

Civil society mobilization

THE PROBLEM

Civil society organizations in Bulgaria and especially Roma civil society organizations are relatively weak and incapable to influence the decisions of the public institutions neither to mobilize significant support from the vulnerable groups they are expected to represent. The controversies among Roma organizations are well known and seemed to be unavoidable. As a result Roma civil society is excluded from the decision-making process with the argument that there is no legitimate national Roma non-governmental organizations (NGO) representation and Roma organizations are not able to negotiate a common agenda. The rule “Divide and Control” is often used by political and governmental elite to alienate Roma organizations from Roma community and to prevent real Roma participation. It is also used by certain donors to create an artificial “own” Roma movement.

OUR ACTIVITIES

To overcome this situation Center “Amalipe” undertook the following activities for civil society mobilization:



Meeting of Roma NGO representatives with the Minister of Health

around 60 organizations. This improved the capacity of organizations and activists included. In addition it fostered the mutual confidence among them, “broke the ice” and formed a sense of belonging to a group of common viewers.

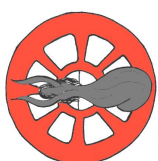
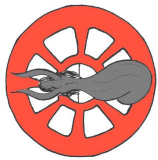
- **Initiating and organizing common campaigns:** several advocacy campaigns with participation of more than 50 organizations all over the country were organized by Center “Amalipe”: campaign for binding European funds with Roma integration, health advocacy campaign, etc. First, they achieved significant results (in fact – all results intended) and provided Roma NGOs with the confidence that they could influence important decisions. Second, the participation of dozens of Roma and non-Roma organizations in these campaigns based on a common cause and shared values fostered the

- **Developing the capacity and human potential of Roma NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs):** Center “Amalipe” has initiated series of trainings in organizational capacity, networking, advocacy,

structural funds, media training. Roma NGOs, community-based organizations and informal groups all over the country took part in them:



National meeting of Roma NGO for discussing the Roma integration strategy



mutual trust and networking;

- **Fostering networking and coalition-building:** Center “Amalipe” has stimulated the process of establishing coalition/network of Roma NGOs through organizing exchange of information and know-how, common advocacy activities, meetings of organizations that work in common field (for example Roma health organizations, Roma women organizations, etc.) and national meeting of all Roma organizations. These activities tend to overcome the controversies among most of independent and working Roma organizations and to form their network based on shared values, goals, and approach.



Roma campaign for participation in the local elections

- **Establishing mechanisms for Roma/ vulnerable groups representation:** As a result of the civil society mobilization Center “Amalipe” and the partnering organizations have managed to advocate successfully for establishing mechanisms for Roma participation and representation and for vitalizing certain existing mechanisms that had only formal existence. Their efforts were concentrated on ensuring Roma participation in the structures that manage the absorption of European funds and for establishing and vitalizing consultative structures for NGO participation in Roma integration process.

THE RESULTS

Owing to these efforts certain results have been achieved:

- ✓ **mutual trust among vast number of working Roma NGOs and CBOs:** around 100 Roma organizations took part in the National meeting of Roma NGOs in December 2008 and more than 90 of them signed the Declaration for Roma Integration Actions that defined the main points of a common Roma agenda;

- ✓ **informal network of Roma NGOs and CBOs all over the country and preconditions for establishing strong Roma NGO coalition:** more than 50 independent Roma organizations took part in several common advocacy campaigns managed by Center Amalipe and formed the basis for a strong advocacy coalition;

- ✓ **mechanisms for Roma NGO participation and representation established or animated:** Roma NGO representatives were elected in the Monitoring Committees of 4 Operational programs, National Strategic Reference Framework, PHARE program, Consultative Council for Roma Health Issues was established, Roma activists (Amalipe Chairman Deyan Kolev) was elected for Deputy Chair from the quota of civil society of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (that is the supreme governmental structure for consultations between NGOs and institutions), etc. Although this process is not completed, it has created preconditions for establishing legitimate Roma NGO representation and participation.

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