

## **Deliberative Poll® Supports Integration of the Roma in Bulgarian Society Prime Minister Lauds Process**

A national Deliberative Poll®<sup>1</sup> of Bulgaria on policies toward the Roma produced many strong and statistically significant changes in the direction of an integrationist perspective. The scientific sample of 255 residents drawn from around the country by Alpha Research spent the weekend of April 14-15, 2007 deliberating about three issues affecting the Roma: Housing, Crime and Education.

Housing: After deliberation, participants expressed far less support for separate Roma neighborhoods but increased support for measures that would help the Roma obtain adequate and legal housing. Those who thought that “the Roma should live in separate Roma neighborhoods” declined from 43% to 21% while those who thought the government “should legalize those buildings that meet current regulations and then destroy the rest” rose from 66% to 77%. Those agreeing that “The government should help people living in illegal housing to get and repay loans to build new houses” went from 47% to 55%. After deliberation, participants also placed increased value on self-reliance in approaching this issue. Those agreeing that “The Roma will take better care of houses that they built with their own resources” rose from 76% to 91%.

As participants deliberated they increasingly agreed that separate Roma neighborhoods posed a problem. Those who thought “the Roma neighborhoods breed crime and disease that affect everyone” rose from 60% to 69%. And while the participants moderated somewhat in their view of what should be done, they continued to be disturbed about unpaid electricity bills. For example, those believing that “power should be cut off in the neighborhoods where the residents do not pay” fell from 82% to a still very high 75%. Nevertheless, there was no support after deliberation for punitive measures such as “building a wall around the ghetto.” Support for this option fell from 12% at the beginning to only 7% after deliberation.

Criminal justice: After deliberation participants approved employing more Roma among the police and in the courts. They also objected more strongly to police checks applied just to the Roma. The percentage agreeing that “the government should hire more Roma police officers” rose from 32% to 56%, while those agreeing that “the government should hire more Roma in the court” rose from 26% to 45%. Those who “agreed strongly” that “more frequent police checks just of the Roma would be unfair” rose from 16% to 27% (and those agreeing strongly or somewhat rose from 29% to 34%).

Education: After deliberation, support rose for integrating Roma children into Bulgarian schools and for closing the separate Roma schools. Those agreeing that “The Roma schools should be closed and *all* the children should be transported by buses to their new school” rose from 42% to 66%. Support for maintaining separate Roma schools also fell dramatically. Those believing the “Roma schools should be preserved” fell from 46% to 24%. Participants’ were also less inclined after deliberation to think that Bulgarians generally would support preserving Roma schools (49% thought before deliberation that

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<sup>1</sup> Deliberative Polling is a registered trade mark of James S. Fishkin. All fees from the trade mark are used to support research.

Bulgarians would support preserving Roma schools versus only 31% after), and the same was true for their perception of support among the Roma themselves (62% before versus 48% after). The sample also thought lack of knowledge of Bulgarian language and culture was an impediment to education of the Roma. Those agreeing that this was a reason “Roma children are reluctant to attend school” rose from 38% to 59%.

Information: Participants showed significant gains in knowledge about Roma-related topics after deliberation. There were ten information questions. An index of all ten rose significantly by 7.5% and seven of the ten individual items increased significantly. For example, those who knew that Roma with higher education tend to have been those who studied in mixed groups with Bulgarians rose from 30% to 47% and those who knew that the Roma in Hungary as compared to those in Bulgaria have a smaller percentage living ghettos rose from 5% to 16%.

Evaluation of the process: Most participants thought the event was extremely valuable. On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 was “generally a waste of time” and 10 was “extremely valuable” 72% of the participants gave the overall event a perfect 10. High percentages also gave specific aspects of the process the same perfect rating: 74% for “the small group discussions”, 52% for the plenary sessions with experts and 47% for the sessions with the politicians.

Representativeness of the sample: A total of 1344 people completed a questionnaire before the Deliberative Poll event. Of these, 255 participated in the event. Compared to the non-participants, those who attended the event were somewhat more educated (24% had a university degree, versus only 17% of non-participants), and had higher levels of knowledge (answering an average of 21% of knowledge questions correctly versus an average of 16% among non-participants). There were also more white-collar workers among the participants than the non-participants (30% versus 20%), and fewer retired people (21% versus 31%). Participants were balanced well with non-participants in terms of gender, however (42% of both participants and non-participants were male), and in terms of residential location (16% of participants versus 14% of non-participants were from Sofia; 58% versus 56% from small or regional towns; and 27% versus 30% from villages). There were more Roma among the participants than the non-participants; they made up 10% of the participants and only 5% of non-participants (6% of the entire T1 sample).

Partners: The Deliberative Poll was organized by the Centre for Liberal Strategies with partner organizations Alpha Research, Bulgarian National Television and the Open Society Institute, Sofia. The deliberations took place in the National Palace of Culture and were televised nationally. Advice and support was provided by Professor James Fishkin of Stanford and Professor Robert C. Luskin of the University of Texas, Austin.

The National Deliberative Poll was under the patronage of the Chairman of the National Assembly, Georgy Pirinski. Mr. Pirinski delivered the opening speech of the forum. The Prime Minister, **Sergei Stanishev**, and the European Commissioner,

**Meglana Kuneva**, addressed the forum at its conclusion.. In his closing remarks, the Prime Minister endorsed the concept of Deliberative Polling and its application to Bulgaria: “The National Deliberative Poll is something brand new for Bulgarian society and in Bulgarian politics. It is very important ...to implement this method to get public support for other crucial or divisive issues in Bulgarian society.” Later he added: “The Deliberative Poll is a mini referendum which has to be applied for key decisions also in other areas such as education or health care reform because this method allows for a deeper knowledge of the essence of the issues, for possible ways to resolve these issues, and for the policies and actions which the institutions should undertake with the support of the society.”

For further information about the Deliberative Poll and its results, contact Yana Papazova, Program Coordinator at the Centre for Liberal Strategies, [yana@cls-sofia.org](mailto:yana@cls-sofia.org), tel. (+359-2) 986 - 1433. In the US contact Professor James Fishkin at [jfishkin@stanford.edu](mailto:jfishkin@stanford.edu) or see the web site <http://cdd.stanford.edu>