

FROM PROMISES TO POLICY: SLOVAK ROMA HOLD NEW GOVERNMENT TO CAMPAIGN PLEDGES



In Slovakia, Roma political and civic activists are conducting unprecedented advocacy efforts to ensure that the new government keeps its promises now that the election is over. The New Roma Generation (NRG) began its pressure campaign in the run-up to the June 2006 parliamentary elections to promote discussion of Roma issues among the candidates. The group issued an open letter to mainstream political parties encouraging them to incorporate policies for Roma inclusion in their election platforms. Many of the parties responded by inviting Roma politicians and activists to help them develop specific policy recommendations. As a result, almost all parties included Roma-related policies in their election programs. In contrast, during the 2002 parliamentary elections, only two parties mentioned Roma in their programs and none articulated specific policies.



The New Roma Generation garnered national media coverage of its press conference reminding the new government of its campaign promises.

The elections resulted in a new governing coalition of Direction-Social Democracy (*Smer*), the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). Despite *Smer's* extensive articulation of Roma policies in its election platform, its choice of governing partners raised concerns about the new government's interest in promoting minority rights. To ensure that the policies outlined in *Smer's* platform are implemented and minority rights protected, NRG and its more than 50 NGO partners wasted no time in renewing their advocacy efforts.



Zuzana Balazova of NRG speaks with a reporter about the need for dialogue between the government and Roma minorities.

To launch its post-election work, NRG and its partners held a press conference to publicize their open letter to *Smer* and its government. The letter encourages continued dialogue with Roma civil society and the inclusion of Roma-specific employment, anti-discrimination, housing and education policies in the government's program and mission statement. NRG's efforts and its national media presence captured the attention of the government. Senior representatives from NRG have already met with Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and Minorities Dusan Caplovic and plan to continue their dialogue with government officials on the development of effective policies targeting Roma communities.

Through its regional Roma political participation program, NDI provides assistance to the New Roma Generation and other Roma political and civic activists in Central and Eastern Europe to enhance their political and advocacy skills. In the fall of 2006, the Institute will continue technical assistance to the New Roma Generation on its advocacy initiatives and will help Roma candidates prepare for the December 2006 local elections. NDI's work with Roma in Slovakia is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

NDI conducts programs in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. For more information on NDI's Roma program, please contact Megan Volk Unangst in Washington at 202-728-5670.