



Gender & Development Magazine of KARAT Coalition, 1/2000



Beijing+5

Editorial



Dear Readers,

This is the birth of a unique magazine that was thought out as a networking tool for women's organizations of Central and Eastern Europe united in the KARAT Coalition. The feature that makes this magazine special is that every issue is prepared by an international team of contributors who reside in different countries and communicate via e-mail. The goal is to provide the regional perspective to important issues affecting women's lives in the post-communist countries of the CEE region. The KARAT Coalition originated out of the common problems that women face in the transition from a totalitarian communist past to a free market society and the need to give women's organisations a voice and space. The magazine aims to enhance the Coalition's contribution to the democratic sustainable development of these countries through providing visibility of the gender-related effects of the reforms presently underway. The voices of grass-root women's organizations of the region are finally to be heard in politics where to exist means to be visible and to be taken into account.

The idea of creating a quarterly printed magazine of the Coalition was agreed upon during KARAT's mission to the 43rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (March 1999, New York). KARAT's participants approved a funding proposal prepared by the Women's Alliance for Development (Bulgaria) on behalf of the Coalition that was later accepted by NOVIB (the Netherlands), one of the major supporters of Gender and Development projects in Europe. Thanks to NOVIB, 12 representatives from 10 KARAT member countries (Poland, Slovakia, Moldova, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Russia and Bulgaria) assembled in Sofia on April 1-2, 2000 to discuss the magazine's objectives, structure and expected outcomes, as well as the major topic areas that will be covered in the 5 issues to be published within 12 months. It was decided that the current issue will be very different from the following ones. It is meant to present the KARAT Coalition's structure and history, and an archive of the most important documents produced by KARAT. Each of the following issues will focus on one topic area that is of key importance to women's advancement in the transition countries (such as Women in the Economy; Minority Women, etc.). There will also be an information section presenting a calendar of important regional and global events, announcements of competitions, Internet services, etc. Each issue (including the present one) will feature the work of popular women-artists from the KARAT member countries.

The magazine's team will strongly rely on your feedback and suggestions for the future issues. You can personally contribute to making the women's agenda a legitimate part of civil society in the CEE region by becoming one of the magazine's sponsors.

Enjoy reading!

Donations from organizations and individuals willing to support us are welcome!

Subscription price: 5 issues for \$ 15, one issue - \$ 3.

Advertisement prices: cover pages (full colored) - \$ 3/cm²; inside pages (black + one color) - \$ 1/cm².

Submissions welcome!

You could send an article or information material up to 2,000 words long, on the forthcoming topics:

Women and the Economy, no later than July 20, 2000;

Women and Governance, no later than October 20, 2000.

Submissions to be sent to: Women's Alliance for Development, 52 Neofit rilski Street, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria; Tel/Fax: (+359-2) 980 5532; 980 9447; E-mail: wad@infotel.bg

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How Democracy Shortchanges Women in Central and Eastern Europe



by Katalin Medvedev

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In 1999 Katalin was involved in drafting the Central Eastern European Recommendations on Women and Peace Building in the Balkans for the Beijing Plus Five Review Process. Katalin is a member of the International Federation of Journalists; the Hungarian Federation of Journalists (Women in the Media Section); Feminist Network, *Hírnök*; and Karat Coalition.

The changes following the downfall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe demonstrated that the word "democracy" had a completely different meaning for men and for women. The region's structural adjustments to the Western World, and the process of transition to a free market economy have positioned women into a "loser's" role. Women were expected to sacrifice many rights they had come to expect and in fact realized under Communism. These rights include full employment, superficial visibility - at the very least - in politics and high-level decision-making, free health and child-care. Such an unexpected turn of events took women by surprise and silenced their personal and political voice. This was not something they had deserved or had been in any way conditioned to expect.

Under Communism, men and women were equally denied political and economic autonomy. The public and private life of both sexes was largely state-controlled and because of this, in the face of totalitarianism, a strong partnership developed between them. There was a consensual interdependency between men and women for survival. Women had a positive and important role in society, albeit a rather traditional one. Unfortunately, contrary to popular leftist Western belief, the actual role of women in Communist countries was not much different from that of the pre-Second World War patriarchal societies.

Since 1989, citizens of the new democracies in Eastern and Central Europe have contested patriarchy at the state level, but not in its nuclear and fundamental form, in the every-day lives and practices of families. No public discourse was initiated on the gender-specific issues of the changes or about their consequences, although they were multitudinous. There has been no discussion about the fact that what might have been, under Communism, the only morally fulfilling role for women i.e. being wives, lovers and mothers might not be, and is not the same in the new democracies. The rules of the game in the new economic, social and political reality have changed dramatically and the players have to adopt new strategies. But what resources, deeply-rooted and internalized democratic traditions can women fall back on? Almost none. Women were not taught or conditioned to be autonomous thinkers. They were not schooled in the values of economic and emotional independence.

During Communism, forcing people into close-knit families was fundamental in exercising control over them. It was also considered economically worthwhile to form family units, because social policies and benefits only favored people who lived in families. If a woman decided not to marry, she was not only a social, but also an economic outcast. The existence of domestic violence, rape, sexual discrimination etc., was ignored, and any

such cases that came to light, were viewed as singular. The system had nothing to do with them. There was no civil society in the countries of the region, no civic organizations to address women's specific circumstances. The official Communist propaganda denied the existence of such needs.

Communism has indeed left a very difficult legacy for men and women alike. It paid mostly only lip service to sexual equality. It did not allow for the spontaneous development of gender equality, either. But from a woman's perspective the democratic changes do not seem to have provided women with the same benefits and rights accorded to men. The only real change we can see is that the oppression of a totalitarian, paternal state has been replaced by the totalitarian oppression of the marketplace.

Women have lost far more than they have gained. Social spending has been radically slashed. Food subsidies have been minimized. Transportation subsidies have been reduced substantially. Child-care centers were the first to be closed down by local governments when funds dwindled. Health care is being privatized and is governed solely by market forces. Unemployment of women is growing as government jobs and administrative jobs are slashed. Prostitution and trafficking in women have dramatically increased. And the list goes on for too long to complete here.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

On a superficial level, women enjoyed a higher political and decision making status in the "Communist" countries than in the West, but this appearance is deceptive. In spite of the twenty per cent quotas for women in Parliament none of the women elected have kept their promises of creating better lives for other women. These women had no program of their own, nor have they introduced recognizably important and memorable legislation. These women were physically present in politics, but they were part of the public facelessness. They had neither autonomy, nor integrity.

At the same time, when we analyze women's position in the post-communist democracies, it is important to note that no women of the region had to fight for the vote, nor for the so-called Communist "privileges". These were mostly imported from the Soviet Union and applied in unifying manner in all countries of the former "Eastern Block". In such circumstances, it is not surprising that women had no ambition to master the "art" of politics and never acquired basic political skills. Women had to enter into post-Communist democratic policy-making without a distinctly female political tradition and perspective. Needless to say, the consequences have been dire

and will be far-reaching

Luckily, with the downfall of Communism, the "token woman" has finally disappeared. But, we cannot celebrate this fact wholeheartedly, either. The old pre-war ideology that women should stay away from politics was revived in an instant. Women who got into Parliaments on party ballots have not demonstrated any sign of a feminist agenda. On the contrary, they have hastened to assert and demonstrate that there is absolutely no difference between a male and a female politician. Overall, in every major decision, they are governed by their party loyalties. Therefore, we need to develop a system of evaluating all parliamentarians, male or female, on the basis of how they have voted in the past on women's issues and publicize our findings in the mass media. In this way, women can see for themselves how the person - male or female - has worked to represent their interests. On the basis of concrete information, women can then decide whether that person deserves their vote again, the second time around. In short, we have to learn how to make our politicians accountable for their actions. It is also important that we give back the value of social activism, which has completely eroded in the years of Communism. We need to produce female decision-makers at all levels, and see to it that they act upon their voters' legitimate interests and demands. In this way, we can establish the roots of real and effective, democratic policy-making which is kind to women as well.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

Another thing about women's situation in the East that was largely envied yet misunderstood in the West was women's full employment under the Communists. In the eighties employment among women of the region was about ninety-five per cent. However, if we examine this fact more closely, we see that women were mainly employed in mundane, non-creative, mechanical and sex-segregated jobs. Women formed the majority of teachers, educators and clerks while drawing smaller salaries than men. Compulsory employment was among the most strictly upheld means for social control by the Communists. Not only were those without work considered criminals, but being employed was crucial to qualify for social benefits as well. Such benefits were tied to employment, not to citizenship.

The biggest "Communist privilege" that women in the region enjoyed was paid maternity leave. This system was created, not because women had a better status in society or because their work at home was considered to be important or productive. In fact, a woman's work was never as highly valued as that of a man's. A big disparity

existed between male and female wages all over Eastern Europe. The introduction of maternity leave was done because of pure economic necessity. Financially, for the states, it was cheaper to pay meager maternity allowances than to create jobs for women with young children. Thus, through their reproductive capacities - as it has always been their fate - women involuntarily contributed to their own economic devaluation. But, on the positive side, this system did offer job security. (On return to work, employers had to re-employ female workers in their original post or in a comparable one.) This is a fact we can think back of with great nostalgia today. On the other hand, women could not have just been laid off. It would not have fit in well with the official propaganda. Consequently, in 1990, when the new rhetoric did not require similar lip service any more, women became the first targets of downsizing. The pro-woman thinking instantly disappeared - which proves that it never really existed in the first place.

Ironically, the best that was supposed to happen to women under Communism - the system of maternity leaves - got totally inverted and became a major disservice to women. For not only did it deprive women of their economic importance - nothing has a value that is free - but it fossilized the traditional division of labor in families as well. This is why in 1990, when women started to lose their jobs to the powers of "economic restructuring", the public did not smell a rat. People did not realize that there would be no going back. To further complicate the picture, women were also supposed to celebrate the fact that they were not "obliged" to go out to work any more. They could stay where they "really belonged" - in the home. But could they really? They had to earn money. With the present "Third World pay scale (which was originally calculated on two people engaged in wage earning) women of the region just cannot stay at home. Another factor that has been largely overlooked is that single mothers could never use this option. Single mothers always had to hold down at least two jobs to get by.

As a result of the current economic changes, there is not enough work in Central and Eastern Europe now. At present, there is a strong political interest in making women stay at home to reduce female unemployment. The ready-made ideology of "the Virtuous Motherhood", imported from the West conveniently complements the economic reasons. A lot of overworked women, guilt-ridden because they do not spend enough time with their children, buy into this ideology. Women at present do not yet see that they are encouraged to go back home only to provide much needed social services, such as care of the children, the sick and the elderly, which the impoverished state and the local governments have no funds for.

CONCLUSION

The majority of social and economic changes in the countries of the former "Eastern Block" after 1990 was to the detriment of women. "Herstory" has already taught us that when economies, national and political identities are in crisis women carry the bulk of the weight. During Communism, men and women got lumped together in their fight against totalitarianism. Aspects of gender were largely ignored even in the academia, as the focus of intellectual discourse was somebody's universalized political self, rather than the gendered self. Perhaps as a belated reaction to the principles of forced equality, imposed on people by Communism, post-communist countries have paradoxically become far more conservative in their gender relations than their Western counterparts. Instead of wanting to "march towards Europe", in this respect as well, we are deliberately marching towards the East.

Women of the region, led by a new generation of articulate, female politicians, advocates, journalists, scholars and activists, have to renew our fight for real political and economic empowerment. Our duty will be to make political decision-makers understand that each decision they make has to be evaluated from a woman's perspective as well. In their efforts to dismantle full employment and put the countries of the region on the "right" economic course politicians have to look for other, more constructive, solutions than returning women to the private sphere. In contrast, women should be encouraged to see that in a real democratic society meaningful work is both a career track and a means for political empowerment.

Because of the constraints on the length of this article, a lot of important issues were not touched upon, such as those of body politics, issues of health care, issues of sexuality, the growing role of prostitution and the sex industry in the region. The solutions to the above issues require the incorporation of a strong female perspective in high-level decision-making. Further, women will urgently have to initiate public discourses on how to improve sexual education in the region and how to eradicate sexism. It should become top priority for them to point out that when decisions are made about women's health and reproductive rights, they must be strictly made with the involvement of women.

We have to act now, when women's empowerment, sexual equality and a balanced gender power structure is still achievable, while socially responsible thinking is not yet totally erased from people's minds. In ten years such a desire might become impossible to achieve. Can we pass up this chance?



The KARAT Coalition for Regional Action Network of Women's NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe

by Kinga Lohmann

CREATION, MISSION AND AIMS

The KARAT Coalition is a network of women's NGOs from thirteen countries of Central and Eastern Europe; some of those organizations participated in the NGO Forum (in Huairou) of the 4th UN Conference on Women. The mission of the Coalition is to work towards the promotion and achievement of real gender equality through publicizing the Platform for Action - the final document of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) - in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as to bring visibility to the issues facing women from the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern European region at international fora. The members of KARAT Coalition monitor the implementation of the Platform for Action and national plans for action.

The KARAT Coalition was created in February 1997 at a meeting in Warsaw. Currently, it has members from 13 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia. The coalition works to change the socio-political position of women in our region and strengthen the women's NGOs in the process of democratization. One of the significant tasks of the Coalition is to work towards a strong representation of women from the region at international fora, particularly at the United Nations. A good example of this is the participation of the KARAT Coalition in the 43rd and the 44th UN sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 1999 and March 2000, and the Coalition's active participation in the global preparations for the UN General Assembly Special Session entitled: "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century".

STRUCTURE

Regional Coordinator elected for a 2-year period coordinates the activities of the Coalition. The present coordinator is Kinga Lohmann from the Women's Association for Gender Equality - Beijing 1995, Poland. All significant issues (projects, programs of meetings, new initiatives, principles of the Coalition's functioning) are discussed and acted upon by the Coordinating Forum - an informal body consisting of the national coordinators as well as those members who are actively interested in the activities of KARAT. The 5-member Advising Committee (elected by all members) is an additional body that helps in reaching final decisions. An exchange of views and discussions constantly takes place via electronic mail.

The national coordinators (one or two people from each country represented in KARAT) direct the work of the Coalition in their own country, inform other organizations about the activities of KARAT, and keep close contact with the regional coordinator.

The KARAT Coalition is currently implementing its third project,



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which, like the previous projects, is generously supported by the Ford Foundation. Last year the Coalition has also received significant financial support from UNIFEM, The Open Society Institute and USAID.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Regional Report

The first significant success of the KARAT Coalition was the preparation of a Regional Report on "Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women" and 10 national reports. A questionnaire, based on the Platform for Action, was prepared by the Polish team, endorsed by all coalition members, and distributed in the 10 countries then represented in KARAT. KARAT members had to evaluate the functioning of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women in their countries. Completion of the questionnaire required knowledge, access to data, and consultations with government institutions for the advancement of women, as well as with experts and other women's NGOs. The Regional Report was created on the basis of information contained in the 10 detailed questionnaires, as well as the 10 national reports: Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Macedonian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Slovakian and Ukrainian. The final version was put together by a team of members from 5 countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) who met in Warsaw (February 1999), after an all-member e-mail discussion on the first draft. The Regional Report was translated into 10 languages and published in print in each of the member countries. The national reports were also published in print and they became an important tool in the relationships with national governments. The publishing of the report has strengthened the position of women's NGOs as a factor for the advancement of civil society in the region.

Presentation of the Report

A public presentation of the Regional Report took place in New York on the 3rd of March 1999 during the session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. For the first time women's organizations from Central and Eastern Europe presented a common position document, and were strongly represented at the UN forum. The report enticed great attention. The participants, more than 50, who attended the presentation were particularly interested in the effective cooperation of women's organizations from this region. After the presentation of the Regional Report and the activities of KARAT Coalition, the national reports were presented: Albanian (Jeta Katro Beluli), Bulgarian (Regina Indsheva), Czech (Miroslava Holubova), Hungarian (Ildiko Biro), Macedonian (Tomka Dilevska), Polish (Kinga Lohmann), Romanian (Cecilia Preda), Russian

(Liza Bozhkova) and Slovakian (Zuzana Jezerska).

Participation in the 43rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

The participation in the 43rd session was an opportunity for contacts of KARAT members with government delegates from their own countries, with accredited UN journalists, and with representatives of missions to the UN. KARAT's participation in the NGO Forum meant active involvement in the "caucuses" (working groups formed on the basis of a regional key), European and Global, and discussing the preparations for "Beijing + 5". The aim of the forum was to work out a common position of NGOs, which would be presented to the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as joint agreements regarding the preparation of the non-governmental organizations themselves. The NGOs agreed that they would prepare national alternative reports, in reaction to the government reports. It was also decided that KARAT members would work together to draft alternative regional reports and a global alternative report of non-governmental organizations. Thanks to our participation in the regional European group, the representatives of Western countries started to use the term "Europe" more sensitively, making sure that the examples quoted did not merely refer to the EU countries when trying to illustrate what is characteristic of Europe as a whole, but also to the countries of the post-Communist region as well.

MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

After the first conference in Warsaw in February 1997, which established the Coalition, the following meetings took place:

- Bratislava - June 1998,
- Prague - October 1998,
- Bucharest - May 1999,
- Sophia - October 1999,
- Budapest - November 1999,
- Moscow - April 2000.

The meeting in Bratislava, called "International Networking and Lobbying", changed the previous focus of the Coalition work. The publicizing of the Platform for Action, which had been a focus up to that point, gave way to monitoring of the implementation of the Platform and an active regional NGO activity at the UN.

The following meeting in Prague concentrated on the "Regional Action at the 43rd UN Session of the Commission on the Status of Women". This meeting was dedicated to setting up a detailed schedule of activities that would finally lead to the producing of a Regional Report to be presented at the 43rd UN session in New York in March 1999.

The meeting in Bucharest, "Central and Eastern European Preparatory Meeting for the Beijing + 5 Reviewing Process", was dedicated to regional preparations for Beijing + 5 and to planning

KARAT's participation in the global preparations. It was agreed upon by a majority of member countries of the Coalition that they would be responsible for writing national alternative reports regarding the implementation of the Platform for Action. It was also agreed that the regional alternative report would contain recommendations of the NGOs to their respective governments for the next 5-year period. One of the most important points of discussion at that conference was the situation of women in the armed conflict in the Balkans. A statement was adopted on this issue, which urged for an immediate interruption of violence and strengthening the decision-making power of the UN; ensuring equal participation of women in all peace-building activities and in resolving the armed conflict in all affected areas. It was also decided that the problem should find its space in the recommendations from the region.

In Sofia a workshop on "The Tools for Lobbying Intergovernmental Organizations on Gender Impacts of Economic Globalization and Transition Policies - Focus on the World Bank" was conducted. That meeting was a continuation of an initiative concerning the setting up of a KARAT Working Group, Women and Banks, which had been suggested a year ago by Ewa Charkiewicz. The meeting was aimed at introducing a new direction in the activities of KARAT - lobbying of the World Bank and other international monetary institutions.

NATIONAL LOBBYING

Preparation of the national alternative reports meant that KARAT member organizations needed to get access to the reports on the implementation of the Platform for Action prepared by their governments. Despite the submission deadline set by the UN at the end of April 1999, many of the governments were not ready with the reports by that date. In many countries, like in Romania, Russia and Hungary, it was the NGOs who brought to the attention of the officials the existence of a questionnaire concerning the implementation of the Platform for Action, as well as an obligation of the governments to complete and submit it.

SMALL PROJECTS

As part of the main project: "Central Eastern European Preparatory Process for the Beijing+5 and its follow-up", KARAT Coalition also runs smaller projects. One of them, coordinated by Lenka Simerska from the Czech Republic, is the designing and maintenance of a web site of the Coalition: <<http://www.KARAT.org/>>. The creation of an Internet-based discussion forum for Coalition members and of a section concerning national preparations for Beijing + 5 is also planned. There will be a link to the European network of Internet sites focusing on those preparations, as part of the "European Women Action 2000" project.

Another project initiated by WAD, Regina Indshewa and Poly Filipova (Bulgaria) is this magazine - a forum for communicating to a wider audience the work of the KARAT Coalition.

EVALUATION

The KARAT Coalition is only three years old. In a relatively short time we managed to achieve the following:

- To build mutual trust and faith in the success of a joint initiative, which came from grassroots organizations in the region and was being implemented with our own resources, based on our own experience, making our own mistakes, helped us realize our enormous potential for action.

- To understand the meaning and importance of a joint regional action and switch from single-country women's perspective to a regional perspective. The breakthrough point for this way of thinking was our participation in the 43rd session of the UN Committee on the Status of Women (March 1999) and presentation of our Regional Report.

- To create a space for ourselves at the UN NGO fora, and to be acknowledged by other well established NGOs as a new partner who has a lot to offer in the global discussion.

- To be recognized by the international donor community sponsors as an important regional network.

- To earn the appreciation and respect of women colleagues from other countries in the region and abroad. Their willingness to cooperate with us is the best proof of this (the large attendance at the CEE/CIS caucuses in New York - March 2000, as well as the initiative of Russian organizations to set up a meeting on Beijing + 5 with KARAT Coalition - April 2000). We have thus managed to defy the stereotype that cooperation between women's organizations in our region is impossible.

- To gain a degree of authority amongst representatives of our own governments and the governments of our region.

Within the last three years we have had the opportunity to meet one another several times a year. Each time we have made a little step forward in reaching the designated goal - bringing the problems of women from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to the international fora. Our discussions are becoming increasingly more professional and reinforce our belief that the strategy we adopted at the onset of our activity was the right one. We had then focused on the possibility of cooperation between non-governmental organizations from the post-communist countries, based on their similar totalitarian past, similar ways of thinking and similar problems arising during the period of transition. We knew that we had to work out our own model of cooperation reflecting the specifics of our region and our common goals. □

KARAT's Participation in the Beijing +5 Process

by Kinga Lohmann

Why was the participation in the Beijing +5 review process so important for the KARAT Coalition?

1. The Central and Eastern European region was not visible in Beijing.

The representation of the Central and Eastern European region at the Beijing Conference in 1995 was very weak due to a lack of knowledge of the mechanisms of UN conferences, the significance of lobbying, the important role played by NGOs in influencing the preparation of an international document. The lack of active involvement in the work on the Beijing Platform for Action from women's NGOs from the CEE region meant that they were unaware of the potential significance of this document for the advancement of women in our countries.

As a consequence, the Platform for Action is still practically unknown in most of our countries, even amongst women's NGOs. It was translated by the governments in just a few countries of the region; in some - translations were initiated by international organisations or foundations, thanks to the initiative or pressure from the NGOs. In 1999 KARAT questioned a number of women's NGOs in the countries of our region (the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary) how familiar the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action were to them. 80% of those organizations had not even heard of the document. This fact demonstrates a lack of awareness of how international documents can be used as a specific tool for pressing local governments to undertake actions for women.

2. The KARAT Coalition represents a regional perspective in the global preparations for the Beijing+5 review.

The KARAT Coalition, created in 1997, started discussions on the common problems facing women in Central and Eastern Europe. We focused on the difference between this sub-region and the rest of the UN region, including USA, Canada, Western Europe, Israel and the former Soviet Union. Three areas of concern were identified to distinguish our sub-region: **women and economy; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; women and the armed conflict** during the CEE/CIS caucus on strategy in New York at the 44th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The economy in transition, the process of privatization in our sub-region has often had negative impacts on women - both in terms of gaining access to assets and in terms of practices of the new private sector. We have focused on the institutional mechanisms because their existence and correct functioning were perceived by women from the sub-region as very important for the development of democracy and the promotion of gender awareness. One of the most burning questions in CEE/CIS sub-region calling for resolution was the situation of women and girls in armed conflicts and peace building.

In our own countries, we did not have a model of democratic co-operation, which we could follow. There was no dialogue between government representatives and representatives of civil society. Our politics is still based on the principle of hierarchy. Governments do not take the women's NGOs' opinion into consideration. The western partnership model does not suffice either. It cannot be uncritically applied to our circumstances. Instead of training women in leadership, we decided to send as many delegates as possible to UN Beijing+5 conferences and activities, so that they could learn democracy through active participation. It is at the international fora that we can take part in partnership discussions with western NGOs.

Over the last decade, NGOs from Central and Eastern Europe have been absent from global debates on women's rights. There was a huge gap to be filled - our own defined sub-regional perspective on the problems facing women. An important part of our participation in the Beijing+5 process consisted of joining the discussion on the Outcome Document and influencing its final shape, so that it contained issues affecting women from the CEE/CIS sub-region in a specific way.

Getting to know the mechanisms of the UN agencies, the procedures associated with the drafting and the adoption of documents had an enormous significance in adopting a regionally functioning model of co-operation between the governments and the NGOs. It helped us realise the extent to which the NGOs can influence the final shape of an international document. It inspired us to introduce similar mechanisms and procedures in our own countries.

Regional Report on Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) prepared for the 43rd session of CSW

Statement

Our regional report is based on the national reports prepared by the women's NGOs from Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine. It has been written for the 43rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York (March 1999).

We state that:

1. Women's issues are of low priority to the governments in our region.
2. International commitments to secure equal opportunities for women are de facto not being respected. Hardly any steps have been taken towards implementation of the Platform for Action.
3. Nascent unformed democracies are marked by frequent changes of governments followed by changes in policy and administrative personnel at all levels, which results in a lack of continuity in the treatment of women's issues.
4. Gender awareness is missing at all levels of society, as is the national machinery needed for promotion of such awareness.

Conclusions

National machinery

1. The national machineries for the advancement of women are vulnerable to political changes in most of the countries. The changes which have been made have had the effect of demoting the position of the national machinery (Albania), removing "women" from its name and mandate (Poland), and changing the personnel, scope, and sustainability of the machinery.
2. Women's issues are lumped together with family, youth and children issues which results in low transparency and a lack of clearly defined mandates for the national machinery for the advancement of women.
3. Currently, Bulgaria and Poland are without national machineries for the advancement of women.
4. In most of the countries there is no existing channel of communication between governments and NGOs on a regular basis.

Recommendations

1. Provide guarantees for the existence, sustainability, mandate and authority of the national machineries for the advancement of women.
2. Define clearly the exact structure, competence, tasks and authority of the national machineries.
3. Establish on a firm basis the mechanisms of cooperation between NGOs and governments for gender mainstreaming and involve women's NGOs directly in the process of implementation of the National Action Plan.
4. Implement the NAP and allocate adequate resources for its implementation.
5. Work out the NAP in the countries where it doesn't yet exist.
6. Introduce and implement gender equality laws both de jure and de facto.
7. Revise the existing legal regulations from a gender perspective and develop legal practices for the implementation of necessary changes.
8. Collect, analyze and present gender desegregated data on regular basis and use such data in policy and decision-making processes.
9. Institute gender mainstreaming in government policies.

Formulating and disseminating the peace recommendations set forth at the KARAT meeting in Budapest, November 1999, titled *Rebuilding Peace: The Priority of Women from Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, was a milestone in the history of the KARAT Coalition. The Recommendations were the result of a spontaneous, regional initiative that was prompted by tragic, concrete events in the Balkans.

It all started at the regular meeting of the KARAT Coalition in Bucharest, Romania, (May 15-16, 1999) which happened to be held at the same time as the 1999 NATO bombings of Yugoslavia were taking place. While discussing various issues of regional importance, the participants unanimously expressed an opinion that at a time of war raging in the region, all other issues, however important they might be, would have to be temporarily put on hold in

order to deal with the urgent issue of the war in the FRY. There was a common sentiment that in such a tragic historic moment, women of the region had to concentrate their energies on showing solidarity with their Balkan sisters whose lives had been disrupted and destroyed by the horrors of the war. Consequently, a decision was made to come together in a joint action to voice the specific concerns of women about the gendered effects of war, and to express a demand to prevent the escalation of the armed conflict in the Balkans. At the end of the meeting a resolution was adopted to bring women from the affected countries together with their sisters from Central and Eastern Europe to discuss possible common actions that would help restore peace to the Balkan region.

This meeting took place in Budapest in November 1999. During the meeting, KARAT Coalition members and their invited guests, representing various women's NGOs from the Balkan region, examined the effects of the war on women and concluded that they needed to speak out against the war together. We have to underline the historic importance of this event because women came together out of their own free will and not because of the principles of fake internationalism. The meeting resulted in region-specific and gender-specific anti-war agenda and course of action.

The recommendations you can read next are the outcome of a two-day intensive discussion on the various effects of the war on women's lives. Experts

of UNIFEM provided technical assistance in the drafting process. They also created a forum at the UN/Economic Commission for Europe Preparatory Conference for the Beijing Plus Five Review held in Geneva in January 2000 to further elaborate their content and wording in order to enlarge their scope. Women in the Commonwealth of Independent States have found the recommendations to fit their own situation too, and have also agreed to endorse them.

The Budapest Meeting and the Peace Recommendations

by Katalin Medvedev

However, the "success story" of the peace recommendations initiated by KARAT Coalition members does not end here. Having shown a unified, regional commitment to peace, also led to the decision that KARAT Coalition member, Zuzana Jezerska, was appointed as a conveyor of the caucus in Geneva examining the effects of armed conflict on girls' and women's lives in the CEE region. In this caucus, the participants identified two other, unique issues that had been largely ignored until then. Namely, the critical situation of minority women marginalized in war conflict situations not only by their gender, but also by their ethnic identity, and that of women in neighboring countries, whose lives are directly affected by the war too. The specific problems of the above mentioned groups of women were recommended for plenary discussion in Geneva, and were further analyzed during a special meeting with the Head of the Security Council in March 2000, in New York.

All in all, we can conclude that a serious grassroots initiative, properly worked out and brought to a regional level, can reach the highest political decision-makers who, in turn, will act upon them. Therefore, the lesson we have learned from the experience of drafting the Peace Recommendations is that if we come together as a united, regional force, we are able to influence the future of our region. This should give us ammunition for further, similar actions that will shape our region to become friendlier to women of all classes, ethnic identities and nationalities.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BEIJING PLUS FIVE REVIEW PROCESS

International Conference organized by KARAT Coalition and UNIFEM

Budapest, November 27-29, 1999

Sponsored by OSI and UNIFEM

REBUILDING PEACE:

The Priority of Women from Central and Eastern Europe

We, the women of Central and Eastern Europe, gathered in Budapest as a united group on the eve of the second millennium, launch an appeal to the global community. In the past decade, many of us have experienced the senseless horrors and tragedies of war. Many of us find our lives shattered by the loss of family members and the break-up of families, by extreme physical and emotional injuries, by environmental poisons and by economic wastelands.

While not all of us have suffered the horrors and indignities of war, we do carry an equal and shared responsibility for the peaceful and prosperous future of our entire region, a future based on the respect of women's and men's human rights. The birth of democracy in our region has enabled us, women from 16 different countries, to come together out of our own political conviction and free will, and not because of a policy of fake internationalism imposed from above. Yet again, there are attempts to manipulate, re-appropriate women for nationalistic purposes, and divide women both across class and ethnic lines as well as national borders.

However, a strong solidarity exists among us because of our common need to fight the traditional gender dichotomy that prevails in the emerging post-Communist democracies. One legacy of the past regime was the unfulfilled promise of women's equal rights and opportunities. In the newly emerging democracies, decision-making has remained in the hands of a predominantly male establishment. As a result, the new "democratic" policy and decision-making continues a culture that lacks genuine social sensitivity, and a female perspective. The transition period to democracy, just like Communism, is shortchanging women.

We, women of Central and Eastern Europe, have learned from our earlier experiences and refuse to become either exploited symbols or to remain silent ever again. We appeal for the support of the International Community to assist us in the process of developing genuine democratic societies

and institutions. We are not only concerned by the ever-widening social, political, and economic differences that divide our societies internally, but by the continuing political and economic fragmentation of the whole region, which we view as a potentially global destabilizing force.

We are deeply concerned about the rising xenophobia and intolerance against all ethnic minorities, including the Roma people and nationalism insidiously engulfing the countries of our region -- a tendency, which has culminated in wars that we fear are still far from being over. We strongly oppose nationalism not only in the form of nationalist states but as nationalist movements as well. We deplore and protest any and all use of educational systems, the mass media or the manipulation of religious communities to promote nationalism at a time when these should be used to promote a culture of tolerance and peace.

We demand that we be heard in order to stop undemocratic, non-inclusive and war-mongering processes. We can and will act as mediators among warring nations and groups, and set an example that peaceful co-existence is possible among people of different languages, culture, history, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Those of us who have not been victims of war atrocities in the past decade express our strong solidarity with all our sisters living in the war torn countries, especially with women in Serbia, who fight a totalitarian dictatorship, and the women of Kosovo, who are courageously rebuilding their shattered lives and communities. We, women from Central and Eastern Europe, strongly urge our governments and the international community to support our efforts with peace-building and reconciliation and take immediate action on our recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WOMEN OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Relating to Women and Armed Conflict

We, the women of Central and Eastern Europe, having gathered in Budapest on the eve of the second millennium to share our experience and join our voices, while reaffirming our commitment to the Strategic Objectives of Section E on Women and Armed Conflicts of the Beijing Platform for Action, remind the international community, UN Members states, international and regional intergovernmental organizations that at the time of the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing, the Platform for Action could not reflect our tragic experiences with the wars in the Balkans. Therefore, we urge the global community and the UN Member States to support our efforts at conflict prevention and peace-building in the region. Towards that end, we recommend:

Recommendation 1:

To create an enabling environment for conflict prevention, conflict transformation and peace-building. All governments should ensure women's full and equal participation in conflict prevention, conflict transformation, peace-building and reconstruction.

Actions to be Taken:

■ The international community and negotiators should end the practice of consulting only presidents and governments. Instead, they should consult, listen to, and partner with civil society, including women's organizations, to take account of their warnings regarding rising tensions, and to collaborate with women to take steps to prevent conflict at the earliest moment.

■ To prevent further bloodshed in the Balkan Region, the international community should make all efforts to support fragile democracies, push for free elections, in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in particular.

■ All governments must engage in dialogue with their civil societies, particularly with women, before making momentous decisions that affect the daily lives and the futures of their people. To ensure that such consultations are meaningful, formal processes for regular consultations should be established and their results respected, particularly for nations facing the risk of armed conflict, and in post-conflict countries where reconstruction is taking place.

■ Governments in the region should introduce legal and financial measures to increase women's participation at all levels of power and decision-making, for both elected and appointed positions, to enable women's equal participation in all institutions of governance, particularly in nations at risk of armed conflict.

■ UN Member States and the international community including International Financial Institutions should thoroughly consult with women's organizations about development plans and programs on an ongoing basis, particularly in pre- and post-conflict situations, and provide financial and political support to women's organizations working on building genuine democracies based on a culture of tolerance, peace and respect for human rights.



Ivica Krosjakova, „Proof of identity“, 1995

Recommendation 2:

To prevent war, build institutions of good governance including secure and civil societies. Further, all governments should take immediate action to make significant reductions in military expenditure and to redirect those funds to the promotion of human security.

Actions to be Taken:

■ UN Member States should take concrete and coordinated action to stop the illegal trade in armaments and the profiteering by criminals who produce and promote the purchase and use of arms, and to eradicate the endemic corruption that prevails in the region.

■ UN Member States should substitute mandatory military service with programs that enable young people to participate in civil and community service activities that work to support peace-building and reconstruction of their communities.

■ UN Member States should redirect funds planned for military expenditures to social protection, particularly to support vulnerable groups, education, and to build a culture of tolerance and peace.

■ UN Member States should make all efforts to ensure de-facto and de-jure full and equal citizenship rights to all ethnic and religious minorities.

Recommendation 3:

To ensure a just, expeditious and peaceful settlement of armed conflicts, all governments in the Region should implement and enforce their existing commitments to international legal instruments and mechanisms.

Actions to be Taken:

■ The international community and UN Member States should take action to ensure that the current rules of law and diplomacy, which allow only combatants and major political parties at the negotiation table, are changed and enable civil society, and particularly women's organizations, to participate in conflict prevention, conflict transformation and peace negotiation processes.

■ All governments in the region and the international community as a whole should take all necessary measures in order to make the implementation of relevant human rights and international humanitarian law instruments more effective, in particular through a wide dissemination of these standards as well as through the adoption, already in times of peace, of all necessary measures of implementation in their domestic legislation.

■ All governments in the region and the international community as a whole should take immediate and concerted action to bring to justice not only those who executed orders to commit war crimes and other international crimes, but also those who issued those orders.

■ All governments in the region and the international community as a whole should co-operate to the fullest with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and should immediately start and expeditiously complete the process of ratification of the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

■ Anyone who commits a crime of sexual violence, including members of the UN peacekeeping forces, should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

■ In the name of justice but also of reconciliation and future peace, all governments of the Region should establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission within the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe to the extent that it does not undermine the work of ICTY.

■ States should at all times respect and implement the international standards pertaining to the prohibitions and restrictions on the methods and means of warfare, in particular the rule of distinction between combatants and non-combatants, and the prohibition of weapons causing superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering, such as anti-personal landmines. They should inform people of the chemicals, poisons and other threats to personal health and the environment used during a military operation.



Six hundred and fifty (650) participants from 51 countries took part in the NGO Working Sessions preceding the three day Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 2000 Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Working Sessions was organized by the Geneva NGO Committee on the Status of Women and its Working Group on Women in the ECE Region, in cooperation with sub-

ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for Beijing Plus 5: a Partnership Model for the Future, Geneva, 16-21 January 2000

regional networks and the ECE Secretariat. Funding from UNDP, UNIFEM, the Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation and the Danish Government enabled an unprecedented number of participants from NGOs of Central and Eastern European Countries (CEE) and CIS Countries. Unlike the past NGO Forum held in Vienna in 1994 that preceded the high level regional preparatory meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Working Session was structured to prepare NGOs to participate as equals at the intergovernmental conference. This process facilitated meaningful dialogue between NGOs and governments - they talked with, instead of at each other.

One common thread ran throughout the meeting: NGOs asked their governments for a renewed commitment and a show of political will to really move forward with effective tools and targets to measure and monitor progress towards full implementation of the Platform for Action. NGOs also debated how they could help in the process of a needed change in mentality of society to finally accept women and men, boys and girls as persons of equal value. On many occasions, the need for more resources and closer cooperation was stressed between governments, NGOs, women's groups and other actors involved.

The Working Session unanimously voted a recommendation to the ECE to adopt a preamble to the Agreed Conclusions, reaffirming and recognizing that the Beijing Platform for Action is based on the principle that women's rights are human rights. The Working Session

■ examined sub-regional reports of NGO coalitions from Canada, the US, the EU, the CEE and CIS countries;

■ held 16 workshops organized by participants from the European region as well as caucuses on the 4 themes: Violence against women, Women and the Economy, Institutional Mechanisms, and Women in Decision-Making; and

■ Organized informal lunchtime workshops on other critical issues such as women's reproductive health.

excerpt from the
"Special Bulletin on the ECE PrepCom for Beijing + 5
NGOs as Partners"



2000 Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Geneva, January 16-22, 2000:

KARAT's Participation in the NGO Working Session and the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting

by **Michaela Marksova-Tominova**

KARAT members worked very hard and were very successful in Geneva! It was necessary to show to the rest of the world, in this case to member states of ECE region, that the CEE/CIS countries do have their own specific issues and needs. Besides taking a part in all kinds of workshops, panels and caucuses, they played an important role in:

CEE/CIS COUNTRIES' NGOS MEETING, HELD BY UNIFEM AND KARAT COALITION

The participants of this meeting identified the main issues specific to women in the CEE/CIS sub-region and drafted a special lobbying document titled: "A Statement from NGOs of CEE and CIS: Distinguishing Countries in Transition". Katalin Medvedev (Karat Coalition, Hungary) and Urszula Nowakowska (Women's Rights Center, Poland) formed the drafting committee. The statement was widely distributed among government delegations, international organizations, media and NGOs.

PLENARY: OPENING SESSION OF NGO WORKING SESSION

The report on CEE countries was presented among the sub-regional reports of NGOs coalitions from the EU, the CEE, the CIS, Canada, and the USA. The presentation was delivered by Kinga Lohmann, coordinator of the KARAT Coalition. She gave a short overview of the main achievements, obstacles, and lessons learned by KARAT members in their efforts to implement the Platform for Action in Central Eastern European countries. The main achievements articulated were: increased activity and more effective cooperation and solidarity between women's organizations at local, sub-regional and UN levels, and devising of National Action Plans in almost all countries. However, national machineries are said to be fragile, vulnerable to political changes in most countries, and often lacking structures, mechanisms, accountability and sustainability. Most crucial is the lack of resources for both governments and NGOs to implement the National Action Plans. The lessons learned are:

- National Machineries should be placed at high, governmental levels to remain unaffected of political changes;
- consistent financial support from donors in the sub-region is a major prerequisite for promotion of gender equality and further development of civil society and democracy in the whole sub-region;
- armed conflicts have a devastating effect on women's lives, particularly on those women who live in war zones; and
- the women's NGOs should be supported as they encourage solidarity and reconciliation and take a very active part in restoring peace to the sub-region.



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Michaela holds a MSc degree from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Charles University in Prague. After graduating from the University she accompanied her husband to the UK, Cambridge, and to Mongolia, where he did his PhD research. Since 1996 she has been actively involved in the women's movement in the Czech Republic. Since September 1997 she has been working as a manager of Gender Studies Center in Prague. Last year Michaela became Czech national coordinator of the KARAT Coalition.

Paulina Filipova of the Women's Alliance for Development, Bulgaria, interviewed Natalia about her impressions of the ECE Regional Preparatory meeting for Beijing+5 held in Geneva, 16-21 January 2000).



Natalia Berezhnaya is the President of the Executive Committee of the Association "Equality and Peace" of the Russian Section of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

What is your impression of the ECE Regional Preparatory meeting for Beijing+5?

I think that a great deal of progress was made during the last quarter of the 20th century in the promotion of women's human rights. I am the only woman in Russia who participated in all of the U.N. World Conferences on Women. I was working in the UN Geneva office and can certify that for many years the Economic Commission of Europe refused work on women's issues. This is the first time that the European Commission has paid real attention to women; the governmental delegates got together and the NGOs were given the floor. It was a pleasant surprise to me that for the first time the number of NGOs was greater than the number of governmental representatives. The quality of speakers from NGOs was very good and the representatives of governmental delegations listened to them very carefully. I believe, it was a real change in UN policy itself - such a cooperation with NGOs. The NGOs had a chance to present their concerns.

What do you think of KARAT's participation in this meeting?

Women from the transition countries were marginalized at Beijing and afterwards. The ECE was the first time when they had the possibility to speak out and be listened to.

KARAT participants were very active. They highlighted the problem of institutional mechanisms - a very important problem for our countries. It became a burning issue for Russia too. We share the same problems and the solution can be found in a common way.

Domestic violence and violence in general, as well as war, are very important issues in the region and they should become the focus of attention for the KARAT Coalition. These are two very important points on which we could build our cooperation.

Technically we don't know how to do lobbying, we need the skills, we should learn how to work with our governmental delegations, I believe that the Geneva conference was a great success with respect to learning and exchanging knowledge on all of the above issues. □

WORKSHOPS

Three of the 16 workshops were organized (or co-organized) by members of the KARAT Coalition: The Consequences of Armed Conflicts on Balkan Women's Lives, Strengthening Partnership between NGOs and National Machineries, Women in Power and Decision Making Process.

The Consequences of Armed Conflicts on Balkan Women's Lives was organized by KARAT Coalition and chaired by Katalin Medvedev (Karat Coalition, Hungary). The panel consisted of KARAT member Erika Papp (FRY), Anna Lithander and Kerstin Greback from the Swedish Kvinna till Kvinna.

Strengthening Partnership between NGOs and National Machineries was held by the KARAT Coalition jointly with the European Women's Lobby. This workshop was co-chaired by Erzsebet Szabo (KARAT Coalition, Hungary) and Jacqueline de Grootte (European Women's Lobby). Aleksandra Solik (KARAT Coalition, Poland) made a short presentation on the major obstacles and barriers affecting the existence and strength of national machineries in 10 CEE countries.

Women in Power and Decision Making Process was jointly held by the KARAT Coalition and WEDO. It was chaired by Regina Indsheva (KARAT Coalition, Bulgaria) and facilitated by Michaela Marksova-Tominova (KARAT Coalition, Czech Republic).

CAUCUS:

Women and Girls in Armed Conflict Situation. The conveyor was Zuzana Jezerska (KARAT Coalition, Slovakia).

REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING ON THE 2000 REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION:

■ **Panel on Violence against Women and Girls in War/Conflict Situations** - among the appointed NGO panelists for the governmental session was Tomka Dilevska (KARAT Coalition, Macedonia). She spoke about the fact that women and girls living in the war affected area face an increase in kidnapping, prostitution, trafficking and rape, and recommended gender sensitivity training for peacekeeping military personnel.

■ **Panel on Women in Power and Decision-Making** - Mevlida Kunosic-Vladic (KARAT Coalition, Bosnia and Herzegovina) was one of the selected NGO speakers at this panel.

■ **Panel on Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women**, where Kinga Lohmann (KARAT Coalition, Poland), as a NGO panelist, after a short presentation of Karat mission, reported the outcome of the caucus stressing how to intensify the exchange of



Karat participation in ECE Preparatory Meeting, Geneva, January 2000

experience across the borders and between sub-regions among gender equality seeking NGOs. She appealed to the international intergovernmental and regional institutions to support NGOs in their efforts to be recognized by their governments, to intensify the exchange between sub-regions among gender equality seeking NGOs and to endorse as partners the NGOs from CEE/CIS countries. She also argued for creating a platform for a cross-border dialogue about gender equality among NGOs since the empowerment of women in the sub-region can be strengthened by relationships with other ECE partners. Kinga also spoke of the importance of recognizing the need and value of the full and effective participation of Central Eastern European NGOs at all international levels to raise the visibility of the sub-region, which should be reflected in the ECE and UN documents.

The other important KARAT activity was a lobbying group, established by Malgorzata Tarasiewicz (KARAT, Poland). The group distributed the Sub-regional statement: Distinguishing Countries in Transition among government delegations, international organizations, media and NGOs. Apart from that, the group was also lobbying for the prompt ratification and full implementation of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court.

SPECIAL THANKS:

The members of the KARAT Coalition (18) were mostly sponsored by UNIFEM. Some have received financial support from UNDP and the Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation. Without these sponsors we would not have had the unique opportunity to be presented at such an important event!

We would also like to thank Zina Mounla, Programme Manager for Europe and the CIS Section of UNIFEM, Marcia Greenberg (Democracy and Governance Specialist for WIDTECH), Danielle Bridel and Renate Bloem from the NGO Working Group on Women for the ECE in particular, for their support which enabled the KARAT Coalition to achieve considerable visibility at UN level.

(The report was prepared by Katalin Medvedev, Hungary; edited by Kinga Lohmann, Poland).

KARAT's Participation and Activities in the 44th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the PrepCom for the Special Session on Beijing +5 in June 2000

New York, February 28 - March 17, 2000

The article is based on the Report prepared by Malgorzata Tarasiewicz, Poland

The 44th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) consisted of two parts: the regular meeting of the CSW (28 February to 2 March 2000) and the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom - 3 March to 17 March 2000) for Beijing Plus Five review. During the CSW Session governmental delegations presented statements on the follow-up activities to the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action were strongly affirmed as fundamental documents guiding efforts to ensure gender equality, though a disappointment was expressed that the call for universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the year 2000 had not been met. Governments were urged to ratify the convention. The inclusion of sexual violence as a crime in the statute for the International Criminal Court was underlined as a big success, while the need for more resources to support implementation, particularly of national machineries for the advancement of women, was often cited as an obstacle. Other impediments mentioned included the HIV/AIDS pandemic; the uneven and gender-differentiated impact of globalization; the devastating consequences of armed conflict and internal displacement; the extent and consequences of violence against women.

One of the major tasks of the Session was to draft the Political Declaration and an Outcome Document that would identify future actions and priorities to be adopted by the special session in June 2000. Country groups (Group 77 - developing countries and China, JUSCANZ - EU states, Japan, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) proposed recommendations for language in the Outcome Document which was discussed and its text drafted at the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the Preparatory Committee for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century. Further Actions and Initiatives to Implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action". The CSW reviewed the progress made since 1996 in each of the 12 critical areas of concern included in the Beijing Platform for Action for the advancement and empowerment of women. The Outcome Document presents obstacles, achievements and recommendations (to be realized at both the national and international levels) for the implementation of the PFA.

A number of NGOs spoke at the PrepCom. Some of the common themes included the negative consequences of globalization on women and the urgent need for adequate responses; the devastating effects of armed conflict and internal displacement for women and girls, and the urgent need for more support from the UN and governments alike for the work of women peace activists in countries experiencing continuing civil unrest. The PrepCom repeated the call of the CSW for a strong political will (including the commitment of resources) for the implementation of the Platform for Action, and the protection of women's human rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights.

The main purpose of KARAT's participation at the CSW session and at the PrepCom consisted in joining the discussion on the Outcome Document and influencing its final shape so that it contained issues concerning women from the CEE/CIS sub-region. KARAT members were able to participate in the UN Session thanks to the generous support from the Ford Foundation, USAID, UNIFEM and the Open Society Institute.

During the 44th Session, the KARAT Coalition coordinated the work of the sub-regional caucus of NGO representatives from Central and Eastern Europe and the



Commonwealth of Independent States. KARAT members assisted participants from the sub-region in orientation during the CSW/PrepCom Session meetings, in formulating their concerns and recommendations, and finally in lobbying for the inclusion of their opinions in the Outcome Document. KARAT organized five meetings of the caucus: March 3, 6, 9, 13 and 15 (twice each week).

KARAT is especially grateful to UNIFEM for allowing us to use its premises for the organizations of the meetings. Thanks to UNIFEM a few dozen of women from our sub-region could participate in meetings devoted to coalition building, sharing of experience and ideas, and general cooperation.

The first caucus meeting on March 3 was devoted to working out the strategy for the Session for both CEE and CIS countries. The meeting identified four crucial areas of concern for NGOs from these countries:

- Women and Girls in Armed Conflict and Peace Building
- Women and the Economy
- Women in Power and Decision Making
- Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

The caucus decided to develop its own recommendations for the Outcome Document for Beijing Plus Five and to lobby for their inclusion in it through the thematic caucuses. Special gratitude should be expressed here to Marcia Greenberg for her technical assistance in formulating our recommendations in legal English.

The second caucus meeting on March 6 adopted the recommendations for language in the four thematic areas that were to be included in the Outcome Document for Beijing Plus Five. Below is a summary of the recommendations:

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN ARMED CONFLICT AND PEACE BUILDING

The recommendations focused on restructuring the education systems in regions of armed conflict so that it excludes cultural, national, ethnic and racial hatred and reinforces a culture of tolerance and peace. Special human rights training for peacekeepers was also recommended. It was recommended that military budgets be cut by 30% and that the international community holds all war criminals accountable. Refugee rights were recommended for internationally displaced girls and women; the devastating effects of war on the lives of women were given special attention.

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

It was recommended that national budgets include specific allocations for supporting development programs for women, including professional retraining, re-qualification and vocational training. Laws against gender discrimination at the workplace and social security system for women were endorsed. The gender impacts of economic reform were given special attention, and it was advised that governments develop policies of transparency regarding

privatization, and credit facilities for women's entrepreneurship.

WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

It was recommended that all training programs for higher level management and leadership, as well as exchange programs abroad and scholarships, include 50% women. Governments should ensure both training of women running for elected positions and training of women in government to increase their skills. Educational materials should be reviewed to identify and remove all examples of leadership models that undermine confidence in women as leaders and decision-makers. New materials that promote women in leadership should be developed by the year 2005.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

It was recommended that gender equality be reinforced through special equal opportunities commissions and other independent bodies financed by each state's budget. Stable and legally mandated national machineries, based on highest level legislation, with responsibility for gender mainstreaming governmental policies, should be created or strengthened at all levels. The international community should assist governments to develop an integrated program of support for the 12 critical areas of concern contained in the Platform and ensure government partnership with NGOs. Financial and technical assistance funds for governments and NGO's working towards gender equality should be established. Partnership cooperation through open and transparent channels of communication on the regular basis among Governments, international organizations, NGOs, the private sector, civil society, women and men should be created in support of gender equality. Government reports to UN should be made available to NGOs for consultation.



The caucus meetings on March 9, 13 and 15, 2000 were devoted both to the discussion of the lobbying strategy and to the reporting of the thematic meetings. KARAT members participated actively throughout the Session in the work of the issue-based caucuses and cooperated with the European Women's Lobby. Lenka Simerska provided KARAT members with information on the media caucus.

On March 9 KARAT organized a Panel on Alternative Reports from CEE. The previous year KARAT had presented the regional report on Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women at the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The report was based on the national reports prepared by the women's NGOs from 10 countries. This year, the KARAT Coalition did not produce a sub-regional alternative report. Instead The Recommendations on Rebuilding Peace: Priority of Women from Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth Independent States were prepared for the Regional Conference in Geneva (January 2000). The statement from NGOs of CEE

and CIS: Distinguishing Countries in Transition was elaborated at the Geneva Regional Conference as a sub-regional contribution to the Beijing+5 process. Other KARAT participants involved in that meeting included Katalyn Medvedev (Hungary) who presented a regional perspective in reporting the KARAT Coalition activities at the Geneva UN/ECE Preparatory Meeting (January 2000) and a statement of CEE/CIS countries; Erika Papp (Yugoslavia) who spoke about the situation of women in her country; Tomka Dilevska (Macedonia) who presented the effects of the armed conflict on neighboring countries; Stanimira Hadjimitova (Bulgaria) who gave an overview of the Gender Task Force of the South Eastern European Stability Pact; Michaela Marksova-Tominova (Czech Rep.) who presented her report on women in decision making in the Czech Republic; Valentina Bodrug-Lungu (Moldova) who spoke on the institutional mechanism for the advancement of women in Moldova; Jeta Katro-Beluli (Albania) who presented the economic situation of women in Albania; Genoveva Tischeva (Bulgaria) who discussed the effects of privatization on women in Bulgaria and Aleksandra Solik (Poland) who gave an overview on reproductive health/rights of women in Poland.

ISSUE-BASED CAUCUSES

KARAT representatives actively participated in issue-based caucuses too. As a result of KARAT's lobbying, all the recommendations on Institutional Mechanisms and Women and Girls in Armed Conflict from CEE/CIS Caucus were included in the thematic caucuses' recommendations. Genoveva Tischeva (Bulgaria) was a panelist at the Gender and Globalization caucus attended by more than 50 participants. She presented the perspective of the countries in transition together with a study on the social impacts of privatization on women. Erika Papp (Yugoslavia) and Tomka Dilevska (Macedonia) were speakers at a panel organized by the caucus on Women and Armed Conflict where Security Council members were invited. More than 50 people attended it. Erika Papp spoke about the difficulties of life in Yugoslavia where hatred, intolerance and xenophobia dominate all aspects of life. The solution she mentioned was the work of the NGOs, especially women's NGOs, who are actively working towards building civil society in Serbia through highly effective advocacy work in the field. The primary task of women's NGOs is to assist people in overcoming their depression and fear - fear of further physical, economic and political suffering, and fear of taking action and being involved in change. Therefore, education about developing a culture of peace is a burning need in the region. Tomka Dilevska spoke about the situation of women in the countries adjacent to armed conflict regions.

At the panel organized by the caucus on Women and Economy Barbara Limanowska (Poland) discussed the problem of trafficking. She proposed to deal with the issue of trafficking within the framework of human rights. This would allow KARAT members to address the roots of this issue - the pressures influencing women's decision to migrate, including women's extremely high rates of poverty and illiteracy, as well as the general social, economic and political discrimination. All of these issues are part of

states' responsibilities. Governments should ensure that women fully enjoy their human rights - civil, political, economic, social, and cultural.

At the briefing on March 13 Kinga Lohmann (Poland) presented the recommendations of the CEE/CIS caucus. The CEE/CIS caucus endorsed the paper of the Coalition in support of the Platform for Action and the additions made by NGO caucuses. However, its participants did not agree with the paper distributed by the caucus on Violence against Women because there were different views on how to talk about the issue of trafficking in women. The CEE/CIS caucus preferred to avoid definitions and focus on action. The caucus's proposal was to drop any reference to prostitution or to forced prostitution because that was the issue of disagreement for the caucus's participants. Instead of that, an emphasis was to be given on the sexual and economic exploitation which were believed to be really the core of the problem.

LOBBYING GROUP

In the beginning of the last week of the PrepCom a lobbying working group was created. Magorzata Tarasiewicz (Poland) was responsible for its coordination. The goal of the lobbying work was not only to lobby but also to teach the participants about lobbying methods. The group decided to use both KARAT recommendations and the issue-based caucuses recommendations as lobbying documents. The aim of using both documents was to outline the specific recommendations from the region, although they were already included in the issue-based recommendations. Five hundred copies of KARAT position papers were distributed among the governmental delegates and NGOs. All KARAT members participated in the lobbying process.



Lenka Simerska, on behalf of KARAT, was a member of the editorial board of Women Action Daily News and the European Women Action web site. Daily News was distributed to the NGOs and the delegates every day during the UN CSW and is available on the Internet at: <http://www.womenaction.org/>. The European section of the Women Action contains also the alternative reports of KARAT member states and other information from the region.

Zuzana Jezerska has been working on the promotion of a video-film concerning the participation of the KARAT Coalition in the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly. The title of the video-film is KARAT in New York and its main objective is to promote the KARAT Coalition as a self-organized and dedicated group of people representing one not very well identified and recognized sub-region of Europe. The video-film touches upon problems of identity, the most burning issues concerning women in this part of the world, and the importance of regional thinking and cooperation. The 20 minutes video-film was produced in professional broadcasting quality thanks to the sponsorship of the EMERGE Productions, Slovakia.



Marcia Greenberg is the Democracy Specialist for USAID's WIDTECH Project. WIDTECH was established after Beijing as a way of helping USAID to integrate attention to gender into its mainstream programming. Marcia's work has focused principally on Eastern Europe and, more recently, on Africa. Her experience in Eastern Europe dates back to 1992 and includes 18 months living in Prague and supporting a Working Group on Preventing Long-term Unemployment, managing a local economic development project in 6 communities in Poland, and research for the OECD in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia on local employment programs and on decentralization respectively. She has worked for WIDTECH in Poland, Romaina, Russia and Ukraine, focusing on the impacts of privatization on women, media coverage of women's contributions to a market economy, local economic development, gender impacts of national policies and legislation, and women's political participation.

Paulina Filipova (Women's Alliance for Development, Bulgaria) talks to Marcia about her experience in working with the KARAT representatives in the 44th Session of the CSW and the PrepCom in New York.

What was your personal contribution to KARAT's participation in the 44th Session of the CSW and the PrepCom in New York?

I was originally sent by the Office of Women in Development of the US Agency for International Development to the PrepCom in Budapest in November 1999 in order to learn directly from Balkan women about their post-conflict needs and activities and to share that information with USAID so that it might support them. But when I arrived in Budapest, it appeared that I could also provide some consulting services. This became the focus of my work with the women of KARAT from that time through the PrepCom in New York. USAID supported my participation in Geneva and New York as a technical assistant to KARAT members because many of them were taking part in a United Nations, democratic lobbying process for the first time.

How did you assist KARAT's participants in their work?

KARAT's representatives are all very capable and determined women. But many women (and men) from the region are not familiar with the skills and processes of democracy, and of the United Nations process in particular. I provided assistance to KARAT's participants in several ways:

- identifying with them the needs and opportunities for presenting their own perspective (e.g. noting that in Geneva many of the women from Western Europe and America were not aware of the very different circumstances of women in Eastern Europe);
- giving advice on how to develop a strategy for action;
- consulting them in drafting informational or lobbying documents;
- supporting those who were preparing workshops or caucuses;
- serving as a liaison with the U.S. delegates to gain their support for KARAT positions.

What was your impression of KARAT's participation in NY? What kind of problems did you experience during your work with KARAT? Could you give some recommendations?

Unfortunately, I was only able to work with the KARAT participants for the first days of the PrepCom in New York. At that time, however, I was very pleased with the focused determination - particularly in the context of a very scattered process and a very weak document. Under the circumstances, it was very difficult to have full information about the process, to find people with whom to collaborate or to lobby, and to reach those responsible for the final document.

One problem I noticed, however, is that leading such a coalition is a very difficult job that requires a strong team. Because there was so much to do, and because each KARAT participant had multiple objectives while in New York, I think that the leadership team was not as strong as it should become. Further, it concerned me that some KARAT members criticized the leadership when things did not go smoothly. There must be a sense of solidarity; a sense of everyone contributing; and a sense of appreciation for the responsibilities and work that leadership takes on; and giving the leaders the benefit of the doubt if something does not happen as one has hoped or expected. If one supports the coalition and its objectives, it is important to express disappointment privately, and to accept that there will be some human error, as well as some learning will take place by everyone. Lastly, there was some tendency to think that if one was not included, one was excluded. When it is not possible to

participate in every drafting or decision-making process, those who do not participate must trust the others to speak on their behalf. The language or document may not be exactly what the person who did not participate would have done, but she has to delegate some authority to her colleagues.

Nevertheless, the above stated problems are an inevitable part of all democratic processes. Democracy making is still very difficult even for those who do not lack the experience.

Could you, please, give an evaluation of the progress made from the Budapest Meeting to the New York meeting?

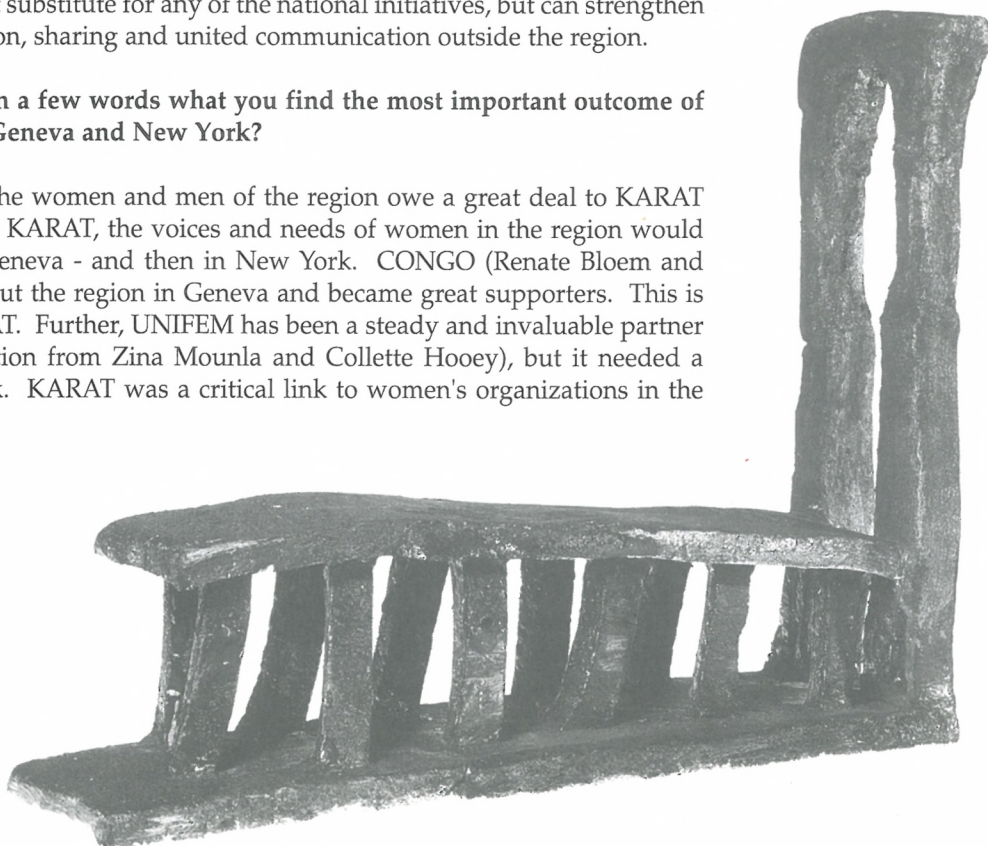
A great deal of progress was made. I believe that there is no better way to learn about democratic processes than to jump in and participate! I think that KARAT's group got stronger as the weeks progressed: stronger regarding strategy, better at focusing on key issues, clearer in articulating their messages, more confident in lobbying, etc. I think that women and men from the region owe a great deal to these women who have worked VERY hard, have learned a lot, and have raised a great deal of awareness about the needs and strengths of women from CEE & CIS. I congratulate everyone in KARAT!

How do you see KARAT's role in the future of the region?

There is an ongoing need for coalitions. Just as individual women's voices could not be heard without some organized associations, non-governmental organizations or community-based organizations, each such organization cannot be heard separately in larger arenas. KARAT's role should include sharing experience and best practices among members (there is a lot of experimentation and learning taking place, both from successes and from disappointments), encouraging networking, supporting participation in regional and international forums where women of the region need to speak with unity and solidarity, and educating and lobbying people from other regions of the world (including allies, friends and donors) about the current needs and contributions of women in the region. Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, and ensuring that governments and donors deliver on their renewed promises in Women 2000 this June, will require a great deal of work. KARAT should not substitute for any of the national initiatives, but can strengthen them all through coordination, sharing and united communication outside the region.

Could you summarize in a few words what you find the most important outcome of KARAT's participation in Geneva and New York?

As I mentioned earlier, the women and men of the region owe a great deal to KARAT (and its founders). Without KARAT, the voices and needs of women in the region would NOT have been heard in Geneva - and then in New York. CONGO (Renate Bloem and Danielle Bridel) learned about the region in Geneva and became great supporters. This is thanks to the work of KARAT. Further, UNIFEM has been a steady and invaluable partner (with the incredible dedication from Zina Mounla and Collette Hooey), but it needed a partner with whom to work. KARAT was a critical link to women's organizations in the region. □



Ivica Langerova-Vidrova, „Majesty”, 1994

PARTICIPANTS' VOICES

(from the session of the Preparatory Committee on the review
of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action,
2-17 March 2000, UN, New York)

Which organization did you represent in New York, what sessions/caucuses did you attend and what institutions did you visit?

Genoveva Tisheva (Bulgaria): My organization - the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation - is one of the major actors in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Bulgaria, up to now especially in the field of violence against women and women's social - economic rights. During my participation in the PrepCom I attended all sessions from the NGO program and the program of the CSW. Additionally, I visited the Bulgarian mission in N.Y, UNIFEM, UNICEF and met with representatives of Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, Women, Law and Development International and IWRAW. These are all organizations with which we have strong professional relationships and are developing plans for future partnership. I also attended regularly the KARAT Coalition meetings where I presented my organization's research on the social impact of privatization on women. I took active part in the caucuses on economic issues and political participation. I was invited as a panelist of the Gender and Globalization caucus attended by more than 50 participants. My role was to present the perspective of women in the countries of transition on this topic. I was also particularly interested in the Youth caucus that helped me learn how to involve progressive young people from Bulgaria in the international movement towards gender equality.

Aleksandra Solik (Poland): I work with the Federation for Women and Family Planning and I am a Board member of Women's Association for Gender Equal Status - Beijing 1995. The main fields of my activities are women's reproductive rights and health as well as the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. During my participation in the PrepCom I took part in many different NGO events and caucuses and followed the CSW when it was open. I took an active part in all caucuses and meetings organized by KARAT. I visited UNIFEM, UNICEF. I also took part in the meetings organized by ASTRA Coalition which is Eastern and Central European Coalition for Reproductive Rights and Health.

Tomka Dilevska (Macedonia): As a member of the Union of Women's Organizations of Macedonia and a KARAT Coalition Coordinator from Macedonia, I was delegated to present at the CEC and CIS Caucus the alternative Report on the 12 critical areas of concern from the Beijing Platform for Action. One of KARAT's activities leading up to the CSW was to prepare recommendations or alternative reports. I presented the report prepared by the Union of Women's Organizations of Macedonia. I did not have the time to visit any Institutions, but I met some individuals like Felicity Hill, Director of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom at her UN Office, and Zina Mounla, from UNIFEM, the program Manager for Europe and the CIS Section, Marcia Greenberg of WIDTECH, Majorie Sims of ICRW. It was an invaluable opportunity for me to meet so many women in one place and have a chance to become a part of established international women's networks. The KARAT Coalition had priority at the following caucuses: Women and Girls in Armed Conflicts and Peace Building; Women & Economy; Women in Power & Decision-making and Institutional Mechanisms. As a representative of a country that has been recently affected by war, I was highly involved in the Armed Conflict caucus. I also attended the open session with the President and the members of the Security Council.

Dina Loghin (Romania): I represented the Network of East-West Women (Equal Opportunities for Women, Romania) and KARAT Coalition. My participation in New York is a further continuation of KARAT activities prior to the PrepCom, the Balkan Recommendation to the UN GA Special Session "Beijing + 5" (November 27-29, 1999, Budapest); the CEE Regional Workshop in Preparation for Beijing +5 (December 6-8, 1999, Budapest) and the NGO Working Session, and the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 2000 Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Geneva (January 15-21, 2000). From a personal and organizational point of view, I had a particular interest in all events: SEF (Equal Opportunities for Women) Foundation is developing programs/projects in all the four areas of interest of the caucuses in New York: Women and the Economy, Women in Power and Decision-Making (both of them are two out the three main

objectives of the SEF Foundation!), Institutional Mechanisms, and Women and Girls in Armed Conflict and Peace Building. My participation enabled me to establish some very important contacts with people like Patricia Noonan (North Western School of Law of Lewis & Clark College, Seattle) who promised to help me with the 'Community Safety and Mediation Center' development in Iasi; Mathana Santiwat (Bangkok University, Thai Women Watch) who would like to collaborate with our organization on women's rights; J. Jayasheree Vyas (Office of the National Core Group & India Task Force) and many others. I was also able to visit UNIFEM.

What were the major achievements of your participation in the PrepCom?

Genoveva Tisheva (Bulgaria): First of all, my active participation in the elaboration of the lobbying document of the KARAT Coalition. Referring to my organization's research on the impact of privatization on women and of our alternative report to the CESC, the KARAT workgroup included in the lobbying paper specific actions to be taken related to the elimination of the discrimination of women in the workplace, to the professional development and re-training of women. The document elaborated within KARAT became part of the lobbying package of the coalition and was disseminated among NGOs and governmental representatives. Another major success was the good and promising contacts we established with our government in N.Y. I contacted the permanent representative of Bulgaria in the UN - Mr. Vladimir Sotirov and he invited all representatives of Bulgarian NGOs, Irina Mouleshkova, Mira Hadjimitova and I, to visit the mission where we discussed the terms of our cooperation with the Bulgarian government. I also did some successful lobbying of representatives of the European union and Russia. My activity was specifically focused on networking with NGOs from the region and internationally. My Bulgarian colleagues and I, managed to establish contacts with NGOs from Macedonia, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and many others. The meetings with our American partners as WLDI and MAHR were very fruitful.

Aleksandra Solik (Poland): I was the coordinator of the group working on KARAT's lobbying document on institutional mechanisms. The recommended language proposed in our document was fully accepted by the NGO subject caucus. I took an active part in the caucuses on institutional mechanisms. I also participated in the meetings of ASTRA Reproductive Rights and Health Coalition and followed the health issues for KARAT Coalition. During the caucus organized by KARAT, I presented the Polish alternative report focusing particularly on reproductive matters in

Poland. I participated in the ECE caucuses and the joint session of European Women's Lobby and the KARAT Coalition that allowed us to present our position on the Outcomes document and recommended language prepared by subject caucuses. It was important for me to follow the PrepCom meetings whenever it was possible. I was especially interested to know the position of the parties involved in the negotiations and follow the amendments introduced to the document. I was also interested in the position of the Polish government since its representatives were not willing to communicate with members of Polish NGOs. Another success was to be part of the group working on future more effective structure of the KARAT Coalition. Our aims were: to improve networking abilities within the coalition; to clarify the membership rules, new membership and frames for future cooperation; to promote the regional approach to various women's issues. It was also a good opportunity to establish new contacts with women and women's NGOs.

Tomka Dilevska (Macedonia): Voicing the needs and the position of women in countries directly affected by or bordering areas of armed conflict areas is my most important achievement in the Armed Conflict Caucus. We made some important recommendations in relation to the draft outcome document before the PrepCom for the Special Session of the General Assembly in June 2000. Our comment was that women perceive peace as a continuous process in which the elimination of all forms of violence including violence in armed conflicts and war are an important element, since women are not only to be seen as victims of gender based violence, but also as effective actors for achieving non-violence and sustainable peace. We prepared a Statement to be included in the Caucus Lobbying Document. We invited Governmental delegates to our Caucus and initiated an open discussion with them regarding our suggestions. Another important achievement was that we succeeded to have an open session with the President and the members of the Security Council. There were more than 50 women who attended this session. For this occasion we had a few speakers from the region (Serbia, Macedonia and Uganda) I was the speaker from Macedonia. We talked about the problems in our region and what actions should be taken to overcome these problems.

Dina Loghin (Romania): First, I have to mention that now I have a different understanding of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and of the United Nation's system on economic, social and cultural rights, a system that has two aspects: rights and institutions. Second, I think that I have now a global perspective of social and economic aspects of increasing poverty. Yet, the "special kind of poverty" that women face in Central and East European, and CIS Countries.

Third, I understood the importance of reversing the argument to "think globally, act locally" to one of "think locally while acting globally". Last but not least, I really made some progress in understanding/working on official documents, in drafting recommendation, in identifying key actors and issues, and then comparing issues, approaches, and finding my own priorities in other groups' presentations.

Lessons learned?

Genoveva Tisheva (Bulgaria): I learned how to work in a regional team and how to lobby as a result of a regional action; how to identify the main actors in the UN political process- the EU, JUSCANZ, G7. I got the firm conviction that it is high time to train and give international exposure to young people if we would like to achieve a more balanced society. I understood how important the training and participation of media in these specific issues are.

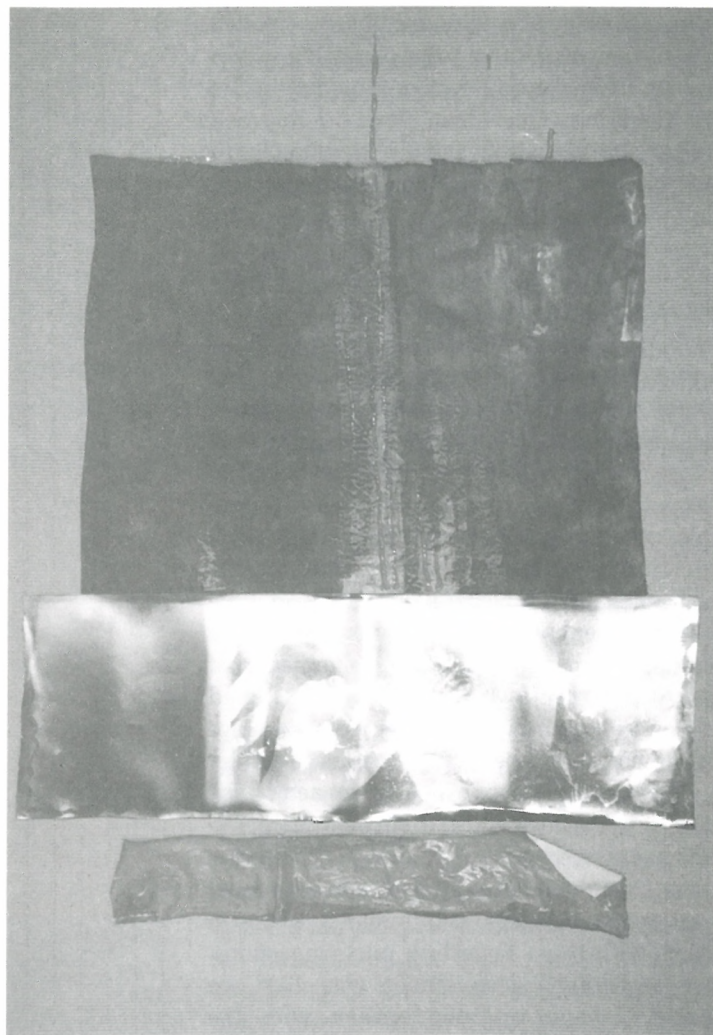
Aleksandra Solik (Poland): I got acquainted with the UN political process and negotiations between major partners: the EU, JUSCANZ, G7. I learned how to cooperate with other NGOs at the regional and global level in order to lobby effectively for common issues. I learned how significant it is to focus on subjects of crucial importance in order to achieve the chosen goals.

Dina Loghin (Romania): In my opinion, while we worked hard and did a good job, the results did not match our expectations. African and Asian Women were very well organized, had a great support of experts and personalities in their caucus and panels, and were very efficient in promoting any activity they organized. I felt the need to be trained on women's human rights and specific aspects of women issues in Europe. We have to know how to emphasize our specific needs in the framework of rights defined as they are (from the Nordic perspective). Hence, to be more involved in such events, to practice interventions, not only to work on the main document and then to lobby. It is also very important to start working for such an event earlier than we did.

Any recommendations to future participants in UN events?

Genoveva Tisheva (Bulgaria): For more concerted actions in the future, a more detailed preparation, guidance and orientation sessions are needed. These should take place prior to the UN event and will allow the participants to be more focused and effective. The work of the CSW and the GASS is an arena of political, conceptual, cultural and ideological fights, which are especially difficult to be understood by people who are not lawyers.

Aleksandra Solik (Poland): More time should be spent on the preparation process. An NGO orientation meeting focused on lobbying would be useful (e.g. more information concerning governments' positions). I find it necessary to be provided with better access to the documents worked out by the governments on different stages during the meeting.



Ivica Kroslakova, „Masque“

KARAT's Regional Recommendations on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

by Biljana Bijelic

KARAT member organizations have supported the global NGO initiative to present a critical evaluation of their governments' implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the form of alternative reports. This article is a compilation of KARAT's alternative reports on Beijing +5 review process, presented during KARAT's Panel on Alternative Reports from CEE countries at the 44th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) New York, March 2000. In some of the countries the government report was not made available to the NGOs or was available very late. That is why some of the KARAT members had prepared only the national recommendations instead. The recommendations are the product of consultation with numerous NGOs. KARAT's questionnaire about the emerging issues and postulates for governmental action was sent out to many women's groups in the respective countries. The reports focus on Peace, Poverty, Labor Market, Health Care, Decision Making and Violence against Women which have been identified as key issues affecting women's lives in Central and Eastern Europe. The recommendations demonstrate a shared perspective and determination of women of the region to use their common political and social background as a basis for joint action.

PEACE

Governments were urged to include women in the programs of the Stability Pact for the Countries of South-East Europe; to recognize and promote partnership with NGOs in the decision making process and the processes of reconciliation, reconstruction and peace building. It was recommended that more resources be allocated to international networking amongst women in the post-Soviet block because the stability of peace can only be achieved by non-nationalistic and cross-borders links in the civil society area.

POVERTY

The reports focus on the need to assess and analyze the gender impact of structural adjustment and develop instruments for strategic intervention in governmental policies. They recognize the discrimination of young women graduates, and women in general, in the job markets of the countries in the region. The governments were urged to devote greater resources and energy to job creation and to providing equal employment access to women and men.

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Biljana Bijelic is living in Zagreb, Croatia. She is an activist at the Women's Human Rights Group B.a.B.e. (Be active, Be emancipated) where she works as a librarian, and media analyst (survey on Women in Croatian Pre-Election Campaign 2000 and Homosexuals in the Media (in process)). She is also a prospective (MA) student of Gender and Culture and her focus is civil initiatives and women's organizations and their impact on the politics of Southeast Europe.

Legal Instruments should be designed to promote equal

application of the law towards women and men. Employers should be forbidden to fire women first, regardless of their qualification, when they reduce the overall number of employees at a firm. Married women who are abandoned by their spouses, should have the right to social benefit for single parents, despite the fact that they have not legally divorced.

Governments should monitor poverty rates from a gender perspective in order to create specially targeted programs to alleviate the problems of particular social groups who live in poverty, especially women who find themselves in a crisis situation (divorced, single mothers, minorities, socially disadvantaged etc.) Women's NGOs should be regularly consulted in this process of collecting data on and educating of various groups of women.

LABOUR MARKET

Special attention was given to the situation of rural women whose business and credit opportunities need to be improved through a restructuring of the agriculture system in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Greater attention must be paid to providing secondary education to girls in rural areas and particularly to girls from ethnic minorities.

Legal Instruments should support policies that ensure equal rights and access to economic resources, information and technology for women, guarantee women's equal placement into the labor market, prohibit the use of gender as an employment or promotion criteria, and forbid the discrimination of women's wages.

Governments should collect information and statistical data on unemployment/employment barriers and women's access to in-country funding and credit. They should ensure equal access to free and qualitative education and professional improvement..

Sexual Harassment at the workplace was recognized as a threatening issue common among all the countries of the region. Disciplinary and penal provisions related to sexual harassment at work and raising public awareness on the issue were recommended.

Labor Rights should ensure the access to jobs by women with special needs (such as disabled and mothers of disabled children) to temporary employment programs run by local authorities. Equal representation of women in collective labor agreement negotiations and in the National Tripartite Commission should be guaranteed.

Media Campaigns were recommended as a way to increase public awareness about the discrimination of women in the labor market.

Special attention was given to the possibilities of self-employment. Micro-credit projects with a specific focus on women's self-

reliance as a key to people-centered, sustainable development were recommended.

HEALTH CARE

Health Service should remain free of charge, despite privatization, and guaranteed by the new Health Insurance system. Special health programs for trafficked women should be designed. Gender differences in health status should be recognized and taken into account in governments' health service programs.

Reproductive rights: Low-income, young and minority women should be provided with professional pre-abortion counseling and free contraceptives from women's information centers and local medical service agencies. All women should have access to a safe and legal abortion; legal regulations reducing the possibility to enjoy reproductive rights should be abolished.

Family planning, counseling and services should become an integral part of the basic health-care system. A network of family planning centers that guarantee women's access to modern, safe and inexpensive contraception should be created, and a legal possibility should be given to use sterilization as a voluntary contraceptive method. WHO's health definition and respect for the patient's rights should be included into the health education system and applied while providing daily health-care services.

Legal Instruments for paid sick leave and adequate social support to parents of disabled and chronically ill children should be designed. Methods and indicators to identify and measure rape, domestic violence and sexual abuse, as these represent a huge public health problem, should be developed.

Governmental Policies should ensure that the health-care reform be reviewed to provide full (economic and territorial) access to health-care services for women in all phases of their life cycle

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Gender Mainstreaming should be institutionalized in government policies. Electoral Laws should include Women's Quotas at all levels of candidates' lists in all kinds of elections. This will help women gain access into male dominated institutions. Start-up mechanisms promoting women by political parties should be introduced, for instance higher reimbursement of the election campaign costs in case a woman becomes a member of the Parliament; pass the equal status law introducing the parity mechanism (at least 40% representation of each sex) in public bodies (Poland).

Additional gender equality mechanisms that

help build a consultative process and institutionalize the civil dialogue between national mechanisms and women's organizations should be established. A special Equality Act, defining and condemning gender discrimination, providing efficient protection and thus establishing the legal framework for national gender equality machinery should be adopted. A Parliamentary Commission on Equal Status as in the General Assembly of the Council of Europe should be created.

Public opinion research centers should survey the popularity of female politicians and the social evaluation of their work. Media, including women's magazines, should present women's point of view on important, current problems in the country in a fair, professional and serious manner.

VIOLENCE (ALSO IN THE ARMED CONFLICT)

Domestic violence needs to be explicitly condemned and criminalized in the Penal Codes in the region, and a definition of gender-based violence should be introduced. Protection of victims of sexual and domestic violence should be ensured. Restraining orders should be introduced, and victims and witnesses should be given special protection during the trial. Reversing the burden of proof and introducing free legal aid for victims of gender-based violence was also recommended.

Education about the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls at all levels is needed; special gender-sensitive training for social workers, doctors and police, prosecutors and judiciary representatives.

Governments should assume full responsibility for the physical, psychological and social rehabilitation of women-survivors of violence by introducing and funding care programs within health institutions, training of the police, and supporting women's NGOs' activities in this field to establish victims protection programs. Mechanisms protecting a victim of violence against secondary victimization during the investigation and proceeding should be created.

Statistics should be modernized to pay full attention to domestic violence and gender-based crimes in crime rates both with reference to the victim and to the offender, as far as the official statistics are insufficient and not reliable.

Campaigning against all forms of violence against women was recommended including educational activities counteracting violence against women and disseminating knowledge of the rights of women. Actions through the mass media and public campaigns towards changing the damaging stereotypes concerning domestic violence and other forms of violence against women and children were recommended.

Trafficking in Women and Prostitution were given special attention as a heavily aggravated problem in the last decade in the region. The use of prostitution should be criminalized (the issue of sentence was left aside due to the lack of expertise). Trafficked women should be guaranteed refugee status. Care services, education programs, legal and counseling services for victims of trafficking should be provided. Comprehensive national programs against trafficking in women should be adopted in cooperation with specialized NGOs having the appropriate expertise. Such programs must include prevention, media campaigns, sensitization training of customs and passport control officers, close cooperation between the police department dealing with the organized crime and specialized NGOs, access of trafficked women to health services, housing, social protection and education. Concrete actions towards the re-socialization and counseling for the perpetrators of violence were recommended.



Ivica Langerova-Vidrova, „Vase“, 1997

The UN Women's Convention at Work

by Regina Indshewa



Regina Indshewa

Regina Indshewa is a Historian and journalist, since 1993 actively involved in women's rights issues. As the director of the first Bulgarian Women's Resource Center, a project of the Women's Alliance for Development, she is working on issues of gender mainstreaming, violence against women, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, strengthening women's groups, and political participation of women. She is researching and analyzing the gender impact of transformation and structural adjustment policies in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe. Member of the Steering Committee of Karat Coalition.

Adopted in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the most comprehensive, legally binding treaty on women's human rights. Often referred to as an international bill of rights for women, the Convention sets up an agenda for national action to end discrimination.

As of March 2000, 165 States - more than two thirds of the members of the United Nations - are party to the Convention, which entered into force on 3 September 1981, including all newly independent States of the former Soviet Block and former Yugoslavia.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS SAY

The report of Azerbaijan states that the Armenian aggression and its destructive consequences are the principal factors and difficulties affecting the fulfillment of its obligations under CEDAW. Nevertheless, the government has set up an institutional mechanism for the advancement of women and committed itself to allocate funding to implement this mechanism.

Croatia's report draws attention to women's decreased ability to exercise their rights in the aftermath of war. Adding that the situation of rural women became more difficult as a result of the destruction of the agricultural estates because of the aggression against the country.

The report of the Czech Republic details its gradual integration into the democratic international economic and social structures, and links the problems faced by women to the principal changes within the country.

The Bulgarian government attached "great importance to the effective implementation of the Convention, as well as to other human rights instruments... In Bulgaria, women's rights are an integral part of human rights. The national legislation in that regard is based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination, which are constitutionally guaranteed. As the right of equality is protected at the constitutional level, no temporary special measures have been passed in that regard. One reason why an implementing mechanism had not been established to date is that extensive changes were being planned, related to the country's overall reform progress, as well as to the country's accession to the European Union."

FINDINGS OF CEDAW

Women continue to face persistent discrimination and difficulties in the context of employment, which is becoming increasingly precarious, noted the experts. Few gains have been made where women's representation in decision-making is concerned, while forms of violence against women and sexual exploitation are growing problems, with countries failing to introduce energetic preventive measures in this context. Trafficking in women has escalated, in part as a result of the growing influence

of globalization and the emergence of more flexible borders. Factors including structural adjustment policies, privatization and economic crisis have contributed to the growing phenomenon of the feminization of poverty and the difficulties faced by poor women in gaining access to elementary social rights, including health and education. The Committee also noted the prevalence of cultural values that impede the implementation of the Convention and a growing use of religions and traditions as excuses to impede measures designed to advance the status of women.

CEDAW comments (1998) on the Czech report:

"The Committee was very concerned at the prevailing wage disparities between women and men, and the segregation of women in low-paying and low-skilled work which had been one of the results of privatization and rationalization...The Committee also noted with concern the increase of over-protective measures for pregnancy and motherhood, as well as early retirement policies for women. It also noted that the cultural glorification of women's family roles exacerbate the negative impact of economic rationalization policies on women."

CEDAW comments (1998) on the Bulgarian report:

The Committee considered that previous ideological positions, including the former emphasis on formal or de jure equality, now tended to impede a proper understanding of the complex issues of discrimination, such as structural and indirect discrimination, which further compounded the situation of the de facto inequality for women.

The Committee recommends that, despite the economic difficulties associated with transition, the Government give priority to the establishment of a strong and effective national machinery with adequate financial and human resources for advancing the position of women in Bulgaria...The Committee noted that countries undergoing transition have a unique political opportunity to improve the situation of women as an integral part of the successful transition to democracy and free market economy. They can thereby avoid the entrenchment of structural discrimination and the need for further fundamental changes in the future.

WOMEN FROM THE REGION GAINED DIRECT ACCESS TO CEDAW

Our impression is that the experts really use this information during the reviewing process. NGOs are allowed to observe the actual country reports and can track the governments' replies to the Committee's additional questions. Even during the lunch break and after the sessions we provided feedback to the experts and discussed with them the emerging topics in the CEE region. The Committee also organizes special briefings with international and national NGOs on the States parties' reports and listens to the "alternative viewpoint." Thus, CEDAW states an

excellent example of transparency and the linking local and global mechanisms.

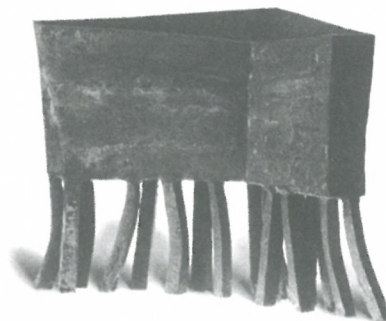
OUR OBSERVATIONS:

Most governments, namely those of the CEE region, find it difficult to understand the essential difference between de jure and de facto equality. Often the very concept of gender is dismissed as "western nonsense." Governments try to argue that since there is no explicit exclusion of women mentioned in the national laws, there is no discrimination. They use the language of gender and non-discrimination, without really understanding the meaning. It is therefore of essential importance to define what "non-discrimination" means.

The absence of a gender perspective (i.e. whether and how the reform process in the countries of the former Soviet Block and Yugoslavia provides for discrimination against women) has very dangerous consequences for women in the countries of transition. Almost everywhere their living conditions deteriorated disproportionately in comparison with men since 1989, and women are constantly being pushed out of decision-making positions, the labor market and public life.

Ivanka Corti, CEDAW Rapporteur on Bulgaria:

"Recent structural changes in Bulgaria have resulted in traumatic effects, most strikingly for women.... Bulgaria's report has not reflected the Government's strategy for implementing the Convention, nor has it indicated the Government's overall strategy for addressing women's issues."



Ivica Langerova-Vidrova, „Vase”, 1997

Governments often argue that "temporary special measures" ("the establishment of programs that do more for women than for men; that, in fact, temporarily undermine formal equality in order to achieve de facto equality" according to CEDAW expert Hanna-Beate Schopp-Schilling) would discriminate against men, that not "quantity but quality is important", thus refusing to take on their responsibility for the majority of the population! Governments hesitate to "interfere" in private business and the family sphere, excusing themselves with religion and traditions.

Since CEDAW is the only mechanism to hold governments accountable for action towards gender equality, NGOs should use the Convention and the reporting process much more actively to push governments to fulfill their promises made in and after Beijing.





Novib (the Netherlands) works for sustainable development by supporting the efforts of poor people in developing countries in, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and by championing their cause in the West. Financial contributions from individual supporters, institutions and governments enable Novib, as an independent organization, to realize its objectives.

In its poverty-alleviation efforts, Novib cooperates with local organizations working with and for the poor. Novib strives to improve their material living standards through financial contributions and other services. The aim of these cooperations is to increase the capacity of local organizations to raise living standards sustainably and to empower them to overcome social and economic oppression. Novib gives priority to human rights, the position of women and the protection of the environment.

Novib informs the Dutch public about the non-western world by challenging conventional images and encouraging deeper insights. Novib stimulates consumer awareness in order to promote an equitable distribution of the world's resources.

Novib focuses on an integrated and three-pronged approach to establishing sustainable development: direct poverty alleviation; social reconstruction and development; advocacy for pro-poor policies. Within all three objectives Novib gives high priority to addressing the social and economic disadvantages facing women and girls. In Novib's work there is a strong emphasis on gender and development. On one hand there are projects specifically dealing with gender issues, which make up Novib's gender program. On the other hand there is a concerted effort to have all projects and programs become gender sensitive.

Within Novib's gender program for Eastern Europe the focus is currently on issues in the field of women and violence (including domestic violence, and the trafficking in women), as well as reproductive rights. Women's leadership development seeks to return women to positions of social, economic and political power, in a manner that advances women's interests as perceived by women, and builds gender equality.

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Ivica Vidrova-Langerova

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Ivica Vidrova-Langerova is a graduate of the Academy of Applied Arts with a Master of Arts in Ceramics. She was a Professor of Ceramics at the School of Applied Graphic Arts at the same Academy (1970-1995) and is now Head of Ceramic Studio there. She is member of the Slovak Ceramic Association; the Slovak Art Association GERULATA; the Association of Women Artists and the Art Association in Graz, Austria. She has had 6 individual exhibitions abroad, in Germany, Norway and Austria, and one in the Slovak National Gallery. She has also participated in over 30 united exhibitions and in 8 art collections in various countries in Europe and around the world. She holds 4 special awards for Ceramics from international ceramic exhibitions.

Ivica Vidrova-Langerova is one of those artists who looks for original and effective approaches even at the expense of a parting with their material. The starting point is the exceptional idea for which the appropriate technical means are then sought. Her interest oscillates between painting and sculpture. Her objects often paraphrase everyday functional items such as bowls, chairs, and other furniture. This group of objects can be understood as a questioning of traditional terms and functions and even, perhaps, of the very term "ceramics". Not all of her pieces are ironic paraphrases of things; in some she is, rather, taken by their quotidian quality of their authenticity and bond with a specific milieu. Among her authentically ceramic objects are items to be found in the factory where she has on a number of occasions worked. She has tried to change their ordinariness through an intervention which is the manifestation of a personal involvement. In some groups of objects she has also veered toward installation in a way that has no parallel in Slovak ceramics. (Stefan Orisko)



„Anatolya“



„Vase“



„Cups-remembrance to Norway“



„Desire“ 1999



„Evercasting Time“ 1999



„Diagnosis of Earth“ 1997

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Ivica Kroslakova has studied at the Fine Arts Academies of Bratislava (1961-64), Prague (1964-65), Vienna (1965-67) and at the Academy of Arts of Muses in Bratislava (1973-74). She is member of the International Association of Women Artists; the Union of Slovak Artists; the Slovak Art Association GERULATA; Salon d'Automne, Paris; the European Art Group Les Issambres, France. She has had 8 individual exhibitions in Slovakia, one in Germany and one in Austria; and has participated in over 40 group exhibitions in many European countries. She holds 15 internationally recognized awards for special achievements in art.

The painting of Ivica Kroslakova has a firm background in the liberated atmosphere of the 1960s. The art of the so-called "inner model", stripped of any confusing messages for the visual world, is a paradigm for her work. Reality is present in her pictures through the used materials and their compositional structures. We can define several determining elements of the artist's work: structure-color-light-line of gesture-and collage. In the creative process the painter handles these elements with an absolutely free manner, with a considerable inner dynamism. The permanent ability to improvise and search for new methods has opened new possibilities for Ivica Kroslakova's work such as the using of photo foils as the base and the surface at the same time. The foil leaks natural light or transforms its nature according to the chosen base. By installing the work in space, its transparency causes a merging with its surroundings which endows the object with new visual and aesthetic qualities. (Eva Trojanova in Chaos-Cosmos, Cosmos-Chaos, 1996)

Kroslakova integrates the elements of photography with those of graphics, painting and plastic. The topicalised objects, more precisely their fragments, functioning in her compositions, reveal the evidently natural substance. The choice of the basis itself evokes biological associations. The female attachment to textile materials evidently points out their gender. (Rudolf Fila)