



Roma Participation in the 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections

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Executive Summary

Roma comprise approximately 7.5 percent of the population in Bulgaria¹, yet they are largely absent from political life, particularly on the national level. While Bulgaria's June 2005 elections did not result in more Roma in parliament, they provided an opportunity for Roma to showcase their political skills on the national level.

Generally, the 2005 parliamentary elections will be remembered for a fragmented electorate that broadly distributed votes among seven parties that passed the four percent electoral threshold. After two failed attempts and almost two months of negotiations, an unwieldy coalition was formed among the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the National Movement for Simeon (NMS) and the Movement of Rights and Freedoms (MRF).

Advances

While the June 25, 2005 Bulgarian parliamentary elections did not result in an increase of Roma representatives—in fact the number of Roma members of parliament (MPs²) decreased from two to one—Roma participation in the elections did increase in several important respects as compared to previous election cycles:

- The number of Roma candidates on mainstream political party lists almost doubled from the 2001 parliamentary elections. Others ran as candidates for Roma parties in coalition with mainstream parties, as well as for the ethnically-based *Evrroma* party, which did not form any coalition.
- Roma were increasingly active in get-out-the-vote (GOTV) and election and media monitoring efforts through civil society organizations. Roma NGOs also interacted with mainstream parties through such efforts as the creation of a code of conduct, in which parties pledged that they would conduct fair election campaigns in Roma communities.
- For the first time in Bulgaria, a mainstream party (the Bulgarian Socialist Party), created a specific platform on Roma-related issues.
- There was an increase in the public attention paid to the issue of Roma inclusion, as seen in media coverage, candidate debates and other campaign documents and events. The topic has become a more prominent item in public discourse due to Bulgaria's inability to address pressing problems related to Roma poverty and discrimination.
- In the post-election environment, Roma fared better than they had during the campaign. Four Roma were nominated by governing parties for deputy minister posts, of whom two secured positions, marking the first time that Roma have been appointed to such high-level posts. The cabinet's governance program states that a priority of the government is the inclusion and sustainable integration of minorities into society through increased representation in economic, social, political and cultural life. The government has also adopted policies related to Roma issues, including a health care strategy for disadvantaged ethnic minorities and a strategy for educational integration of minorities.

¹ According to the 2001 census the official Roma population is 4.7 percent. Experts estimate that Roma make-up more than 7 percent of Bulgaria's population.

² A list of all abbreviations used in this report is included at the end of the document.

Challenges

Despite these advances, the Roma community faces many challenges in gaining political representation befitting its population size and in promoting effective policies on their priority issues including the following:

- While parties increased their attention to Roma inclusion, the policies outlined in their election platforms and other policy documents were vague and developed with little input from Roma themselves.
- Though the increase in Roma candidates was encouraging, they numbered approximately 100 out of a total of more than 6,000 candidates.
- International and domestic sources declared the elections generally free and fair, but voter intimidation and vote-buying were not uncommon in Roma communities, highlighting the need for an increased number of trained Roma election monitors³.
- The newly-formed *Ataka* coalition gained more than eight percent of the vote by campaigning on an anti-minority, populist platform. While *Ataka's* long-term impact on Bulgaria's political landscape remains to be seen, the party's rapid ascension may have a chilling effect on immediate prospects for political integration of Roma into the mainstream.

Recommendations

For Roma to increase their participation in Bulgaria's electoral and legislative politics, a number of changes must be made to the legal framework, the public administration, the political parties and NGOs. This report highlights these areas for improvement and makes recommendations for policy and structural change. Recommendations include such things as the following:

- Government should reform the current election law to safeguard against multiple voting and to detail penalties for vote buying.
- MPs, committees and caucuses should conduct minority assessments when drafting legislation.
- Political parties should develop policies on Roma inclusion and political representation with input from the Roma community and increase the training and recruitment of Roma members.
- NGOs should organize efforts to monitor elections, the portrayal of Roma in the media, and the work of the National Commission for Prevention from Discrimination and other relevant institutions.

As Bulgaria completes its transition as a full-fledged democratic state and member of the European Union (EU), it needs to recognize the larger role that all of its citizens, and Roma especially, must play within government institutions to shape and analyze legislation; within political parties to represent their communities and spearhead policies; and within civil society to monitor the performance of government and party officials.

The aim of this report, drafted by NDI with funding from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is to analyze Roma participation in the June 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections and to identify areas for improvement. In this report, NDI reviews

³ OSCE/ODIHR. 2005. Election Assessment Report. Warsaw: Government printing.

and analyses Bulgaria's electoral system, the election results and election-day activities, the participation of Roma parties, candidates, voters and civil society activists, and the methods employed by mainstream parties to improve their outreach to Roma voters and address Roma-related policy issues.

NDI collected data through desk research from such sources as party candidate lists and platforms, exit polls, official election results publicized by the Central Election Commission and NDI's March 2005 public opinion poll on Roma political attitudes. The Institute conducted qualitative research through individual interviews with Roma candidates and parties, NGO partners in election related activities and all parliamentary parties with the exception of Ataka.

PART ONE: BACKGROUND

Bulgaria's Electoral System

On June 25, Bulgaria held its sixth parliamentary election since the establishment of a multi-party system, marking the second consecutive government to complete its full four-year mandate. The outgoing government was led by the NMS, which was formed in 2001 when former Bulgarian Tsar Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha returned to Bulgaria. At that time, NMS won half of the parliamentary seats and formed a coalition government with MRF. Saxe-Coburg-Gotha served as prime minister.

The Bulgarian National Assembly is a unicameral body, whose 240 members are elected for a four-year term from closed party lists. Bulgaria has 31 districts, in which voters elect between four and 14 parliamentary representatives based on population data from the last census. Seats are determined using a proportional representation system with a four percent national threshold for parties and coalitions.

Prior to the elections in June 2005, the Law on Political Parties and the Election Law were amended. The revisions to the Law on Political Parties changed the required number of signatures to form a political party from 500 to 5,000 and outlined penalties for violation of the law, including party finance provisions. The amended Election Law introduced a financial deposit for election candidates, ranging from 5,000 BGN (approximately 2,555 euros) for independent candidates to 40,000BGN (20,454 euros) for coalitions, and increased the number of required signatures for parties and coalitions to contest the elections, bringing them closer in line with requirements for independent candidates. As a result, the number of parties participating in the 2005 parliamentary elections decreased dramatically. Fourteen political parties and eight coalitions (as well as 13 independent candidates) registered with the Central Election Commission (CEC), compared with 62 parties and coalitions that registered for the 2001 parliamentary elections. This trend was also evident in the registration of independent Roma parties, as only one party out of several known "movements," "coalitions," or "confederations" fulfilled registration requirements.

Bulgaria's Roma

Roma suffer disproportionately from discrimination, social segregation and economic impoverishment. While living standards for many citizens have declined during the transition from socialism to a market economy, conditions for Roma have deteriorated more severely, as they are poorly positioned to take advantage of emerging opportunities due to inadequate

education, limited professional experience, and discrimination in the workplace. With 88 percent of Roma not employed and 97 percent with basic education or less, 96 percent of Roma earn fewer than 50 euros a month (compared to 42 percent of ethnic Bulgarians fitting the same income category)⁴.

No legal restrictions on the participation of minorities in politics exist, but the constitution prohibits parties based on ethnicity, race, or religion. However, some political parties are widely perceived as representing the interests of a particular minority group; the largest being the MRF, which is seen as the party of Bulgarian Turks. Smaller Roma parties exist as well, such as the *Roma* party and Political Movement Evroroma (*Evrroma*). Whereas the MRF has established itself as a mainstream political party, with some support coming from outside the Turkish community, Roma have been unable to achieve similar success. This has contributed to the Roma population's underrepresentation in elected and appointed bodies.

Roma suffer from political marginalization with few active Roma members of mainstream parties and very few Roma elected or appointed to senior level government positions. Since Bulgaria's democratic transition, only one Rom has been elected in each parliamentary assembly, except in the 2001-2005 assembly to which two Roma MPs were elected.

Issues related to Roma integration are not confined to Bulgaria and are increasingly discussed within the EU. Bulgaria completed EU accession negotiations in December 2004 and in April 2005 signed the accession treaty for full membership by 2007. The October 2005 EU Comprehensive Monitoring Report on Bulgaria's accession cited that "efforts made by Bulgaria to implement the Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma into Bulgarian Society as lacking sufficient strategic approach, coordination and finance. The EU commission argues that initiatives aimed at attracting and keeping Roma children in school (e.g. free lunches, subsidized textbooks, teacher assistants in schools with Roma students, bussing programs), as well as efforts to implement national housing, health care and employment action plans have garnered few results." Bulgaria is party to several important international agreements related to Roma integration: the *European Union Declaration on the Full and Equal Participation of Roma in the Expanding Europe* (February 2004), the *OSCE Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area*, and the *Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005 – 2015) Declaration*.

The 2005 Parliamentary Campaign Atmosphere

Completing the remaining reforms required for EU accession by 2007 was the general theme of the election campaign. However, because all major parties (with the exception of *Ataka*) supported EU accession, the debate shifted from whether to support the changes required by EU accession to how to make those changes. In early 2005, health care surpassed unemployment and standard of living as the biggest priority for citizens.⁵ Several social scientists attributed this change to economic improvements such as a rise in the minimum wage and falling unemployment. Apart from healthcare, employment policy and rule of law dominated the campaign, as well as national security— particularly as it relates to Bulgaria's involvement in Iraq.

The government increased its election budget in 2005 by BGN 6 million from 2001 to a total of BGN 17 million (approximately 8.7 million euro). Of this, BGN 4 million was allocated for

⁴ Alpha Research, Key Facts and Figures about Bulgaria. Pg. 38

⁵ NDI Public Opinion Research on Roma Political Attitudes in Bulgaria, March 2005, field by Alpha Research

get-out-the-vote GOTV efforts and BGN 3 million was dedicated to voting abroad, a ten-fold increase compared to 2001. An unprecedented GOTV campaign was carried out to increase the youth turnout and the vote abroad, widely seen as favoring incumbent parties. Particularly controversial was the introduction of a “lottery” in which voters could win prizes such as a new car and high-end electronics for turning out on election day.

PART TWO: 2005 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RESULTS

General Results

The 2005 elections results will be remembered for the difficult negotiations required to form a governing majority, as well as the rise of *Ataka*. While the BSP and its affiliated smaller parties received the largest share of parliamentary seats with 31 percent of the vote, the mandates were widely spread among the seven parties that passed the four percent electoral threshold— BSP, NMS, MRF, *Ataka*, UDF, DSB, and the Bulgarian People’s Union (BPU).

The BSP-led Coalition for Bulgaria and the MRF almost doubled its seats in parliament, leaving NMS with almost half as many seats as it won in the 2001 parliamentary vote. The center-right parties (UDF, DSB, and BPU) turned in their lowest vote totals since the 1990 elections, collectively losing approximately five seats. The election results represented a fundamental alignment of the political spectrum, with the BSP cementing its leadership among the left-wing political parties and NMS firmly establishing itself as the center-liberal party. The right wing parties saw their power and standing on the political spectrum weakened by internal divisions and an inability to attract undecided voters.

In the weeks prior to the elections, the *Ataka* coalition gained significant support, growing from two percent in pre-election polls to winning more than eight percent of the vote on election day. This success secured *Ataka*’s place as the fourth strongest power in parliament.

Party	Popular Vote ⁶	Roma Support ⁷	MP Seats
Coalition for Bulgaria (CB) Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and partners	30.95%	2.4%	82
National Movement for Simeon II (NMS)	19.88%	1.9%	53
Movements for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)	12.81%	5.5%	34
Coalition <i>Ataka</i>	8.14%	0.4%	21
Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) - UDF and partners	7.68%	0.6%	20
Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB)	6.44%	0.9%	17
Bulgarian People’s Union (BPU)	5.19%	1.0%	13
			Total: 240
<i>Other Parties (under 4% threshold)</i>	8.91%	14%	

⁶ Source: Central Election Commission

⁷ Source: MBMD exit poll, June 25, 2005; number represents the percentage of the parties vote totals that can be attributed to Roma support.

Roma Members of Parliament

The June 2005 parliamentary elections resulted in only one Rom elected as a member of the 40th National Assembly—Toma Tomov, who was reelected as a candidate for the BSP-led Coalition for Bulgaria (CB), continuing Bulgaria’s post-transition history of under-representation of Roma.⁸ While these results are disappointing for the Roma community, it should be recognized that Roma are playing political “catch up” with their non-Roma counterparts, and that significant electoral gains will not happen immediately. Municipal elections scheduled for late 2007 in Bulgaria provide a strategic opportunity for Roma to increase their political representation more broadly. Local politics provide an arena in which Roma have higher chances of success not only in gaining votes but also in effectively addressing the needs of their communities. Local government also serves as a vehicle for Roma with higher political ambitions to build their skills and reputations before seeking provincial or national office.

Roma Vote Breakdown

MBMD exit poll data indicates that the Roma vote generally paralleled the popular vote, with the left-wing parties garnering the most support, followed by center-liberal parties, and the right-wing party receiving the fewest votes. The most notable difference between mainstream and Roma voters is the very high level of support for MRF by Roma voters. Roma support for MRF was primarily concentrated in the north-west and central-south regions, as well as other pockets throughout the country. This can be explained by a stronger tendency among Roma to vote for the individual rather than the party (most visible in Vidin and to an extent in Montana, with Roma candidates in electable positions), or by targeted and—judging from the results—effective local campaigning. Examples of localities which indicate a sizable increase of Roma support for the MRF: Vidin – from 700 votes for MRF in 2001 to more than 8,000 votes in 2005; Dimitrovgrad – from 500 votes for MRF in 2001 to 2,000 in 2005; Svilengrad – from 100 votes for MRF in 2001 to 800 in 2005.

Party/Coalition	Roma vote ⁹
Coalition for Bulgaria	28.18%
MRF	20.33%
NMS	7.86%
BPU	4.34%
UDF	3.79%
DSB	1.8%
Ataka	0.54%

The election produced significantly different results than those predicted by analyzing Roma voter attitudes three months prior to the elections. NDI research findings showed the following Roma party preferences: 20.1 percent for the BSP, eight percent for the MRF, 8.2 percent for NMS, 4.5 percent for the UDF, 1.9 percent for the BPU, 0.2 percent for the DSB and 17.5 percent for *Evrroma*.

⁸ One Roma MP was elected was to National Assembly in each election since 1990, except for 2001, when two were elected.

⁹ Source: Gallup exit poll, June 25, 2005

Between March and June 2005, the BSP managed a slight increase in Roma support. The majority of Roma over the age of 50 continued to identify BSP with improvements in their standard of living. Conversely, frustration with NMS over unrecognized high expectations after the Decade of Roma Inclusion deflated support by Roma voters.

It is striking to see that *Ataka* received Roma votes given the party’s stated promise to “clear the political establishment of all Gypsies, all Turks, and all strangers.”¹⁰ The most likely explanation for the support is a lack of information and voter confusion, reinforcing the need for consistent voter and civic education programs among Roma.¹¹

Roma voters were influenced by significantly different factors than the mainstream population¹². Although party affiliation and/or candidates were the most important factors to Roma voters, they were significantly less influential than with non-Roma voters. Family and community opinion were twice as influential to Roma as to non-Roma, reinforcing the strong role family plays in Roma culture. Roma voters were also more likely to fall victim to offers of financial reward or political pressure for votes. The NDI pre-election poll cited 14 percent of Roma voters felt limited in their freedom of choice due to financial factors or outside pressure.

In NDI’s poll, Roma identified a candidate’s image as the most important factor influencing their vote. A good illustration of support for strong candidates was the Roma MRF candidate Borislav Metodiev in Vidin, who received 8,026 votes compared with the 700 votes for MRF garnered in 2001; or the results of Erdinch Hasanov, a successful Roma mayor of the village of Yasenovetz, who received 3.54 percent of all votes in Razgrad region on the ticket of a new formation called Formation for Active Citizen Society (FAGO), compared with 0.5 percent of support for FAGO nationwide. Despite the expressed importance of party platforms to Roma, little faith in Roma or mainstream political parties exists.¹³ When asked to rate their approval of political parties’ work on a scale from one to six, with six being the highest, Roma gave a small, disapproving range of marks. The lowest parties DSB and New Time scored a 2.4, while the highest, BSP, scored only a 3.4.

The lack of significant Roma participation in pre-election activities is attributed to disappointment in the prior elected representatives (5.2 percent), a lack of interest in politics (4.8 percent), little improvement in the life of Roma communities (3.9 percent), no confidence in parties and candidates (3.7 percent), or a lack of Roma candidates (1.9 percent).¹⁴

What influences your decision to vote in the upcoming parliamentary elections?

	National representative sample	Roma sample
Image of the party/candidate	42%	24%
Platform of the party	28%	20%
Party/candidate’s campaign	17%	13%
The family	13%	19%
The media	11%	7%
The opinion of the community leaders	5%	13%

¹⁰ Campaign speech of Volen Siderov, leader of *Ataka* coalition.
¹¹ Roma Political Participation in Bulgaria, NDI assessment mission report, funded by OSI, February 2003
¹² NDI Public Opinion Research on Roma Political Attitudes, March 2005.
¹³ *Ibid.*
¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Financial factors	1%	10%
Pressure	0.2%	4%

Election Voter Turnout

The official turnout released by the CEC was 55.7 percent, marking the lowest voter participation in national elections since the beginning of the transition period. The previous low turnout was 58.4 percent in 1997. As evidenced by the three million potential voters that stayed home on election day, parties on both the right and left failed to attract undecided voters. Nationwide, voter turnout was highest in districts with mixed ethnic population (65 percent turnout in Kardjali, 68 percent turnout in Razgrad, 80 percent turnout in Vidin), indicating a strong political mobilization of the Bulgarian Turks and Roma.

The CEC turnout figures did not disaggregate on ethnicity, so it is impossible to determine Roma voter turnout. However, some information on Roma turnout can be derived by pre-election public opinion research. Based on the NDI polling conducted by Alpha Research in March 2005, 64 percent of Roma declared that they would vote in the parliamentary elections, whereas 24 percent defined themselves as undecided. This was considerably higher than the corresponding national representative sample of which 48 percent said they would vote, and 34 percent were undecided about their participation. This finding confirms a tendency of high voter turnout reported by previous UNDP research¹⁵.

Do you intend to vote in the upcoming parliamentary elections?

	National representative sample	Roma over-sample
Yes	48%	64%
No	18%	14%
Undecided	34%	22%

The research also reported that the Roma living in middle to small-size towns are more likely to vote. Voter turnout among males and married citizens is 10 percent and 7 percent higher than female and single citizens respectively. The research did not reveal any significant differences in the voter behavior of Roma of different age groups, nor of Roma with different levels of education.

Election Day Conduct

The CEC and all major parties declared that no major violations occurred on election day. The OSCE conducted an election assessment mission and deployed teams of observers to Blagoevgrad, Bourgas, Kardjali, Plevan, Plovdiv, Shumen, Sliven, Stara Zagora, Varna and Vidin. The OSCE's assessment report stated that the elections "demonstrated the credibility of the election process in Bulgaria, but also highlighted issues of both administrative and political nature that introduced a measure of uncertainty and decreased confidence in the process, and in some instances represented a departure from best electoral practices."¹⁶ The OSCE also reported that "the lack of adequate safeguards to prevent unauthorized duplication

¹⁵ See *Avoiding the Dependency Trap*, a Regional Human Development Report of UNDP, lead author Andrey Ivanov, Bratislava 2002.

¹⁶ OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Report, Warsaw, November 2, 2005.

of [voting] certificates, [as well as] complaints to the CEC on the organized transport of voters by bus in some parts of the country, compounded concerns of the potential for multiple voting.”

OSCE/ODIHR election experts directly observed undue influence on voters and vote-buying on election day in several Roma communities. “In Vidin for instance Romani-speaking political party observers were used to instruct Roma voters inside polling stations how to vote. In Varna, OSCE/ODIHR experts directly observed Roma voters being escorted by party activists into polling stations and then receiving food and envelopes outside of the polling station after voting.”¹⁷

In addition to the OSCE observations, some Bulgarian media outlets¹⁸ revealed schemes to exert pressure on Roma or to buy their votes. The media published photos of multiple voting certificates and aired video of vote-buying. In a television interview on election night, Tzvetelin Kanchev, the leader of *Evrroma* expressed the gravity of the problem, stating that, “individual Roma votes had reached a value of BGN 100 in this election.” Although Article 116 of the Election Law provides for fines for any violation of the law, it does not specify particular violations such as vote buying and multiple voting. Assigning appropriate sanctions for these breaches of the law are necessary, as well as efficient law enforcement.

According to CEC election results, of the more than 3.7 million ballots cast, only 1.48 percent were deemed invalid, dispelling pre-election expectations that many voters, particularly Roma, would not understand the new ballot system. Prior to the elections, many were concerned that the high rate of illiteracy within the Roma population, thought to be almost 40 percent, would cause Roma to have problems with the new ballots, which introduced white numbered ballots rather than the individual color-coded sheets previously used. With such a low number of spoiled ballots, it appears that the numbers helped Roma cast their votes.

Post-Election Developments

While the number of Roma elected to parliament decreased, the number of Roma appointed to senior government positions increased. Prior to the current government, a Rom had never been appointed to the position of deputy minister or higher. However in 2005, the parties of the governing coalition appointed two Roma as deputy ministers to portfolios with significant direct impact on Roma. Yavor Dimitrov was appointed deputy minister of labor and social policy; and Aleksandar Filipov was appointed deputy minister of state policy on disaster management. In addition, three other Roma were nominated by mainstream parties, though not appointed, to the positions of deputy minister or regional governor.

These appointments and nominations demonstrate a level of commitment on the part of the parties to include Roma in the highest level of state administration. It also confirms the observation that appointing representatives of under-represented groups is easier than electing them¹⁹ However, the low public support for Roma senior government officials—the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *24 Hours* daily and *Nova Televizia*

¹⁹ The same trend is valid for the women’s participation in the 2005 elections: the women in parliament dropped from 26 percent to 20 percent, but the number of women appointed district governors increased from 2 in 2001 to 7 in 2005 out of 28.

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee opinion poll²⁰ showed that 76 percent of Bulgarians disagree with having a Roma minister—indicates the need for significant political will to overcome public skepticism on Roma inclusion.

The new government also adopted several documents related to Roma issues, including a health care implementation plan for disadvantaged ethnic minorities and a strategy for educational integration of minorities. The cabinet's draft governance program states that "a priority of the government... is the inclusion and sustainable integration of minorities into the Bulgarian society through representatives in the economic, social, political and cultural life." Among the special measures contained in the program related to Roma are providing equal access to education, improving schools and curricula, introducing Romani language in schools, improving infrastructure and housing, and enhancing professional skills and employment of the disadvantaged.

PART THREE: ANALYSIS OF ROMA ELECTORAL STRATEGIES, MAINSTREAM POLITICAL APPROACHES TO ROMA ISSUES AND ROMA NGO PARTICIPATION

Roma Electoral Strategies

In the 2005 parliamentary elections there was an increase in Roma candidates vying for elected office, with more than 100 Roma candidates, as compared approximately 15 in the 2001 election. Roma candidacy in the elections fell into three distinct categories: a Roma party running independently; a Roma party in pre-election coalition with a mainstream party; and individual Roma candidates on a mainstream party list. The number of Roma candidates on the lists of mainstream parliamentary parties and coalitions almost doubled from the previous parliamentary election from 10 to 18. However, this must be weighed against the total number of registered candidates (more than 6,000) and the fact that although more Roma candidates were on party lists, there was only a slight improvement in the number of Roma in electable list positions.

Based on the level of support for parties in different electoral districts, the Roma candidates with the highest chances to succeed were Toma Tomov (CB) in Vratsa, Borislav Metodiev (MRF) in Vidin, Nikolay Kirilov (NMS) in Montana and Aleksandar Filipov (NMS) in Pleven. In the end, only Tomov won a parliamentary seat. Roma candidates were mostly concentrated in the northwest region of Bulgaria, where they had to compete among themselves for Roma votes.

Running Independently as a Roma Party: Evroroma

After the success of Roma in the October 2003 local elections when more than 160 Roma were elected (three percent of all local councilors and a 60 percent increase from the 1999 elections), support for the creation of a unified Roma political movement to cross the four percent parliamentary threshold reached a critical mass. Despite several attempts to capitalize on this momentum, Roma factions were unable to form a broad, representative Roma coalition. What seemed to be the most promising tool for improving Roma political representation never reached its potential as an authentic political force.

²⁰ *Interethnic Attitudes, Social Distances and Value Orientations*, national representative poll of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee fielded by BBSS Galup, authors dr. Krasimir Kanev, Emil Cohen and Zhivko Georgiev

Evroroma, the only Roma party of the 14 parties registered with the CEC in 2005, sought to fill the void left by the failed initiative to create a Roma coalition. With the largest membership of any Roma party, and supporters throughout the country, *Evroroma* was the first Roma party to run independently in parliamentary elections. Early in the election campaign, it appeared *Evroroma* had the momentum to consolidate Roma votes in spite of the controversial notoriety of its leader, Tsvetelin Kanchev (a former MP who was deprived of his parliamentary immunity and imprisoned for criminal activities). However, the party had difficulty solidifying its core base of support, splitting over disagreements on the composition of the candidate lists. Several members of the political leadership of *Evroroma*, including Mladen Ivanov, the political secretary of *Evroroma*, left the party in the months prior to the election for this reason.

Evroroma's campaign failed to construct the image of a responsive party ready to play a role on the national political scene. NDI's March 2005 public opinion research showed that the largest share of likely *Evroroma* supporters would decide for whom to cast their votes based on who their local community supports, the party's platform addressing Roma issues, and the image of the party and its candidates. *Evroroma* failed to respond to the public's latter two expectations. Instead of a platform outlining a broad vision with detailed policies, *Evroroma* developed three separate documents on Roma education (featuring a controversial system of incentives to encourage school attendance), health care and a system to provide land to Roma.

Evroroma's candidate selection was one of its campaign's greatest weaknesses. *Evroroma* placed such Roma and Bulgarian folk stars as Azis, Sofie Marinova and Bonie at the top of its candidate list, assuming that their popular appeal would translate into votes. *Evroroma* continued to rely on high visibility events and mass concerts featuring folk celebrities, while ignoring substantive campaigning that involved direct voter contact. The *Evroroma* candidates that engaged in local-level campaigns with strong direct voter contact and GOTV activities attracted more votes for the party. Fanya Gadularova, who received more than 2,800 votes as the head of *Evroroma*'s candidate list in Plovdiv region, was an example of this success. The party's campaign also suffered from inadequate funding. Accordingly to many party candidates, this lack of financing prohibited the party from launching and implementing a full-fledged campaign.

On election day, *Evroroma* received only 45,637 votes (1.25 percent), but still ranked as the third largest party not represented in parliament and passed the one percent threshold making it eligible to receive subsidies from the state including free space for party offices nationwide. Although the results indicate some potential for the 2007 local elections, *Evroroma*'s failure to come close to entering parliament will likely be interpreted as an ineffective attempt by a Roma party to consolidate Roma support and run independently in parliamentary elections.

Coalitions between Mainstream and Roma Parties

In the 2005 parliamentary elections, two mainstream parties formed pre-election coalitions with predominantly Roma parties: BSP with the party *Roma*; and UDF with the Movement for the Equal Rights Societal Model (DROM).

This is not a new pattern in Bulgarian election campaigns. It was first introduced by BSP in 1994, when two Romani organizations—the Confederation of Roma "Europe" and the Association of Romani Foundations—entered into a pre-election coalition led by BSP. The

leader of the Confederation, Petar Georgiev, was elected as an MP from the coalition list that year. Prior to the 2001 parliamentary elections, BSP signed a coalition agreement with the Romani political party *Roma* and again a Rom, Toma Tomov, was elected to parliament on the BSP-led coalition list. Building on the party ideology of social justice, BSP promoted its image as being a patron to the Roma community, not just a party that included Roma candidates. *Roma's* presence as a party represented in parliament by its leader Toma Tomov, helped it achieve significant electoral success in the 2003 local elections. In 2001, MRF also explored a pre-election coalition with *Evrroma*. Despite putting a number of Roma candidates in 'semi-electable' positions on the candidate lists, the party did not attract a sufficient number of voters and no Roma were elected to parliament. When MRF became a member of the governing coalition it failed to appoint Roma to senior government posts and the partnership between the MRF and *Evrroma* quietly ended.

In 2005, the BSP followed its previous model and included *Roma* in its Coalition for Bulgaria (CB). However, despite BSP's image as the party most consistently addressing Roma issues and in contrast to expectations, only one Roma candidate, Toma Tomov, was placed in an electable (top five) position on a district candidate list. As result, only Tomov was elected, leaving the CB again with one Roma MP, despite significantly increasing its parliamentary seats.

For the first time in its history, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) included a Roma party, the newly formed DROM, in its pre-election coalition, Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The parties signed and publicized a coalition agreement and DROM's leader Iliya Iliev was placed on the party candidate list. Given the deep crisis plaguing UDF due to splits within the party, the coalition was seen as a safety net for UDF to ensure meeting the four percent threshold regulation. This strategic move did not have the desired effect, however, as DROM had little experience, local structures in few localities and was not well-organized.

Both BSP and UDF made their respective Roma partners visible in their campaign events and included them in coalition leadership bodies. A challenge was selling the coalition to the grassroots members. Negotiations were made at national level, without sufficient grassroots promotion, creating the feeling of an artificial union by many supporters.

One reason for the mainstream parties' lack of local-level promotion of their partnership with Roma parties is public opinion. A recent tracking poll conducted by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee²¹ indicated that 76 percent of ethnic Bulgarians would not vote for their preferred party if it nominated a qualified Roma candidate. Significantly, when the same question was asked in a 2004 Helsinki Committee poll, 66 percent of respondents said that they would not vote for a party with a Roma candidate. In the 2005 poll, when asked about voting for parties with other minority candidates, 64 percent of respondents said that they would not vote for a party with Turkish candidates and 50 percent for a party with Jewish candidates.

Running as Individual Candidates on Mainstream Party Lists

The third political party strategy for Roma participation and representation in the parliamentary elections was for mainstream parties to include Roma on their party lists. This strategy was used most broadly in the 2005 elections by MRF and NMS (the BSP also had

²¹ *Interethnic Attitudes, Social distances and Value Orientations*, national representative poll of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee fielded by BBSS Galup, authors Dr. Krasimir Kanev, Emil Cohen and Zhivko Georgiev

individual Roma placed in non-electable positions). The NMS and the MRF took slightly different approaches as the former relied on Roma candidates who had proved their loyalty to the party, whereas the latter recruited people who could generate mass support even if they had not been previously affiliated with the party.

<i>Roma Candidates on Mainstream Political Party and Coalition Candidate Lists²²</i>			
Party	Name of candidate	Constituency	Place in the list
Bulgarian Socialist Party	1. Stancho Stanev	Varna	20
	2. Pencho Pakov	Vidin	8
	3. Toma Tomov	Vratsa	2
	4. Trajko Panev	Pazardjik	11
	5. Petar Georgiev	Sofia	15
	6. Kosta Kostov	Shoumen	7
National Movement Simeon the Second	1. Nikolai Kirilov	Montana	3
	2. Alexander Filipov	Pleven	4
Allied Democratic Forces	1. Iliya Iliev	Pazardjik	2
	2. Assen Kolev	Bourgas	6
Democrats for Strong Bulgaria	1. Hristo Hristov	Blagoevgrad	7
	2. Tatyana Dimitrova	Montana	7
	3. Emil Topalski	Pleven	11
	4. Alexander Ivanov	Targovishte	2
Movement for Rights and Freedoms	1. Borislav Metodiev	Vidin	1
	2. Gencho Linkov	Montana	2
	3. Pavlin Sandov	Montana	5
	4. Zlatan Vassilev	Sofia	6

The Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB) included Roma candidates on its party list. As early as 2004, the party announced its intention to counter MRF's strength at attracting minorities by reaching out to the Roma community. As part of this effort, the DSB conducted a series of party training seminars entitled "In Search of the True Roma Leaders", in which it sought to identify and develop Roma candidates for the party and establish a Romani party-affiliated NGO, Roma—Democrats for Strong Bulgaria. The NGO, however, was not easily identifiable and NDI research showed that Roma had little knowledge of it: .6 percent thought it was an independent Roma party; .4 percent correctly identified it as an NGO; and 0.2 percent believed it was a chapter within the DSB²³. This confusion was the result of the following: the lack of previous similar strategies in Bulgaria; the relative newness of the DSB (it registered in May 2004); and the fact that voters identified prominent Roma within the party as individuals likely to be associated with a separate Roma party.

²² Information provided to NDI by party election headquarters.

²³ NDI Public Opinion Research on Roma Political Attitudes, March 2005

Roma – DSB did not play an important role in the party’s campaign due to personality clashes and district lists that did not include a large number of Roma candidates. The NGO approach taken by the DSB is closer to the coalition model than the individual candidate approach, as the chapter was not fully integrated into the party and ceased to function when a Roma from the chapter did not receive an electable position on the candidate list to guarantee a seat in parliament.

Roma Issues in Public Discourse, Party Campaigns and Election Platforms

Roma Inclusion as a Topic of Mainstream Political Discourse

Many international and national bodies have provided recommendations for steps to be taken prior to Bulgaria’s EU accession. Almost always cited is the need for improved treatment of Roma, through creating specific initiatives targeting Roma inclusion and development, as well ensuring that mainstream policies positively affect the Roma community.

The political participation of minority groups, and Roma in particular, became an important item in campaign discourse. Questions on the issue were asked in at least two candidate debates organized by national media outlets²⁴, and a question on minority rights was included in *Glasovoditel*, Bulgaria’s first electronic on-line quiz to help voters define their political standing and learn about the political parties’ platforms. Roma inclusion has become a more prominent item in public discourse due to Bulgaria’s inability to address pressing problems related to Roma poverty and discrimination. During the campaign, parties took two approaches to addressing Roma issues. Most mainstream parties developed policies to promote Roma economic and social inclusion, while *Ataka*, argued against assistance programs targeted at Roma and other minorities.

Until the 2005 parliamentary elections, Roma were generally excluded from contributing to or being the subject of election party campaigns and platforms. While some parties had anti-discrimination or social inclusion policies, the issue of Roma inclusion was never specifically addressed. The experience of Bulgaria, as well as other European countries, demonstrates that for Roma inclusion must be addressed through “mainstreaming”, as well as targeted programs aimed specifically for Roma development. Mainstreaming—which in international bodies means that policies are analyzed in advance and regularly assessed to ensure that they are positively impacting marginalized groups²⁵--has yet to be defined in the Bulgarian language and is frequently misunderstood to mean not recognizing specific target groups²⁶.

Party Outreach to the Roma Community

In the 2005 parliamentary election campaign most parties attempted to reach out to the Roma community, albeit not always in the most effective or transparent manner. Almost all parties visited Roma communities in the months preceding the elections; however, they were often seen solely as directives from party leadership or a tactic to win votes rather than a genuine

²⁴ See the transcript of the debate on education and culture, Bulgarian National Radio, June 3, 2005.

²⁵ For discussion of mainstreaming, see “The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union”, a report produced for the European Commission by Focus Consultancy, European Roma Rights Center and European Roma Information Center, 2004; also “Mainstreaming Equality in European Union Law and Policy-Making”, a report prepared for the European Network against Racism by Jo Shaw, July 2004.

²⁶ For Bulgarian explanation of the concept of mainstreaming, see “How to Work at the Local Level to Assert Gender Equality”, a manual developed by Women’s Alliance for Development, Sofia, 2005.

interest in Roma community issues. Polls show that this disillusionment was not confined to these parliamentary elections. NDI public opinion research showed that more than one out of three Roma (36 percent) believed that political leaders visit a Roma settlement to campaign for elected office, compared to 1.9 percent of Roma respondents who thought that politicians came to hear about the problems and priorities of the community. These sentiments are in part due to the fact that political parties did not invest in genuine, two-way communication and that election campaigns generally remain the only occasion when the political elite meet with Roma. Parties engaging in questionable behavior to win Roma votes by organizing charity drives and developing new infrastructure projects for Roma preceding the election further reinforced these views. These practices are disconcerting and warrant the voter skepticism they received.

While Roma voters feel ignored by politicians, the feeling is even stronger with mainstream voters. When polled, 43 percent of Roma respondents said that they had been visited by politicians, whereas only 26 percent of the non-Roma sample indicated they had received similar visits²⁷. The visibility of campaigns in Roma communities and the promises made by political parties to Roma triggered a negative response within the mainstream population that was conveyed through the media. The following are a sample of titles and quotes from articles published during the election campaign period: “Parties speak of the rights of Roma, not of Bulgarians... Roma participation in governance will increase the already escalating mistrust between Gypsies and Bulgarians” (newspaper *Sliven Today and Tomorrow*, June 15-21); “*Thousands of Bulgarians rise against Gypsies. Election boycott because of the dark-skinned killers*” (newspaper *Standart*); “Privileges are harmful to the Roma. Caring for the socially disenfranchised Roma on an ethnic basis not only gives them a privileged position in comparison with the other citizens, but contributes to their isolation as an ethnic group and to the sustainability of long-time bad habits, customs, way of life” (newspaper *Trud*); and “*Roma trade their party membership for work*” (*24 Hours* newspaper). These statements served to fuel anti-minority views.

Mainstream Party Political Party Platforms

The way in which Roma issues are addressed by political parties is critically important. Political parties are the driving force behind government policy development and must articulate strategies to solve this pressing issue.

In the 2005 parliamentary elections, most parties did not develop specific Roma-related policies differentiating them from their opponents or showcasing a strong will to address Roma inclusion. Most parties identified need for improvement in two areas—segregation, particularly in education, and discrimination based on ethnicity. However, policy documents rarely ventured beyond such general statements such as “guaranteed and accessible health care,” based on EU requirements and standards. Many parties also pointed to recently developed legislation and government bodies, including the inclusion of EU anti-discrimination directives into a domestic law, the creation of a national anti-discrimination committee to monitor implementation, the establishment of the Directorate on Ethnical and Demographic Issues to the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues, and the creation of a national ombudsman. While acknowledging these institutions and policies are a step forward, parties did not suggest further reforms. This may be explained in part as a deliberate reluctance of the political parties to identify problems and

²⁷ NDI Poll on Roma voter attitudes

solutions that may drive away potential swing voters. These voters played a large role in shaping the election campaign due to their large numbers²⁸ and the fact that pre-election polls predicted a close election.

The need for adequate Roma and minority political participation also became an election campaign topic. Parties developed a variety of policies regarding Roma participation in public administration. Parties' representation of traditional conservative, liberal, and social-democratic ideologies was evident in the stances the parties took regarding the appointment of Roma to public office. For example, the DSB approached the issue from a conservative standpoint, arguing that that an emphasis should be placed on individual, rather than group rights, while the BSP articulated social democratic values in promoting itself as a defender of the poor and disadvantaged groups.

Below is an overview of the treatment of Roma issues by mainstream parties, beginning at the right of the political spectrum and moving left.

DSB

The DSB's policy on minority political representation was discussed in terms of "reformulating the meaning of political representation of ethnic groups in the context of [Bulgaria's] NATO and European Union membership"²⁹. The party declared that "Bulgarian Turks, Bulgarian Roma, as well as representatives of any other ethnic group in the country unconditionally belong to the national cultural diversity and richness of the country. They do not need special "mediators" to be part of Bulgarian society." The DSB's policy was that minorities should be integrated into mainstream parties rather than the "Bulgarian ethnic model" of minority-based political parties traditionally associated with MRF. The DSB criticized minority-based parties, as well as ethnic-based political appointments to office, claiming that they "close minorities into a political ghetto." The party's policies on this issue are strongly based on the DSB's concept that emphasis should be placed on individual rather than group rights.

On Roma social and economic issues, the DSB's policy was rooted in the Framework Program for the Integration of Roma into Bulgarian Society, which was adopted in 1999 by the cabinet of Ivan Kostov (then of the UDF, but now the head of the DSB). The Framework contained specific policy recommendations in the areas of housing, education, and healthcare.³⁰

UDF

Despite the UDF's partnership with DROM, the coalition's platform had no reference to either Roma representation or inclusions. The relevant platform text is quite vague:

"Allied Democratic Forces has a policy of overcoming the dead-end street situation related to minorities and disenfranchised groups. The nation needs the potential of all. Today, however, large groups of the population have practically been excluded from life because of lack of qualification, lack of access or discrimination. We

²⁸ A poll conducted in May by Alpha Research indicated that 28 percent of people were still unsure of if they would vote, and of those who planned to vote, only 57 percent had decided for whom they would cast their ballot.

²⁹ DSB platform is available at http://www.dsb.bg/?page_id=69

³⁰ The Framework Program for the integration of Roma in the Bulgarian society was developed by Roma NGOs in 1999. It is available at <http://www.ncedi.government.bg/draft-wawedenie.htm>

find this unacceptable: every person is important. We have specific programs for qualification, access and dignified life for all groups which are disenfranchised. No one will be left behind. Ethnic and other minorities, as well as people with disabilities, will participate in decision-making related to their problems and demands.”³¹

This above illustrates that, while the UDF reached out to DROM in the pre-election campaign, its policies to improve living conditions for Roma were largely non-existent. This phenomenon was not at all confined to the ADF coalition.

MRF

Consistent with expectations, the MRF embraced a human rights agenda and discussed Roma political representation and the discussion of Roma-related issues as a core value of Bulgaria’s ethnic model. The party’s platform stated that “as part of the defense of human rights, the Movement insists on radical solutions for the problems of Roma integration into Bulgarian society.”³² The MRF was the only party that provided strong counter arguments to the anti-minority rhetoric of *Ataka*, and as a result, managed to establish itself as an alternative to nationalism and racism not only against Bulgarian Turks but also to Roma, winning itself a substantial number of Roma votes.

MRF’s policy on Roma-related issues focused on the problem of segregation of Roma, particularly in education. The party has advocated for several initiatives regarding educational reform for ethnic minorities, including: equal access for all age groups to quality education, the introduction of respective mother tongues in the schools, and improvement of school equipment and facilities. Other issues addressed by MRF in the campaign include preventative health care, disease prevention, improvement of housing and infrastructure through municipal planning and unemployment.

NMS

While Party Leader and Prime Minister Saxe-Coburg-Gotha hosted the official launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion³³, the NMS did not policies to increase Roma political representation or solve pressing social and economic issues plaguing the Roma community. The only NMS platform component that included any reference to Roma was on the modernization of the education system which advocates for “desegregation of education of Roma children and their integration in kindergartens and schools with diverse ethnic composition”³⁴.

BSP

The BSP’s platform contained the most detailed policies on improving Roma living standards and political representation. In addition to the party’s general election platform, *For a Socially Responsible Governance: Basic Parameters of the BSP Program for Governing the Republic of Bulgaria in the period 2005-2009*, the party developed and publicized a supplementary document entitled *For Roma – For Bulgaria, Governing Program of the BSP for the*

³¹ ADF platform is available at <http://www.ods.bg/documents.php?id=6>

³² MRF platform is available at <http://www.dps.bg/?it=67&pit=10>

³³ The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015), which is an initiative of eight Central and East European governments facilitated by the Open Society Institute and the World Bank, aims to overcome discrimination against Roma in the areas of housing, education, employment and healthcare.

³⁴ NMS modernization of Bulgarian education platform is available at <http://www.ndsv.bg/?magic=0.1.6.0.0.1.0>

*Adequate Integration of Roma into the Bulgarian Society*³⁵. According to party sources, the second document was developed by a working group with broad Roma participation. Roma were invited to the working group in one of three capacities: as party members and affiliates; as professionals/experts; or as NGO representatives. The document was adopted by the Executive Bureau of the Supreme Council of the BSP and was presented to the 45th BSP Congress in Plovdiv on April 9, 2005. This supplementary Roma program sets a precedent both in terms of content and the Roma participation in its development.

The 22 pages of *For Roma – For Bulgaria* cover priorities and detailed activities in the areas of Roma education, labor and employment, social benefits, healthcare, housing and infrastructure, and the defense of the cultural identity of Roma. The document contains a technical chapter outlining the necessary changes to governing institutions, improvements to the relative legislative framework, funding and monitoring mechanisms, and the need for increased capacity of the public administration to deal with Roma issues. It also addressed the need to increase the policy development skills of Roma to serve in the public administration. While many of the policies outlined in the document lack specificity and rely on specific programs and projects targeted solely at Roma rather than also ensuring that mainstream policies positively effect Roma communities, this document is an illustration of increased awareness on the part of a mainstream political party, and – hopefully – increased engagement to advance Roma inclusion by changes and adjustment of policies and the delivery of services.

In conclusion, the momentum remains strong for significant advancements in the inclusion of Roma-related issues in election campaigns. Europe's increasing attention to Roma rights serves as powerful leverage to promote change within the Bulgarian government and political parties. The higher level of Roma political organizing, and the public's appetite to see a resolution of problems facing the Roma community have helped to bring the issue into the political discourse³⁶. However, party platforms and policies still do not reveal coherent and strategic approaches to the problems, nor do they define clearly what social inclusion (integration) means, how it will be achieved, and over what time period. Parties have yet to prove that they will implement the policies put forth in their platforms with meaningful Roma participation.

The Rise of Ataka

Ataka received more support in these elections than any previous party running on an anti-minority agenda. This caused many segments of the population to question the country's tolerance of a multi-ethnic community. The rise of *Ataka* as Bulgaria's fourth largest party (it received 8.2 percent of the vote) took many Bulgarians by surprise. The coalition was created in April 2005 when the National Movement for the Salvation of the Fatherland, the Bulgarian National Patriotic Party and the Union of Patriotic Forces and Militaries of the Reserve Defense joined forces. Sizeable and increasing support for *Ataka* did not register in pre-election polls until ten days prior to the elections.

³⁵ Available at <http://zabulgaria.org/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0011&n=000004&g=>

³⁶ Andrzej Mirga, Chair of the Council of Europe Specialist Group on Roma and Travellers, presentation to European Parliament Public Seminar "Promoting EU Fundamental Rights Policy: from words to deeds or how to make rights a reality?" organized by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, April 25-26, 2005.

With the campaign slogan “Let's Give Bulgaria Back to the Bulgarians,” *Ataka*’s platform was centered on nationalist and anti-minority policies. The coalition’s two program documents, the *20 Principles*³⁷ and the *Program Scheme*, defined Bulgaria as a one-nation state and asserted the supremacy of the “Bulgarian nation” over ethnic and religious diversity. During the campaign, *Ataka*’s leader Volen Siderov—who is included in the 1999 Israeli Foreign Ministry report on Anti-Semitic Incidents Worldwide and in the 2002 Annual Report of Human Rights without Frontiers International—was shown on Bulgarian television speaking out against all Bulgarian minorities, including Roma, Turks and Jews. During the campaign, *Ataka* called for such extreme policies as creating work camps for criminals of Romani ethnicity and urging Turks to change their names to Bulgarian ones³⁸. Among the new 23 *Ataka* MPs were people who were excluded from other parties and coalitions for inciting ethnic hatred (Ognyan Saparev, formerly of the Coalition for Bulgaria) or collaborating with the secret services (Petar Beron, an original UDF leader).

The rise of *Ataka* presented other parties and minority voters with the challenge of responding to this rapid growth of nationalism. With the exception of MRF, parties across the political spectrum were unable to field strong counter arguments to *Ataka*’s anti-minority rhetoric and as a result lost votes to *Ataka*. MRF, on the other hand, managed to establish itself as an alternative to nationalism and racism not only against Bulgarian Turks but also to Roma, winning itself a substantial amount of Roma votes.

While a portion of *Ataka*’s support was drawn from voters wishing to make a protest against the political establishment and those attracted to the coalition’s populist agenda, the party’s success showcases a growing anti-minority sentiment among the Bulgarian public. A Bulgarian Helsinki Committee poll³⁹ shows that 29 percent of respondents disagree with minorities having representation in parliament (up from 26 percent in 2004) and 35 percent disagree with other languages used in periodicals, magazines, or books (up from 25 percent in 2004). The poll also shows that 64 percent of Bulgarians disagree with the use of minority languages in schools (up from 50 percent in the 2004 version of the poll).

Roma and Minority NGOs and Elections

Several Roma and minority NGOs used the parliamentary elections as an opportunity to raise awareness on Roma issues, give Roma citizens an active role to play in the electoral process and in mobilizing people around community priorities. Although Roma NGO initiatives were not nationally coordinated and in some cases were donor-, not demand-driven, they did contribute to increased political participation of Roma citizens.

Among the largest NGO pre-election initiatives during the elections was the NDI-sponsored, USAID funded voter education and GOTV program *I Am Young and I Vote!*, which targeted young urban voters. The Center for Interethnic Dialog and Tolerance *Amalipe* in Veliko Turnovo and five partnering Roma NGOs participated in this national, non-partisan effort. The Roma NGOs’ worked in the regions of Veliko Turnovo, Montana, Razgrad, Shoumen, Haskovo and Karlovo to encourage youth to vote and to conduct voter education. The NGOs efforts included explaining the new integral ballot and providing information on the candidates to allow voters to make an informed choice. The Roma NGOs were able to recruit more than 150 volunteers and successfully implement educational and door-to-door

³⁷ Available at <http://www.ataka-stz.hit.bg/principi.html>

³⁸ Alexandrova, Polia. *Keeping Attack at Bay*. Transitions Online, June 28, 2005.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

campaigns, debates, meet-the-candidate events and vote simulations, reaching more than 3,500 people.⁴⁰ The NGOs also developed strong relationships with the local and national media outlets.

Amalipe also partnered with the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the European Roma Information Office and NDI to conduct a number of activities during the election campaign targeting mainstream political parties. The NGO consortium developed a Declaration for Transparent Election Campaigns in Roma Communities, that included the basic principles of free and fair election campaigns such as tolerant ethnic rhetoric and a condemnation of vote buying. The Declaration was signed by MRF, BSP, New Time and NMS. Although the initiative was nationally recognized, it did not become an integral part of the mainstream party campaign. However, it was an important first step in organizing Roma citizens to demand fair election campaigns and established lasting communication between Roma and mainstream political parties.

Another NGO that worked to promote Roma issues in the run-up to the parliamentary elections was the Intherethnic Initiative Foundation. Through its network of local NGOs, the Foundation launched a campaign entitled “More Minorities in Politics, Better Policy for Minorities”, funded by King Baudouin Foundation. The campaign included the development of policy recommendations which were submitted to parties, individual advocacy meetings with party election headquarters, in-depth interviews with mainstream candidates, and media events.

Roma NGO’s continued their work through election day with an attempt to organize domestic election monitoring. OSCE-ODIHR worked with New Chance and the Human Rights Project, two Roma NGOs, to register election observers. This effort was in response to a significant decrease in election observers from the 2001 parliamentary elections and the continued need for monitoring in Roma communities. The NGO’s faced significant challenges, with limited experience and a short time to prepare; however, they performed an important service in shedding light on an acute election-related need in the Roma community.

Equally important was a media monitoring project conducted by the Roma Media Center funded by the Open Society Institute (OSI) that tracked the portrayal of Roma in the Bulgarian print and internet media. The project monitored 12 national dailies, 26 regional newspapers, six weekly newspapers, four magazines and seven internet news sites for a period of 10 months. The monitors found that the press continued to publish negative images of Roma, both reinforcing and creating negative public attitudes toward Roma. Roma were referred to more often than any other ethnic group, with stories most often on crime, poverty, and EU integration. Most frequent were articles and images highlighting Roma election fraud and the hardships of co-existence between Roma and the majority population. Any positive coverage generally featured “one good Roma/family/community” as a contrast to the broader Roma population. The project’s report concluded that the negative stereotypes of Roma promoted by the media could be attributed to the outlets’ political goals or preferences.

Controversy surrounded the report, with groups criticizing its objectivity and methodology. While these points are duly recognized, it should be noted that the media monitoring was an important step toward addressing public perception of the Roma community. The media monitoring offers a public critique of the media’s portrayal of Roma and provides a

⁴⁰ NDI. 2005 *I am Young and I Vote Report*. Washington: organization printer

significant alternative to simply lodging complaints to governing bodies such as the National Anti-Discrimination Commission or the Electronic Broadcasting Council, as they often are dismissed or go unanswered.

In conclusion, Roma and minority NGOs were significantly more active in this election cycle, introducing monitoring and activism methods previously used by other disenfranchised groups. As the NGOs mature, it is important that their work continue to become more professional and self motivated.

PART FOUR: RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a set of recommendations to address problems related to Roma political participation that were highlighted in the 2005 parliamentary election campaign:

1. Concerning the legal framework

While elections in Bulgaria are generally conducted in a free and fair manner, the prevalent vote manipulation in Roma communities through pressure and vote-buying must be addressed through more and better trained Roma election observers.

The OSCE/ODIHR assessment report on the 2005 elections identifies several aspects of the current legal framework in Bulgaria that can be improved with the purpose of conducting fair elections. Among them are detailed safeguards preventing multiple voting, detailed campaign finance mechanisms and accountability, and sanctions for vote buying and multiple voting.

Other OSCE/ODIHR recommendations related to the general campaign environment include the following: regular updates of voter lists as some Roma are excluded from the civil registry and census data; a review of the policy that requires parties to pay for media appearances because fees limit the participation of smaller parties; and putting an end to the practice of amending the Election Law immediately before an election so that time can be allowed for all electoral participants to familiarize themselves with their rights and responsibilities.

2. Concerning public administration

The administrative capacity of the state to promote Roma inclusion must be enhanced. Bulgarian authorities should demonstrate that the country applies a zero-tolerance policy on racism against Roma or any other minority. Although major legislation has been adopted such as the Law of Anti-Discrimination, efforts are needed for its effective enforcement and implementation. Bulgaria created an anti-discrimination commission in 2005 to monitor the implementation of this law, however, as of October 2005 the commission is still not operational. This delay has been previously noted by international organizations and was included in the October 2005 European Commission's report on Bulgaria's progress toward European Union membership.

When developing future legislation on the integration of Roma, it is important that the government consult with Roma representatives to identify new approaches and ensure that the intended effect of policies can be achieved through the measures suggested. Similarly, official minority impact assessments should be encouraged for all major pieces of legislation, included those that do not directly relate to Roma inclusion.

Roma can most effectively influence the policy development process by being included in local and national governments. The Bulgarian government should make efforts to significantly increase the number of Roma in public administration. This would strengthen legislation, build the capacity of Roma and contribute to overcoming the feeling of dependency among the Roma community. Roma in public administration should not be confined only to Roma-related work, such as serving as experts on ethnic and demographic issues, but also be included in mainstream departments when possible.

3. Concerning political parties

Mainstream political parties need to be more open to the inclusion of Roma not only as voters, but as party members, candidates, election commission representatives, party poll watchers and, where possible, members of the local and national executive bodies. The increased potential Roma activists could bring to political parties can be seen in the level of Roma self-organization, the will to participate in the political life on the national scale and high Roma voter turnout. Mainstream parties would also do well to include Roma in an effort to fend off the destructive, anti-minority rhetoric of *Ataka*.

As most Roma have little political experience, parties should pay targeted attention to training their Roma candidates, members and affiliates to increase their political skills and prepare them for good governance. Particular resources should be allocated to the inclusion of Roma women in political life. Additionally, parties should develop experts and spokespeople in the area of Roma integration.

As parties are the agent of policy change, it is important that they make serious efforts to develop policies with significant Roma input to promote Roma inclusion in the political, economic and social sectors and include them in their party platforms and manifestos. Similarly, parties should begin the practice of conducting minority impact assessments on pending legislation. Such assessments consist of experts analyzing important pieces of pending legislation to identify its likely positive and negative effects to the Roma community, which may not otherwise be considered.

Finally, it is important that parties honor the pre-election declaration promising to engage in fair election campaigning in Roma communities and condemn all forms of pressure, vote buying or derogatory rhetoric. NGOs and media outlets should monitor parties' actions in this area and publicize improprieties.

4. Concerning NGOs

NGOs should pay attention to the following needs revealed during the parliamentary election process and implement projects to address them when possible:

- Consistent and targeted civic education in the pre-election period to eliminate vote-buying, acquaint Roma with voting procedures. On going training should inform Roma on their rights and responsibilities as citizens.
- Roma election-related NGO programs to channel community demands to political parties and to give Roma voters a voice in shaping the policy debate.
- The development of an election observation capacity both within the Roma community as well as integrated into the majority population as a tool to prevent the manipulation of Roma voters.

- Develop the capacity to evaluate and monitor the enforcement of the Law for Protection from Discrimination and other relevant laws and action plans.
- Continued monitoring of the portrayal of Roma in the media, as well as monitoring of the work of the Electronic Broadcasting Council, the National Commission for Prevention from Discrimination, the National Ombudsman and other bodies implementing the policies of tolerance and non-discrimination.
- The development of the capacity of Roma NGOs to participate meaningfully in impact assessments of new pieces of legislation of importance to the Roma community.
- Donors should look to fund programs that integrate Roma and non-Roma audiences, focus on long-term prospects for development, and balance funding between governments, Roma organizations and international organizations with expertise in areas where development is needed.

ABOUT NDI

Established in 1983, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices, and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, to safeguard elections, and to promote citizen participation, and openness and accountability in government.

Since 1990, NDI has worked in Bulgaria to support nonpartisan domestic election monitoring, political party development, constituent relations among members of parliament, NGO-based voter education, public advocacy and women's political participation. NDI programs in Bulgaria have been funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

NDI is conducting a regional program to increase Roma political participation. The program currently operates in Bulgaria and Slovakia with planned expansion into Romania in January 2006. Through individual skills training, public opinion research, mainstream party engagement and crossborder exchange, NDI seeks to give Roma the political skills to become elected representatives and to govern effectively.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORT

ADF	- Allied Democratic Forces
BGN	- Bulgarian Nominated Lev (currency)
BPU	- Bulgarian People's Union
BSP	- Bulgarian Socialist Party
CB	- Coalition for Bulgaria.
CEC	- Central Election Commission
DROM	- Movement for an Equal Public Model
DSB	- Democrats for Strong Bulgaria
EU	- European Union
FAGO	- Federation for Active Citizen Society
GOTV	- get-out-the-vote
MP	- Member of Parliament
MRF	- Movement for Rights and Freedoms
NDI	- National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NGO	- Non-governmental Organizations
NMS	- National Movement Simeon the Second
ODIHR	- Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UDF	- Union of Democratic Forces

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