance funds for the Roma community falls well short of that needed to solve even the most basic problems.

Therefore, in order not to exacerbate the mistrust and disillusionment already in the Roma community, the Roma Political Participation Initiative should caution against developing overly ambitious political agendas that will raise unachievable expectations and widen the gap dividing Roma leaders from their constituents. The NDI team agrees with the director of Romani CRISS who said that the new Roma leaders must be trained to, “Build trust and be honest. Don’t try to sell dreams. People will understand that they need to go step by step.”

While this report does not propose to develop a Roma political agenda, NDI offers the following observations that might be considered as such an agenda is prepared and evolves:

The Strategy of the Government of Romania for Improving the Condition of the Roma. NDI notes with cautious optimism that considerable technical, training, and financial resources are anticipated through the EU's support of the *Strategy* initiative discussed above. These funds represent an unprecedented opportunity to improve the prospects for Roma on a wide front. If these resources were to be mismanaged by bureaucracy and partisan interests as a means of consolidating power, it would deal a significant blow to reform efforts within Romania. Therefore, financial oversight of such funds should be handled with the utmost caution. Monitoring governmental funding of Roma initiatives could indeed be a principal focus of one or several Roma civic groups. Clearly the implementation and monitoring of the *Strategy's* mechanisms, policies, and accomplishments are appropriate for a Roma agenda.

The National Council for Combating Discrimination. Roma are victim to significant and institutionalized racial discrimination in Romania. Yet, at present no Roma are represented on the National Council for Combating Discrimination; they should ensure that they are legitimately and permanently represented on the Council. In addition, a comprehensive strategy and plan, perhaps involving international monitoring and legal support, should be developed to use this potentially powerful mechanism to expose and eliminate discrimination against the Roma.

Roma Caucus in Parliament. Romania has two Members of Parliament who are Roma, both serving in the lower chamber, the Chamber of Deputies. One of these MPs is elected, and the other is appointed as a minority representative. NDI recommends that consideration be given to approaching one or both of these MPs to explore different means of cooperation. One concrete proposal, for example, might be to form a Roma Issues Caucus or Committee of 20 to 30 MPs, which could serve as a more or less permanent body to represent and advance Roma issues, providing a critical link between the Parliament and Roma. In addition, such a caucus might inspire the Roma legislators to aggressively advocate for Roma issues and produce concrete results, introducing a sense of expectation, measurements, and accountability between elected Roma leaders and their supposed constituencies, which does not exist today.

Electoral Reform. The potential to increase Roma representation in national and perhaps local parliaments/councils is considerable through reforms to Romania's electoral system. The adoption of a mixed system that provides for the direct election of representatives is of primary importance to Roma political participation. This opportunity should be addressed by a comprehensive effort.

Micro-Lending Programs. Although NDI cannot verify their results, several community-based micro-lending programs are in various stages of implementation in the three countries visited—all of which seemed to offer promise to the Roma community. The NDI team recommends that these programs be carefully studied and, as appropriate, that serious consideration be given to advocating for a long term and large scale micro-lending program backed by Romanian and international institutions – government, private, or some combination thereof.

Preferential Tax Treatment for Commercial Investment. NDI is generally aware that the national government offers tax incentives to businesses that locate in economically depressed areas. Roma should examine ways to use this to attract businesses into their communities. In addition, an examination of existing tax holiday programs might be useful in determining and ensuring that the Roma benefit proportionately and appropriately where their community's poverty has created the condition that makes the tax benefits possible.

- **Incorporate International Supporters, Institutions and Experience.** The broad consensus is that international pressure is the key to maintaining the PSD government's interest in Roma issues; the same is true of most countries in the region. Indeed, the general secretary of the Roma Party, which is in coalition with the PSD government, acknowledged that, "The political will 'at the top' would disappear if not for the international pressure on Roma issues." Clearly, that continued international support and engagement from foreign governments, multilateral institutions, and NGOs will be critical to achieve the goals of this program. At a minimum, this support should take the following forms:
 - 1) Coordinated international *financial support and guidance* will be indispensable to launch and sustain the comprehensive effort described herein.
 - 2) *Extensive international training and expertise* will be needed to conduct the program successfully. An essential component will be the trainees' participation in political campaigns in Europe, Canada, or the United States. In addition, the get-out-the-vote (GOTV) programs from Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia, and Croatia all would be instructive to the Roma political leaders/activists. The western campaign and Eastern Europe's GOTV experience should be integrated into the Roma training program.
 - 3) Continued international *political, advocacy, and diplomatic support* will be critical to advance specific issues and agendas that could contribute significantly to this program's objectives. For example, representatives of the international community could encourage further discussions to reform Romania's electoral system to enhance prospects for appropriate representation of minorities at the local level. In addition, international support could be useful in any effort to influence governmental bodies such as The National Council for Combating Discrimination. And, as mentioned previously, some international support could possibly be exerted on media executives

in an effort to persuade them to hire Roma, including where foreign owners have an interest in the particular media outlet.

4) Many Roma and non-Roma claim that the restrictive criteria, confusion and abuse of the existing national identification card system disenfranchises large numbers of Roma. In addition, the NDI team was told that large numbers of Roma votes are annulled apparently because of confusion over voting procedures with a significant impact on local elections. (One mayor said matter-of-factly that 400 of 600 Roma votes in the recent local election were annulled.) Appropriate voter education and mechanisms should be adopted to investigate, expose, and correct this reported abuse, including *international election monitoring* at Roma polling stations, as required.

5) The NDI team recommends that an *International Donor Committee* be established among those governments, multilateral institutions, and NGOs willing to support the Roma Political Participation Initiative with financial, technical, or political/diplomatic support, or some combination thereof.

6) The *United States Peace Corps* has extensive experience developing micro-economic/business, education/training, and community-based self-help programs in depressed areas around the world. Although most Central and Eastern European countries are no longer served by Peace Corps volunteers, the NDI Team recommends the Roma Participation Project managers consider discussions with their government and U.S. Peace Corps executives to explore the feasibility of receiving Peace Corps volunteer support in targeted Roma communities.

VI. Conclusion

The problems confronting Roma are many and complex. Essential to their resolution is active, widespread participation by Roma in the political process to represent their communities strategically. This requires first and foremost a more amenable political, social and economic environment; it also requires individual skills training, enhanced political organization, and strategies that allow for political diversity among Roma while promoting collective interests imbued in their status as citizens.

The government of Romania, like others in the region, needs to implement Roma development strategies in a manner that derives meaningful and measurable benefit to Roma in the areas of political representation, economic development, social integration, and human rights protection. International organizations need to include political participation among the key goals of Roma development, and then provide the resources and oversight to ensure that progress is made. Mainstream political parties need to incorporate Roma as voters, members, candidates, and eventually among their leaders.

Given the breadth and depth of the political, social, and economic obstacles facing the Roma in Romania, NDI believes that a nationwide, multi-faceted, and long-term approach to create meaningful political participation is needed. The recommendations in this report represent a first step toward Roma ownership of the future of their communities through democratic means.

Roma Political Participation in Bulgaria

Appendix 1

Assessment Team Meetings

Government

Simeon Blagoev, Ministry of Culture

Mihail Ivanov, Secretary, National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues at the Council of Ministers

Kancho Kantardjiiski, Ministry of Work

Aleksandar Krachalov, Stara Zagora district government administration

Georgi Mikov, Sofia district government association

Hristo Nikolov, Sofia district government association

Yosiff Nunev, Ministry of Education and Science

Lachezar Toshev, MP, Chair of Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Religions

Political Parties

Alexander Filipov, Roma MP, National Movement of Simeon II (NMS)

Toma Tomov, Roma MP, Coalition for Bulgaria

Non-Governmental Organizations

Vasil Chaprazov, “United Roma Community” in Sliven

Petar Georgiev, Roma Confederation “Europa” and former BSP Roma MP

Mikhail Georgiev, Romani Baht

D. Goergiev, Human Rights Project

Anton Karagyzov, Coalition Stolipinovo

Stela Kostova, Association Romska Mladejka Organizacia

Georgi Markov, Roma Educational Center

Dobromir Milev, member of district government, Buro za Samopomost-Stolipinov Foundation

Zlatko Mladenov, Roma public council “Kupate” in Sliven

D. Nuneva, Edelvays

Donka Panayotova, DROM Foundation

Petar Stefanov, Nov Pat

Asen Slavchev, Roma-Lom Foundation/Pakiv

Biserka Yourdanova, Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives (SEGA)

Media

Kremena Boudinova, Roma host, 7 Days TV Channel

Danail Danov, Media Development Center

Dimitar Sotirov, Bulgarian Media Coalition

Bulgarian and Roma experts from the following organizations: Human Rights Project, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, SEGA, Center for Intercultural and Minority Studies (IMIR), Open Society Institute, Studii Romani, Political Academy, Roma Information Project, Foundation Roma’s World, Pakiv European Roma Fund, and Equal Access Foundation.

Roma Political Participation in Bulgaria

Appendix 2

Assessment Team Bios

Michael Brown is an independent political consultant based in Richmond, VA. Mr. Brown has an extensive background in campaign management and consultation and specializes in developing campaign strategies for African-American candidates. Recently he advised the campaigns of candidates to the 2003 House of Delegates and Virginia State Senate. From 1979-1985 Mr. Brown held the office of Deputy Executive Secretary of the Virginia NAACP Conference of Branch. During his tenure with the NAACP he conducted voter registration drives and workshops on political organization. From 1980-1983 he was the statewide coordinator for the Congressional Black Caucus, and in 1984 he participated in the Dick Davis Study Committee on Increasing Voter Registration. Mr. Brown has served on the Virginia State Board of Elections. While serving as secretary to the State Board of Elections he instituted new training manuals for Officers of Election, General Registrars and Electoral Boards.

James Denton is an international commercial, public, and government relations and communications consultant specializing in strengthening relations between former East Bloc governments, NGOs, and businesses with their counterparts in the United States. Since 1985 Mr. Denton has played a leadership role in developing US-supported programs that promote democratic and market reforms in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. From 1997-2001 he served as executive director of Freedom House, a Washington, DC-based non-partisan organization that promotes political and economic freedom worldwide. Mr. Denton has traveled extensively in Eastern Europe, Central America, and much of the former Soviet Union where he has created and sponsored training and support programs for thousands of new leaders in politics, media, business and NGOs. He is a member of various international organizations, including the Council on Foreign Relations.

Michael Farnworth has worked as NDI's resident representative in Bulgaria since April 2002. He brings extensive experience as an elected official at the municipal and provincial levels of government in Canada. From 1997 to 2001, he served as Minister to four high-profile ministries in his home province of British Columbia. In addition to his legislative experience, Mr. Farnworth has broad campaign and political party expertise, having participated in several local and national campaigns as a volunteer, manager, party member, candidate, and governmental minister. He has worked and traveled extensively in and outside of North America.

Rumyan Russinov is director of the Roma Participation Program for the Open Society Institute in Budapest. Part of his portfolio includes the initiation of projects to desegregate schools in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary. While acting as the Director of the Monitoring and Advocacy Program for the Human Rights Project from 1997-2000, Mr. Russinov participated in the drafting of “For Equal Participation of Roma in the Public Life of Bulgaria,” the first document to highlight strategic measures to be undertaken by the Bulgarian state to accomplish equal status and non-discrimination for the Roma minority. He also coordinated a nationwide media campaign to create a positive image of Roma. Mr. Russinov earned a Master’s degree in Economics from the University of Sofia in Bulgaria.

Sevdalina Voynova, deputy director of NDI’s program in Bulgaria, served as an NDI representative on the assessment program and as a translator for external meetings. She also accumulated background material on Roma in Bulgaria for the assessment mission.

Toni Tashev is a 30-year-old lawyer from Vidin and former employee of the Human Rights Project in Bulgaria. She served as a local expert on Roma in Bulgaria, providing local insight to the delegation prior to and following each of its meetings.

Lika Pishtalova, a member of NDI’s local staff in Sofia, served as a translator for the assessment delegation.