

Conference Report

# **Roma Political Leadership Academy**

Bucharest, Romania  
April 7-10, 2006

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## NDI ROMA POLITICAL PARTICIPATION PROGRAM PARTNERS

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NDI would like to thank the **Council of Europe** for sponsoring the participants from Albania, Moldova, Serbia and Spain. The Council's sponsorship was made possible through a voluntary contribution by the Government of Finland to the Council of Europe Roma Special Account.

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## Foreword

Amidst 16 years of democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe, Roma remain politically marginalized and suffer disproportionately from discrimination, social segregation, and poverty. As a result, the gap continues to widen between the material gains generally seen in the region since 1989, and the stagnant socioeconomic advancements in Roma communities. International and domestic efforts to improve Roma quality of life have not fully addressed the issue of political participation, which alone can enable Roma themselves to resolve their communities' long-term needs in such critical areas as housing, education, employment, and healthcare. In 2004, NDI began a targeted approach to gain greater political representation for Roma, working to build a skilled group of Roma activists in Bulgaria and Slovakia who can add political expertise to parties and government, and use elected and appointed office to influence policies affecting Roma communities.

Following the success of the first Roma Political Leadership Academy in Ohrid, Macedonia in July 2005, NDI held its second annual academy in Bucharest on April 7-10, 2006. Coinciding with International Day of Roma and the launch of NDI's Roma initiative in Romania, the event brought together 24 participants from eight countries. The objective of the Academy was to provide Roma activists with practical, advanced political skills, as well as opportunities for networking and the sharing of lessons learned.

Political party organizers and trainers from the United States and Europe led sessions on different strategic electoral coalitions available to Roma candidates, monitoring government implementation of national Roma action plans, conducting impact assessments of draft laws, and learning to leverage community leadership to attract the attention of mainstream political parties. The event concluded with an election simulation that had five mock political parties competing against each other in a fictitious mayoral campaign.



*Young supporters of Peter Pollak's regional election campaign in Markusovce, Slovakia. Pollak's campaign was supported by more than 60 volunteers employing intensive voter outreach methods. His ability to garner significant vote totals was an example of a Roma candidate's potential if offered tangible political skills training.*

## NDI's Roma Political Participation Initiative

*Objectives and Achievements from 2004-2006*



*Roma from eight countries gathered in Bucharest, Romania for NDI's 2nd annual Roma Political Leadership Academy.*

In 2004, NDI began a multi-year initiative to enable Roma to secure elected office and pursue their goals in the legislative arena. The strategic approach consists of four pillars:

- Public opinion research of political attitudes and priorities among Roma;
- The development of skilled Romani activists and public officials;
- The strengthening of Romani political groups and the inclusion of Roma in mainstream political parties; and
- Issue-based outreach by Roma to political parties and public officials.

The Institute's first two years of Roma programming focused on basic leadership training to enhance the skills of more than 80 emerging Roma political activists in Bulgaria and Slovakia. The group consisted of past and future electoral candidates from mainstream and Roma parties, local government officials, and civic leaders committed to participating in the political process and ready to use their skills for the advancement of their communities.

Through this initiative, NDI also conducted public opinion research on Roma political atti-

tudes and priorities in Bulgaria and Slovakia. The research was used to encourage mainstream political parties to reach out to Roma leaders and include Roma communities' issues in their campaign platforms.

NDI has built relationships between program participants and government officials. In Bulgaria and Slovakia, NDI Roma participants have met with Presidents Parvanov and Gasparovic, respectively, to discuss policies of pressing concern to the Roma community.

In 2006, NDI's Roma initiative expanded into other countries in Southeast Europe, with continued support from the National Endowment for Democracy, and new funding from the Open Society Institute and the United States Agency for International Development. New Roma program activities include public opinion polling and a political skills training series in Romania, technical assistance to a coalition of Serbian non governmental organization working for Roma social and economic inclusion, and campaign simulations for Roma partners in Macedonia in preparation for the July 2006 parliamentary elections.



*NDI Romania Advisory Board member Gelu Duminica and Romanian Academy participant Marta Herki.*

## Opening Remarks

*The academy opened with a message from Romanian Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu, delivered by his Press Secretary **Oana Marinescu**, and keynote addresses from the President of the Romanian National Agency for Roma **Mariea Ionescu**, and the Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States Embassy to Romania **Mark Taplin**.*

Each of the speakers expressed their belief in the potential for Roma to gain a voice in mainstream politics and improve the lives of those in their communities. Mariea Ionescu spoke of the importance of events such as the Academy in reminding national leaders where their efforts must be focused.

With 24 Roma from eight countries in attendance, the scope and diversity of the wider

Roma community was on display. Mark Taplin remarked on the symbolism and power of a united, cross-border Roma voice. By showing that Roma from across Europe are willing to take ownership of their future, the Academy enables participants to leverage their influence to make their voices heard.



*President of Romania's National Agency for Roma Mariea Ionescu speaks at the Academy's opening session.*

## Sharing Experiences in Electoral Participation

*A key part of the Academy's agenda focused on providing Roma activists with an opportunity to share their experiences in politics. Trainers and guest speakers led group discussions and skills building exercises. They included:*

- *A group discussion on the different forms of Roma participation in the electoral process moderated by NDI/Bulgaria Country Director **Sevdalina Voynova**;*
- *A training session on how Roma activists can become community leaders and leverage that influence with mainstream political parties, led by **Gruia Bumbu**, Advisor on Roma Issues to Romania's Deputy Prime Minister and **Nick Demeter**, NDI/Romania Country Director; and*
- *Remarks from **Ruyman Russinov**, Deputy Director of the Roma Education Fund and advisor to Bulgarian Prime Minister **Sergey Stanishev**.*

Each country in the region provides different examples of ways Roma can participate in the political process. Whether by joining a mainstream political party, forming an ethnically-based Roma party, forging a coalition between Roma and mainstream parties, or running as an independent candidate, Roma political activists must take into account their country's particular electoral climate when developing a political strategy.

In the Academy's opening session, participants gave brief descriptions of the political climate for Roma in their countries and offered examples of past challenges and successes. Peter Pollak, leader of Slovakia's New Roma Generation, talked about his strategy for advancing in the Slovak political leadership after successfully managing and nearly winning his recent regional election campaign. He stressed the importance of building a strong organization of committed activists and volunteers who will

think strategically about their further electoral opportunities, and will participate in community activities that will create a natural support base and constituency.

The mechanics and particular skills involved in building leverage within mainstream politics were also addressed. For minorities, building political capital within one's community can be the critical lever that pries open closed political systems.

The most critical time for Roma to increase their political leverage is the period between elections. Capitalizing on activities during this time can be done by serving on a school board, attending town hall meetings, or joining an NGO. By showing active involvement within the community, emerging Roma leaders can increase their name recognition and enhance their credibility among their peers. Mainstream political parties view community leadership as a potential asset to their own organization. By becoming a commodity in demand, Roma activists gain the necessary leverage to negotiate for political concessions on behalf of their community.

In concert with the training on leverage building, Gruia Bumbu offered concrete examples of how his organization has maximized its political capital to secure favorable positions on



*Roma activists from Moldova, Romania, Serbia, and Spain brought their own political experiences to the Academy to discuss the best avenues for Roma electoral success.*



*Deputy Director of NDI Central and Eastern Europe Catherine Messina Pajic, and advisor to the Bulgarian Prime Minister Ruyman Russinov listen to participants as they share their experiences in local and national elections.*

party lists. He emphasized the importance of avoiding the traps that often befall those trying to exchange influence for political leverage, such as bribes, and corrupt favors. Those who see politics as a path to personal wealth and power do not have voter's interests in mind. Minority populations, often in lower income brackets, must ensure that those seeking office are doing so with their community's interest as the motivating factor. If not, they stand to diminish the reputation of all aspiring Roma leaders.

In the Academy's closing session, Ruyman Russinov offered words of encouragement to the participants and an affirmation of the value of the skills NDI has provided to the Academy's up and coming Roma political leaders. Russinov emphasized the need for Roma to professionally communicate their message to gain the attention and respect of the mainstream public. To do this, Roma must be emboldened by a level of confidence and practical knowledge that can only be gained through education and experience.

## Holding Government Accountable: Monitoring and Impact Assessment

*Valeriu Nicolae of the European Roma Grassroots Organization and Claude Cahn of the European Roma Rights Centre presented several avenues for holding government accountable for its actions toward minorities. To give participants specific guidance on analyzing and assessing the impact of draft laws, Nicolae shared his experiences leading grassroots Roma advocacy efforts since 1992. Cahn drew on his experience monitoring the harmonization of national laws to the European Convention on Human Rights.*

Government accountability rests on the ability of the public to monitor its actions and evaluate the effects of its policies. In monitoring government activities and conducting impact assessments of laws, claims against the *status quo* must be supported by strong quantitative and qualitative data and endorsed by relevant experts.

Both presenters pointed to the particular challenges Roma face in collecting the necessary and relevant data, and in securing endorsements from policy experts. Data on Roma communities is often deficient or unavailable, allowing mainstream politicians to deny that a particular problem exists. These same people often maintain strong preconceptions regarding minority issues and thus, require a higher threshold of supporting evidence to alter their stance. Enlisting the support of expert organizations is critical to overcome these initial roadblocks. In addition to providing substantive data on the issue in question, experts lend a credibility that forces the issue into the mainstream. Whether assessing draft laws or monitoring national action plans, Roma activists must come armed with significant, credible evidence that can successfully counterbalance the weight of deeply ingrained practices.

In both sessions, Nicolae and Cahn examined case studies that demonstrated the importance

of strong data to support a comprehensive and successful argument. Claude Cahn reviewed several of the cases the European Roma Rights Centre has pursued throughout the region, and Valeriu Nicolae offered as an example a campaign he conducted with the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) to change a Romanian draft law to recognize Roma as victims of the Holocaust. ERIO enlisted the support of specialists from the Center for Research on the Holocaust and cited the Center's professional research that recognizes Roma as Holocaust victims. The expert endorsement forced main-



*Secretary General of the European Roma Grassroots Organization Valeriu Nicolae answers questions from participants on ways to monitor and assess legislation in their home countries.*

stream political leaders to accept ERIO's initiative as an effort to correct the historical account of the Holocaust, rather than simply dismiss it as the opinion of a Roma advocacy group. This distinction provided the necessary political cover for the Romanian president to refuse the draft law that did not incorporate ERIO's suggestions and request one that included Roma as recognized victims of the Holocaust.

## Putting Skills to the Test: Election Simulation



*Participants from Slovakia design their party's campaign material during the election simulation.*

NDI organized a half-day election simulation exercise, launching participants into the fast-paced environment of the final week of a local election campaign. For some, the activity was an opportunity to showcase the skills gained throughout their year-long participation in the NDI Roma political leadership training series. For others, it was an opportunity to gain first-hand experience with the challenges, rewards, and uncertainties of an election campaign. Above all, participants gained confidence in their public speaking abilities, practiced their campaign skills, experienced work in a high pressure environment, and gained an understanding of the importance of teamwork and the clear delineation of roles on a team.

Participants were divided into five fictitious political parties. Their first task was to determine who would fill the roles of candidate, campaign manager, campaign press secretary, president of the women's forum, party branch leader, and president of the youth forum. Over the course of the simulation, each party was given thirteen tasks to complete, each directed at a specific team member. Activities included a live radio interview, a candidate debate, drafting talking points for the candidate's speech to an interest group, and designing campaign ma-

terials. Incorporated into the activities were breaking news events that forced the parties to react quickly to unplanned situations, requiring crisis management and damage-control skills. A panel of judges evaluated the parties on the clarity of their message, creativity, teamwork, and timeliness.

Prior to the election simulation, NDI trainers Nick Demeter and Zuzana Dzurikova emphasized the importance of developing a strong message for the success of any campaign. They reminded the participants that an effective message is not determined by *which* issues a candidate raises, but rather, *how* the candidate shapes the message around the issue. Because all electoral candidates are likely to be asked to address the same policy questions, the unique way in which a candidate frames a given issue and the creative solutions he or she offers will be the most critical factor in setting the candidate apart from the competition.



*Nicu Ion, a Romanian participant in the election simulation, gives a mock radio interview. He was questioned on a range of issues; from his party's health policy to its stance on women issues, to recent indiscretions committed by some of his fellow party members.*



## Roma Recommendations for Greater Inclusion

*The academy's final session elicited recommendations from participants, special guests, and trainers for future Roma political advancement. Despite many common challenges for Roma, circumstances vary from country to country. As a result, the recommendations focus on the guiding principles for emerging Roma leaders in any challenging political environment.*

### **Acquire Advanced Skills to Enhance Political Leverage**

To more effectively integrate into the mainstream political class, Roma must acquire advanced skills that will equalize their standing. A demand exists among Roma to gain additional qualifications— English fluency, computer literacy, university degrees— that will allow them to be viewed as equals in the political arena.

### **Identify and Advance a Common Cause**

While Roma candidates espouse diverse views and have competing interests, those who share the common goal of increasing Roma political representation should coordinate their efforts rather than work against each other.

### **Enhance Participation in the Legislative Process**

Participants expressed their desire to be more deeply involved in the development of policy that affects their communities. Whether by enhancing their interaction with the ground level political institutions – local governments and municipal administrations— or by improving their ability to effectively contribute to legislative drafting, Roma believe they can and should take a more integral role in the process.

### **Develop Strong Messages and Communicate Professionally**

The best ideas are worth little if they are poorly communicated. The Academy's external guests emphasized that Roma must translate their recommendations for improving their communities into clear, coherent, and professionally communicated policy messages.

### **Campaign Better, Get Elected**

A goal that resonated universally throughout the Academy was to have more Roma elected to office. This is the single most effective way to provide Roma communities with a voice in the policies that affect their daily lives. To succeed in this goal, NDI should expand its campaign training programs prior to elections.

### **Sustain Momentum, Work Toward a Critical Mass**

Many of the Academy participants and guests encouraged NDI to continue to work with its local program partners through training and consultation, arguing that this is the most effective method to sustain the current positive momentum. Only when Roma political participation reaches a critical mass will the movement be self-sustaining.

## Appendix 1

### Regional Roma Political Leadership Academy April 7- 10, 2006

#### Friday, April 7

- 19:30            Opening Remarks and Dinner  
*Press Secretary to Romanian Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu, Oana Marinescu*  
*Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States Embassy to Romania Mark A. Taplin*  
*President of the Romanian National Agency for Roma Mariea Ionescu*

#### Saturday, April 8

- 9:00-10:00     Introduction of Participants and NDI's Program  
*Catherine Messina Pajic, NDI Deputy Director for Central and Eastern Europe*
- 10:00-12:00    Group Discussion: Different Forms of Roma Participation in the Electoral Process  
*Sevdalina Voynova, NDI/Bulgaria Country Director*
- 13:30-16:00    Government Monitoring of National Roma Action Plans  
*Claude Cabn, European Roma Rights Center, Program Director*
- 16:30-18:00    Communicating Your Value as a Community Leader  
*Nick Demeter, NDI/Romania Country Director and Gruia Bumbu, Advisor to the Romania's Deputy Prime Minister*
- 19:00            Gala of the Roma Civic Alliance: Celebrating International Roma Day  
*Location: Amphitheater Room at the Bucharest National Theatre*

#### Sunday, April 9

- 9:00-12:00     Conducting Impact Assessments of Impending Laws  
*Valeriu Nicolae, Secretary General of the European Roma Grassroots Organization*
- 12:15-13:00    Explanation of Rules and Procedures of the Political Communication Simulation  
*Zuzana Dzurikova, NDI/Slovakia Country Director*
- 13:00-14:00    Message Development Training and Working Lunch  
*Nick Demeter, NDI/Romania Country Director*
- 14:00-17:30    Simulation Exercise
- 18:00-19:00    Evaluation of Simulation Performances
- 19:30            Group Dinner

#### Monday, April 10

- 9:00-9:30       Morning Remarks  
*Rumyan Russinov, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Bulgaria and Deputy Director of the Roma Education Fund*
- 9:30-11:00     Recommendations and Future Plans  
*Scott Andersen, NDI/Romania Resident Senior Program Officer*

## Appendix 2

### Biographies

#### *Participants*

#### Albania

**Shaqir Hasantari:** Since January 2006, Mr. Hasantari has worked as the executive director of Roma Active Albania. He also served as coordinator of social policies and project coordinator & councilor for the Albanian Roma union *Amaro Drom*.

#### Bulgaria

**Anita Krasimirova:** For the past two years, Ms. Krasimirova has served as a coordinator on minority issues for the Selanovtzi mayor's office. In 2004, she became vice-chairperson of the *Roma Party* and was chosen to represent the NGO *Vsichki Zaedno-2002*.

**Deyan Kolev:** Mr. Kolev holds Master's degree in both philosophy and history, and has worked as a philosophy teacher since 1999. He is also the chairperson of the Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance—*Amalipe*, one of the most active Roma rights foundations.

**Dragomir Mikhajlov:** Mr. Mikhajlov has extensive NGO experience with a number of organizations, including the *Janglipe* association, the Bulgarian Red Cross, and the Association of Roma Women and Children—*Nadezhda*. He was elected municipal councilor in 2003.

**Emilia Kovacheva:** A graduate of the Roma Mainstream Media Internship Program, Ms. Kovacheva is a freelance journalist for the daily newspaper *Trud* and works for the administration of *Nove Holding* in Sofia. She is also vice-chairperson in the Pazardzhik city council representing the political movement *Evroroma*.

**Stefka Velinova:** For the last three years, Ms. Velinova has worked as an expert in Roma issues for the Bobov Dol municipal administration and is a member of the political party *The New Time*.

#### Kosovo

**Emsale (Merxhollari) Begamin:** Ms. Bagmin serves in several leadership roles, including as president of the Roma Womens NGO CRGJ (since 1999), Prizren branch president for the Roma political party PREBK (2006), and as President of the Roma and Ashkali Women's network.

**Ferdi Herceg:** Mr Herceg is an active member of the *Roma party's* Prizren branch, and works as a Project Researcher for AGEF.

**Ramnat Manxhukan:** As president of the PREBK youth forum since 2005, Mr. Manxhukan has been active in several party activities and organizes ongoing events for Roma youth.

#### Macedonia

**Dzulieta Memedova:** Currently working as a councilor in the Delcevo municipality, Ms. Memedova is a member of the governing Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM).



*Participants from Bulgaria and their colleague from Macedonia used skills gained through the NDI's intensive five part in-country political skill training series to win the election simulation. They received high marks for the clarity and content of their message, creativity, teamwork, and time management.*

## Cont'd: Appendix 2

### Moldova

**Marin Alla:** An active member of the Roma community since 2001, Mr. Alla currently works as the editor of the Romani-language broadcast program *Petaloromano*. He also served as president of *Tarna Rom*, the Union of Young Roma from Moldova.

### Romania

**Carmen Vasile, Ph.D.:** Dr. Vasile has worked with Romani CRISS Association in Bucharest since 1997, dealing with media-related projects, such as a “Roma NGOs’ Focal Point with the Media”. She also was involved in the British Council’s program “Improving the Political Representation of Women” and acted as editor-in-chief for the RomaNews press agency.

**Marin Maria Emanuela:** Presently working as the projects coordinator at the Roma Centre for Public Policies—*Amare Romentza*. Ms. Emanuela has worked with the Bucharest based organization in planning numerous special events for Roma awareness.

**Marta Herki:** Since 2002, Ms. Herki has served in a number of capacities for the Center for Roma Communities, most recently working as an assistant coordinator for the Center’s Professional Development for Roma Instructors program.

**Margareta Hochin:** Currently working as an advisor on Roma issues for the Iasi county prefecture, Ms. Hochin brings Roma activist experience from a number of organizations, including the Open Society Institute-Budapest and World Vision International.

### Serbia

**Marjan Muratovic:** Having served in a leadership role during the design and implementation of Serbia’s National Action Plan for Roma Health, Mr. Muratovic is an active member of the League for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, as well as president of the Yugoslav Association for Culture and Education of Roma.

### Slovakia

**Gabriela Radičová:** Fluent in Russian, English and Romani, Ms. Radičová is a member of the Slovak Roma Decade advisory board and plans to run as a candidate in the 2006 municipal election in her hometown, Hnúšťa.

**Jozef Gabčo:** Currently working in the business sector, Mr. Gabčo is also involved with the Roma Civic Initiative (ROI) party and now is planning to establish a Slovak Christian Democratic Union (SDKU) club in his hometown Jánovce. He was a parliamentary election candidate in 2002.

**Marcela Revaiová:** Presently working as a teacher’s assistant in Handlová, Ms. Revaiova plans to run for city council in the 2006 municipal election.

**Roman Eštočák:** With a background in journalism, Mr. Eštočák has worked for the Open Society Foundation’s Roma program and for the World Bank-funded survey of poverty in Roma communities. He plans to run as a candidate in the 2006 municipal elections.

**Zuzana Balážov:** Ms. Balážov is currently a student of social work, and has worked as both a teacher and a community organizer. She hopes to run for elected office in the 2006 municipal elections.

### Spain

**Antonio Santiago Maya:** Working as a legal advisor for the *Instituto de Realojamiento e Integracion Social* and serving as a delegate in the European Roma and Travellers Forum, Mr. Maya is also the general secretary of the *Rom* Foundation. Additionally, he has been involved with the Forum of European Roma Young People.

## Cont'd: Appendix 2

### *Special Guests*

**Mariana Buceanu:** Developed the Roma Health Mediators program in Romania and has served as an activist for Romani CRISS and an external consultant for the Council of Europe. In 2005, she worked for the National Agency for Roma as an expert in public policy. She holds an MA in management of social and public health services, and is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Bucharest University.

**Gelu Duminica:** Executive Director of *Impreuna* Agency for Community Development, one of the most important Roma NGOs in Romania. He holds an MA in European social policy and is the author of many reports in the field of Roma access to the labor market and social inclusion. He is also a researcher at the European Center for Ethnic Studies under the aegis of the Romanian Academy.

**Spaska Gatzinska:** Assistant Program Officer for the Central and East European department at the National Endowment for Democracy.

**Jef Helmer:** Director of Spolu International Foundation. The organization seeks out opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe to combine the political expertise of its Dutch party partners with other initiatives aiming to improve the socioeconomic position of Roma.

**Salome Hirvaskoski:** Administrator on intergovernmental activities for the Roma and Travellers Division of the Council of Europe.

**Nicu Ion Stoica :** Works at Romani CRISS. He served as an observer in the 2004 elections and volunteered for the Democratic Party's 2000 electoral campaign.

**Peter Pollak:** A leader of the Roma NGO New Roma Generation and Roma rights activist, Mr. Pollak was a candidate in Slovakia's July 2005 regional elections, in which he garnered the most votes ever by a Slovak Roma candidate.



*NDI staff, participants, and guests of the Roma Political Leadership Academy in Bucharest.*

## Appendix 3



ROMÂNIA  
PREȘEDINTELE ROMÂNIEI

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### **THE MESSAGE of the President of Romania to the participants to the Roma Regional Training Academy**

April 7-10, 2006

The Romanian State strives to promote mechanisms affording fair political representation to all minorities at all levels. The authorities make every effort to develop complex and comprehensive policies for minorities.

In order for such policies to be successful, several factors must be combined; the assistance of international or nongovernmental organizations, the support of civil society, and first and foremost, the active interest of the respective communities or minorities.

I would like to congratulate the National Democratic Institute for their initiative in organizing the *Roma Regional Training Academy* in Romania. I believe we can learn from the experiences and the good practices developed in other countries that can be made applicable in Romania. Last but not least, I would like to encourage and wish the best of luck to the young Roma who participate in this project.

To be an active participant in social and political life means to fight for the interests of the community to which you belong. To fight is to show that you care! The young Roma are the ones who know best the problems faced by the Roma minority, and are the best positioned to help improve things. That is why I strongly encourage them to be active, especially at the local political level, since it is at that level that most of the issues with direct relevance for the members of their communities can be tackled.

The young Roma's wish to enter politics is not and must not be different from that of any other young person's. Each should step onto the political stage with a dream and with a clear plan of heading towards an objective, whether that objective be a better life for of all Romanians or better social inclusion of the Roma minority. Young people in politics can serve as a model for professional success to other young people and as role models -- models of behavior that public opinion can appreciate. Young people, irrespective of their ethnic background, can help change the mentality of the political class as a whole and likewise the public perception of politicians. Young politicians can act on behalf of, and for the benefit of, marginalized groups. They can serve as a voice for those whose voices cannot be themselves heard, and act for people in challenging situations.

I wish you great success!

Traian Băsescu  
President of Romania

## Appendix 4



April 7, 2006

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to send greetings to each of you participating in the Second Annual Roma Political Leadership Academy. As you also celebrate International Roma Day, I am delighted that you will have the opportunity in the upcoming days to build on the success you have already achieved in your communities.

In my visits to Central and Eastern Europe, I have had the opportunity to meet many hard working Roma who share your strong will and the perseverance to secure a better life for themselves, their families, and their neighbors. During my prior visits to Central and Eastern Europe, I have emphasized the importance of securing minority rights when trying to create a free and open society. Solving the problems of intolerance, discrimination, and marginalization of minority groups in democratic societies is an ongoing test of our own principles and values. It is evidence of our genuine efforts to fulfill the democratic ideals we hold so high.

As you complete your political skills training with the National Democratic Institute, you display a commitment to bridge the gap that has isolated Roma communities throughout Central and Eastern Europe. I am hopeful that your efforts will enable each of you – whether through politics, government, civic activism, or the media – to help end intolerance and discrimination, against Roma and all minorities. Your participation in the Academy, along with your continued efforts once you head back to your communities, sends a powerful message to those who resist inclusion. It is my hope that by challenging ourselves to see more sharply, to hear more clearly, and to feel more fully, we will rededicate ourselves to completing the circle of human rights once and for all.

I send my best wishes for great success in your endeavors and I look forward to hearing of your accomplishments in the future.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hillary Rodham Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hillary Rodham Clinton  
United States Senator

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### NDI OFFICES WITH ROMA PROGRAMS

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