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## **REGIONAL SUMMIT OF ROMA POLICYMAKERS**

**BUCHAREST, ROMANIA**  
**January 18 – 19, 2011**

Recognizing that the challenges faced by the agencies handling Roma issues transcend borders and require regional cooperation, on January 18 and 19 NDI convened a regional summit of Roma policymakers in Bucharest, Romania. Funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), with additional support from the Open Society Institute (OSI), the summit brought together representatives from both European Union (EU) and non-EU member states.

In a frank and candid exchange, participating Roma policymakers discussed strategies to build political support in their respective governments and parliaments; coordinate policy within the government and across borders; identify and negotiate budgetary resources, and collect important data on Roma communities through an accurate census; and strengthen the agencies' operational capacity.

Among the challenges identified at the summit were the following:

- inadequate information and data on Roma demographics as well as the programs and funding that are intended to promote Roma inclusion;
- lack of authority within the government;
- lack of political support across the board, even within the Roma community;
- underfunded mandates; and
- frequent turnover in leadership and a subsequent lack of long-range planning and staff capacity.

The group discussed specific actions that could be taken, by their own agencies and others in government and parliament as well as those in civil society and the international community, to increase the effectiveness of these policymaking individuals and state bodies. Below is a brief summary of their recommendations.

### **1. Information and Data**

Both governmental and non-governmental bodies need to do a better job of collecting and sharing information regarding the socio-economic status of Roma in their countries, as well as the funds and programs that are dedicated to Roma inclusion and advancement. Governments and their implementing partners should conduct and share more detailed research on the annual expenditure of state and EU funds for different types of Roma-related development projects. Data that is ethnically “blind,” focusing solely on socio-economic status (i.e., marginalized and/or impoverished communities), can be relevant and

perhaps sufficient for identifying target areas for development and evaluating progress. However, ethnically-based statistics remain critical to addressing problems of Roma inclusion, which are interconnected with racial discrimination and minority rights. Socio-economic markers should be cross-referenced geographically, as it is evident where Roma reside.

The 2011 census taking place in most of Europe offers an invaluable opportunity to collect this data, but will require governments and civil society to raise public awareness within Roma communities on the importance of self-identifying as a means of securing resources. Advance preparation is needed to train Romani field workers and develop an effective methodology to yield the necessary data. Serbia's model could be highly useful for other countries, although with the first census being fielded on February 1 (Bulgaria), most governments will not have sufficient time to undertake that level of preparation.

## **2. Political Will**

Roma policymakers need adequate political support within their own governments and parliaments in order to be effective. They should look to civil society – Roma and non-Roma alike – as partners in maintaining pressure on politicians to make these issues a priority, identifying key allies in specific policy areas (e.g., health care, education, or housing). They must also identify allies among political leaders who promote Roma issues to ensure that their agencies genuinely represent Roma interests and to build political support for pushing those issues onto their governments' agendas.

Most important, perhaps, Roma communities need to hold their elected representatives accountable in order for them to be legitimate representatives in developing sound and responsive policy. This means putting an end to vote-buying schemes and advocating for more effective legal frameworks around this issue and stricter enforcement of the laws.

To this end, party internationals and European party groups, particularly those that espouse progressive values on civil and minority rights, should pressure their members to conduct genuine outreach to Roma communities to build an active, educated constituency. Initially, this could be a voluntary pledge to which member parties might be held accountable by their peers, although more courageous party leaders could push for mandatory commitments. The European Commission should set stronger conditions for states to develop and implement national strategies during their accession process, including the dedication of resources to government structures that implement those strategies, as the ability of Brussels to intervene in the affairs of member states is limited.

## **3. Unity and Vision**

More important than generating reports or funding, Roma in high positions need to create a common vision and act upon it with unity of purpose. Political diversity among Roma is natural and can be a constructive force, but agreement on common challenges and goals would allow policymakers to speak with a collective voice that would be heard more clearly in their own capitals and in Brussels. Democratic leaders and opinion makers at all levels

within the Roma community should be identified, cultivated, and convened through groups like this to provide peer support and articulate shared ideals.

#### **4. Financial Resources**

Armed with better data, greater political support, and a clear vision, Roma policymakers should seek increased funding from their own state budgets as well as from Brussels (both pre- and post-accessions funds). In addition, they should seek public/private partnerships, attracting funds from the private sector so as not to rely only on the state budget and Brussels. They should also advocate for changes in funding structures to make funds that are available more accessible and easily absorbed. Many state authorities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) choose not to apply for funds due to the onerous, bureaucratic process and cost share requirements. When applying for funds, they should solicit input from local communities on development priorities so that funds are not wasted on projects that are unwanted, unnecessary, or unable to be accessed or utilized (e.g., digging sewer systems for communities that lack running water). Finally, there was mention of the necessity to create a special fund for Roma programs inside the Regional Operational Program of the structural funds for the next EU funding cycle (2014-2020)

#### **5. Accountability Measures**

Government needs to be held accountable for spending and implementation of projects intended to benefit Roma at both the national and local levels. With adequate political support, this can be done by legislative bodies through existing oversight mechanisms, such as public hearings or question periods, with civil society as a catalyst to initiate debate. Roma communities themselves need to self-police, so that corrupt practices among their leaders are exposed and publicly censured. EU structural and pre-accession funds should have strong accountability measures built into their agreements to prevent fraud and mismanagement. However, controls should allow governments the flexibility to respond to the situation as it looks on the ground, not as it looks from Brussels.

#### **6. Internal and External Communication**

Communication on Roma policy approaches and practices needs to improve, both among the relevant government agencies or ministries within one state, and across borders among the various policymakers in different countries and at the EU level. Sharing information on successful projects, failed approaches, and political and operational challenges would yield greater efficacy in programming as well as increased cooperation and more effective advocacy in Brussels and at home. Meetings such as this one in Bucharest are welcomed, as they provide a platform for Roma policymakers from different countries to discuss informally and candidly the activity of the agencies and learn what techniques and approaches have worked. Forums that would bring Roma policymakers together with officials from relevant government ministries (education, health, etc.) or from local government bodies in their own country would allow various political actors and technical experts to discuss overlapping mandates and competing priorities, and to share critical information regarding their work.

## **7. Focus on Romani Women**

A commitment to the protection and promotion of women should be integrated into all Roma policies and projects, as this is a highly vulnerable group that is subject to double discrimination based on gender and race. More Romani women should be trained and promoted within the state bodies. Roma-related policies need to be considered through the lens of “gender impact”, with support and input sought from civil society organizations that are focused on the advancement of women, as well as those focused strictly on Roma.

## **8. Institutional Capacity**

Government agencies and ministries dealing with policies for Roma inclusion need to be situated in government at the ministerial level, with a direct line of reporting to the prime minister, in order to have the authority needed to fulfill their mandates. They need to develop the skill sets and knowledge base of their civil servant staff in order to achieve continuity and sustainability of expertise in the face of political leadership transitions. In recruiting staff, they should seek qualified Roma who can be further trained and developed as an opportunity to expand the talent pool of educated Roma who can become future leaders. Nonetheless, ethnicity should not trump merit in decisions related to hiring and promotion.

## **Next Steps**

The group identified some initial steps that NDI and others could take to offer them additional assistance and resources to carry out the above recommendations. NDI will conduct follow-up consultations with each participant on the implementation of workshop recommendations and on the potential design of a seminar series that would offer relevant training to policymakers and/or their staff. The first such seminar could be focused on identifying and securing budgetary resources; NDI has been approached by the Lantos Institute to co-organize such an event in Budapest. Another such seminar could focus on developing civil society partnerships to generate political support, and could be co-organized with the ERGO Network in Brussels. These discussions will take place during the coming weeks with a goal of launching the first seminar in spring 2011.