

Annex III: HRAW NGOs Can Make a Difference – Examples from CEE countries

1. Improving transparency

1. Party finance reform in Slovakia

The Slovakian Fair-Play Alliance works to improve transparency in public affairs and to strengthen public-disclosure rules.¹ The organization tries to improve awareness of corruption and government processes, cooperating with businesses, the media and other NGOs. The Slovakian Fair-Play Alliance has become one of the most effective watchdog organizations in the entire CEE region.

The Alliance was the driving force behind the party-finance reform laws of 2003. It also started a “civic watch” over public and political affairs in 2004.² Most recently, the Alliance launched the “Politikaopen” project³ for the 2010 election campaign: Candidates were invited to disclose detailed information about their property holdings, financial interests and other important data beyond what is required by law. No candidates from any of the three ruling parties took part; these parties were voted out of office. The four parties that are now in government all participated; during the campaign, they burnished their transparency credentials by referring to “Politikaopen.”

2. Publicity of Nuclear Power Plant Enlargement

Improving transparency is in the focus of TASZ (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union). The NGOS successfully sued state-run or state-owned organizations and companies to reveal information important to the public. According to TASZ, the enlargement of the nuclear power plant in PAKS (the so called Teller project) is of general public interest. Therefore, TASZ argued, the financial background along with environmental and health risks of the state-run project must gain widespread publicity as well. According to the court’s recent January 2012 decision, the MVM Paks Nuclear Power Plant company is liable to reveal all the relevant information on the Teller project. In a series of court verdicts, TASZ was successful in representing the freedom of information through legal means.

3. Political Pressure Brings Early Cabinet Reshuffle in Hungary

Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai’s caretaker government was forced to change its line-up before even taking office in April 2009. Transparency International informed Bajnai that his pick for economy minister, Tamás Vahl, had been caught up in a cartel case during his tenure as manager of computer-software firm SAP Hungary. Upon receiving the letter, Bajnai asked for a briefing from the Competition Office (GVH) and an explanation from Vahl, according to the government spokesman’s office. Vahl withdrew his candidacy a day after the letter was made public.

Transparency International immediately praised the government’s reaction: The NGO said Vahl’s decision to stand down indicated that the incoming premier wanted to staff his cabinet with people who could handle public money responsibly and ethically.

¹ http://www.fair-play.sk/index_en.php

² http://www.fair-play.sk/en_newspapers.php

³ <http://www.politikaopen.sk/>

The cartel accusations came from 2004, when the Competition Office slapped a HUF 1.5 billion forint fine on SAP, IBM and Hungarian software firm ISH Kft. in connection with the companies' strategy for winning IT contracts at universities. SAP, run by Vahl at the time, had to pay HUF 690 million of the total. SAP also had several other cartel-related troubles during Vahl's tenure, according to press reports. Bajnai tapped economist István Varga to replace Vahl as economy minister.

2. Fighting against segregation and human trafficking

1. Increasing Roma employment and improve housing conditions in Slovakia⁴

Slovakia's Roma population was hit hard when communism collapsed in 1989. Many of the Roma who lost their jobs during the transition to capitalism remain unemployed today. As a consequence, there is a new generation of adults who have never seen their parents working and don't have any experience in the workforce. Unemployment rates in many segregated Roma localities can be as high as 95%; and it is almost impossible to find a working Roma woman in such communities. Housing and educational opportunities for the Roma have also deteriorated since the end of state socialism. The lack of opportunity in Slovakia prompted many Slovak Roma to emigrate to Western countries (e.g. Great Britain and Ireland) once Slovakia joined the EU in 2004. They face serious integration problems in their new countries as well. Slovak government programs to integrate the Roma since 1990 have been mostly unsuccessful. (The Office of Plenipotentiary of Slovak Government for Roma Communities, released a complex concept of integration in 2008, but concrete results are lacking). On the other hand, there have been some conspicuously successful civic initiatives:

2. Social employment in Rudlov

The "Svatobor pod Oblikom" NGO in the village of Rudlov in the Prešov region is working on an ecological "bio" farm that grows medicinal herbs and plants used in the cosmetics industry. The goal is to provide work for the long-term unemployed – often young and undereducated Roma from the surrounding villages. The NGO attempts to employ and support local people, teaching them new skills that they can use both at work and at home. Trainees who do well can win regular employment. More than 100 (mostly Roma) people are working on the farm, half of them women. Svatobor pod Oblikom has also conducted trainings to organic farming skills. The NGO has also started to employ its first workers on regular contracts, thus taking responsibility for their full income.

3. Social enterprise in Krompachy

The non-governmental organization L'udia a perspektiva (People and Perspective) concentrated on employing of long-term unemployed women from underprivileged groups. Krompachy is a medium-sized town with population 8,650. About 20% of the townspeople are Roma who live in five concentrated settlements. While total unemployment in the town is around 15%, it is around 85% for the Roma population. The idea was to give jobs to the long-term unemployed people, who have serious difficulties integrating – not just because they are unskilled, but because of the psychological barriers that were built

⁴http://www.nadaciamilanasimecku.sk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenty/Romske/ROMA_SK%20report_final.pdf

up during the long years of unemployment. The NGO attempts to secure a safe work environment with services for mothers. One successful project was when L'udia a perspektiva's people began assembling power-switchers and plugs for the nearby SEZ factory. In 2008, the Krompachy municipality and the NGO won a grant from the Labour Ministry to establish a new social enterprise.

[4. Programs to increase Roma employment and improve housing conditions in Lithuania⁵](#)

The estimated number of Roma in Lithuania is around 3,000. Roma live throughout the country, but the largest and most impoverished settlement is on the outskirts of Vilnius, near Kirtimai (population 670). There are some Roma who, for various reasons, do not have official papers and therefore experience difficulties obtaining full citizenship rights. The Vilnius Roma Community Centre initiated an education programme to assist the Roma minority. At the moment there are two preschool classes for children aged 5-10. The Centre implements a Day Centre programme, the Crime Prevention Programme for Children and Teenagers and arranges summer camps. The programme workers, teachers and specialists try to improve social status and employment opportunities for young Roma. The Centre also helps to solve variety of daily problems between the Roma and the mainstream society.

[5. Integration of Roma children in Bulgaria](#)

Bulgaria began a large-scale campaign for the integration of Roma children at the beginning of the 21st century. The main force behind the campaign was the "Romany Bah" foundation, which provided transportation, shoes, clothes, books and notebooks for Roman children and helped them attend schools in non-Roma neighbourhoods. The program was soon "adopted" by Bulgaria's Education Ministry, which made it part of its official strategy for integrating Roma children in 2004. Every Bulgarian public school now has a classroom quota for Roma pupils that is determined by the percentage of Roma residents in the area. Some elements of Romany Bah's strategy are now being used to integrate children with health problems.

Romany Bah's period of greatest activity was between 2000 and 2005, when it collaborated with the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and won a prize from the Open Society Institute for outstanding service in Roma integration. Nowadays Romany Bah's public activity is more sporadic; it essentially helps resolve ethnic conflicts when they break out.

[3. Fighting against gender segregation, domestic violence and trafficking in women](#)

[1. Trafficking in Women and Violence against Women in Bulgaria](#)

In 1998, Bulgaria joined La Strada, an international program for the prevention of trafficking in women in Central and Eastern Europe. La Strada is financed by the EU and the government of the Netherlands; its executor in Bulgaria is the Animus Foundation. Member countries include Poland, Czech Republic, Ukraine and the Netherlands, all of which have serious problems with trafficking in women. Each country develops its program in three directions: lobbying and media work, anti-trafficking actions and advocacy on behalf of the victims.

The Animus Foundation also works for the prevention of violence against women and children, offering free anonymous telephone lines and consultation centres to help victims. The foundation works on projects with Bulgarian and international institutions including the child protection agency and the Interior Ministry.

⁵http://www.nadaciamilanasecku.sk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenty/Romske/ROMA_LT%20report_final.pdf

2. Programs to prevent violence against women in the Czech Republic

Women's NGOs launched a public-awareness campaign in 2001 that highlighted the issue of domestic violence. In April 2001, an inter-ministerial working group was set up to create interdisciplinary teams that facilitated medical, social, legal and police cooperation in detecting and prosecuting cases of violence against women. The Government prepared a new Penal Code in which domestic violence would be specifically addressed.

3. Fight against Domestic violence in Hungary

NANE⁶ is a civil organisation in Hungary established in 1994. It fights violence against women through public awareness-raising campaigns and legal initiatives.⁷ NANE is the only NGO that runs a hotline for battered women and children in Hungary. The organisation has initiated amendments to laws and public-administration reforms in areas where the current regulations do not guarantee equal protection for victims of domestic violence. In 1997, Hungary's Parliament passed a law criminalizing marital rape as a result of a NANE petitioning the Constitutional Court. The organisation kept the issue on the political agenda, putting continuous pressure on decision makers to create a legislative framework that is truly able to defend the women from domestic abuse.

4. Further examples of successful civic initiatives

1. Online Map of Public Security Cameras in Hungary

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ) in 2007 requested police release data related to public security cameras in Budapest. When police refused, TASZ launched a court case that lasted 2.5 years – and eventually won.

Hungary's Supreme Court in spring 2010 ruled that the cameras were a matter of public interest and ordered the Budapest Police Department (BRFK) to publish data related to all cameras that it operates in the city. This includes the cameras' location, their operational, technical and legal details, and financial information.

The result was an interactive internet map at www.geospace.hu where users can see the locations of Budapest's security cameras. The map is not complete, because only cameras operated by law-enforcement agencies appear on the map; cameras operated by private companies are not on the list, even if they record activities in public areas. The map's administrators have asked Budapest residents to help complete the map by sending in photographs of security cameras along with details of their locations.

Following the NGO's victory, Hungary's National Police Department (ORFK) made public its list of police-operated security cameras nationwide. TASZ was waging another legal campaign against the municipal governments in Budapest's Districts 10 and 13, arguing that the district councils illegally hired non-police organizations to operate their cameras. TASZ won the first ruling.

TASZ argues that there is no overriding public interest to justify keeping the cameras' locations secret. No one has ever published any studies in Hungary to determine how effective the cameras are at preventing crime or whether police could use another method that does not violate people's privacy.

⁶ <http://www.nane.hu/>

2. Consumer Rights protection in Bulgaria

There was a strong campaign for consumer rights with respect to Bulgaria's central heating system, between 2005 and 2007. The campaign was especially active in the capital, Sofia, and the coastal city of Varna. The main initiator was the Federation of Consumers in Bulgaria, which offered free consultations and lawyers to help in collective civil claims against the central heating system. Heating services didn't improve, but Bulgarian consumers became more informed about their rights.

The Federation of Consumers in Bulgaria, founded in 1990, is the country's oldest authoritative working consumers' organization. The federation initiates campaigns for better consumer information and a higher quality of goods and public services.

3. Patients' Rights in Bulgaria

Bulgaria's public healthcare system suffers from periodic drug shortages that leave patients without access to medicine – especially patients with cancer. In 2005, cancer victim Teodora Zaharieva started a hunger strike in front of Bulgaria's Health Ministry over the state's inability to provide her with the medicine she needed. She later sued the ministry for failing to provide treatment – and won. Zaharieva, a cancer survivor, now works with the Association of Patients with Oncologic Diseases, the main defender of patients' rights. The association acts as a mediator between patients and the state health authorities, helping to solve problems.

The APOD started out as an organization for women with breast cancer, but later merged with organizations for patients with different oncological diseases. APOD is a member of Bulgarian National Patients Organization, an umbrella group for patients' rights advocates.

4. Combating violence against Animals in Bulgaria

An unidentified person cut all four legs off a dog in March 2010. The dog was saved and sent for medical treatment in Germany, but pictures of the animal's suffering shocked Bulgarians into action. "Mima's Case," as it came to be called, prompted ecological and animal-protection NGOs to launch internet campaigns against animal violence. Consequently, Bulgaria's government sent a bill to Parliament that would raise the punishment for animal cruelty to a fine of BGN 5,000 (€2,500) or up to three years jail. Lawmakers have yet to act on the proposal, and stakeholders predict MPs will reduce the severity of the punishment before passing it. But Mima's Case and the NGOs' actions have had a clear impact on legislation and have made Bulgarians much more sensitive toward animal cruelty.