

# fair play

8/2002

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Moldova

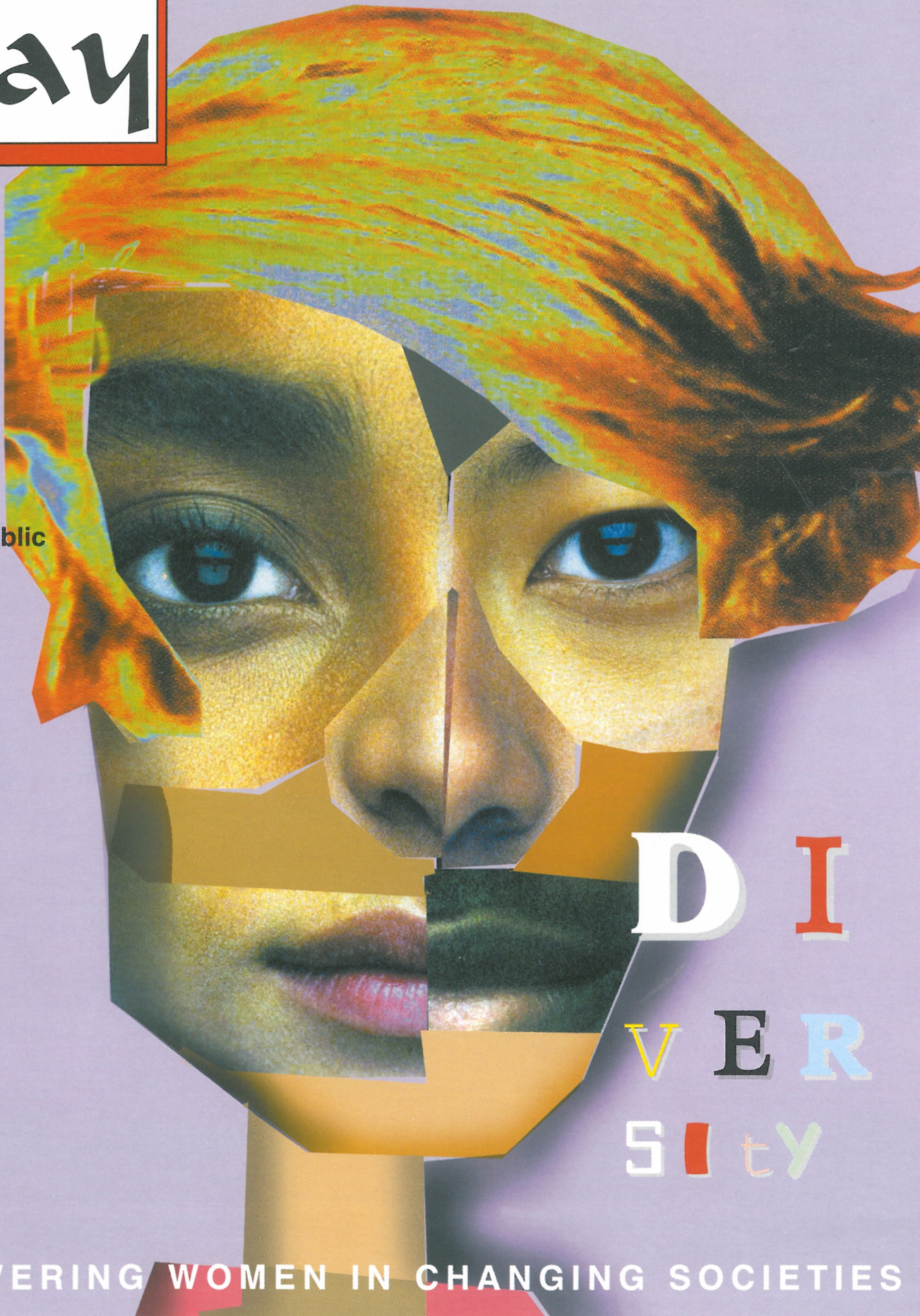
Poland

Romania

Russia

Slovakia

Yugoslavia



**D I**  
**V E R**  
**S I t Y**

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN CHANGING SOCIETIES





# E d i t o r i a l

by Eugenia Kirilov, editor-in-chief [eugenia\\_kirilov@hotmail.com](mailto:eugenia_kirilov@hotmail.com)

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Diversity is the very expression of the big picture of the world. Whether is perceived as a chance for us all, or a threat, it is however an undeniable reality. As such we can verify it in both the micro, and macro universe. Is it a reality of the borders, official or otherwise that we draw all the time -different languages, traditions, customs? Is it a reality of nature itself- different race, sex? It is maybe both to an extend or another. It is thought to have good and bad connotations with no ultimate criteria of separating them.

It is implied , sometimes by politicians, sometimes by reality itself that diversity as a common characteristic it is not understood properly, therefore something should be done for that. The type of things found necessary to be done for this purpose are divers as well. Different voices - political parties, nongovernmental institutions etc - struggle to make themselves heard and acknowledged. Sometimes they sound like a chorus of the damned desperately attempting to reach a deaf ear. Who should be listening? Some say the decision-makers. But who are those? Isn't it the very principal of democracy that they should be the regular guys on the street? Yes it is. It is the regular guy that we too should address the concept of diversity to.

The countries in our region change fast their law systems according to the requirements of the European Union in order to become part of it. But the regular guy lives in the universe of regular people governed by inertia and laws unwritten. The picture accomplished in the end is ludicrous : we have democratic law systems coexisting hilariously with mentalities of a different world. And samples of that are everywhere one turns ones head. I met with a striking one this summer. In Romania laws were past one after another at an incredible speed to protect minorities. The reason I mentioned already: acceptance into the European Union. At the same time all through the summer there were reports on Romania TV about Romanian citizens of Romma origin being deported from France and Finland, countries where they asked for political asylum. Given the reality of the law system changed over night in Romania, for the respective countries it was a simple matter of embarking and escorting them back to Bucharest. Romania has laws to protect minorities therefore there is no discrimination to talk of. That would be so if Romania, as a reality, consisted of the Government alone. But Romania consists mostly of regular people who might not even be aware of the laws in question, and of those minorities who are just as ignorant of them. As a result of that to the majority the Romma ethnics are still second rate people. And the discrepancy between the law and reality results in situations such as the the report on the news on Romanian National TV about a police action on the streets of Bucharest against Romma ethnics. The police confiscated as many of their carts as they could find based on the rumour that they steal manhole from the streets in order to sale them as metal for recycling. Now, not only wasn't there anyone to take note of the abuse of the police who decided to be judge, jury and executioner in one day for these people, but their action was applauded at the level of the regular guy, and overlooked at others. To top it all off, the same television voiced the opinion that something should be done about those who embarrass the honest Romanian abroad.

On the other side of the world where these problems have been long since addressed we encounter a different kind of aberrant situations : there has been a debate in USA over banishing Mark Twain from schools curriculum on the basis that in novels I am sure we all read and enjoyed, he used the denomination "Niger" in reference to African Americans.

So what are the conclusions to be drawn from all this? Where should we start in trying to implement the idea of diversity being an undeniable reality? Why should a leader of the Romma community in Romania be the one to speak of embarrassment? Why should classic literature be banished from schools? And these are just few random examples among so many more of the aberrant way of understanding diversity.

It seems that diversity is still the greatest challenge for us all however advanced in democracy. In the era of communication, fast airplanes, of America a country made entirely of immigrants, of the formation of European Union we are still too afraid of the differences between us to be able to see what a marvellous thing diversity really is

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# W r i t i n g a b o

by **Anita Seibert**, Poland  
Karat secretariat

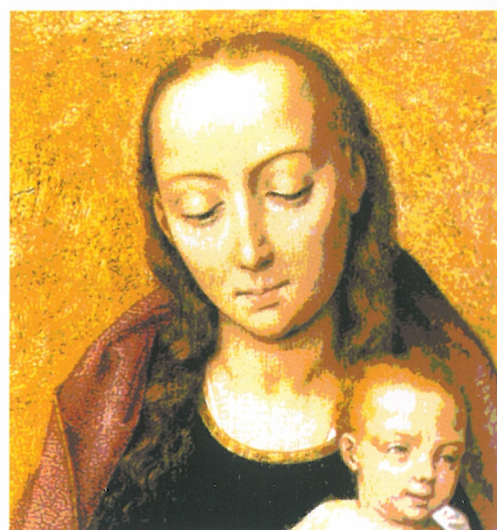
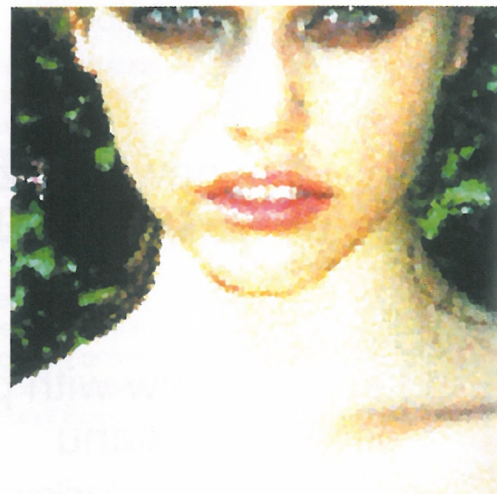
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It is very difficult to write about diversity without falling into the traps of using the language, the logic, and the arguments used by those who we happen to be criticizing for not understanding the concept of diversity, or for not acknowledging the fact that the world around us, starting from our families, through our work places and communities and finishing on the global nation is a collection of diversities. Diversities which are manifested at so many levels: gender, sexual, political, ethnic, cultural, physical, intellectual, religious, social and economic just to mention a few.

**Initially this article was going to address diversity in the context of European Union and more precisely in the context of the invocation dei which is currently being proposed by Polish representation to the Convention on the Future of Europe.**

This seemed very appropriate partly because of Karat's "Gender and Economic Justice in European Accession and Integration Project". But while doing research for this article I realized that writing about the threat to diversity posed by the proposed invocation dei is very difficult. This is simply because it requires (so it seems) quite a strong criticism of the attitudes of others. So while I still would like this article to refer to the debate around the invocation dei, this will be done not so much in order to gain an understanding of the approach to religious diversity, but rather to illustrate some of the difficulties associated with talking about diversity.





# ut d l v e r s i t y

So why is it writing about diversity so difficult? Firstly, because writing about any politically charged and complex topic usually is. For example in Poland (and I assume in other countries of the region as well) a debate regarding difficulty of writing and talking about abortion has been going on for quite a while now. Secondly, in talking about diversity in a way that does not indicate that we ourselves have a problem with it is almost impossible.



Here I should finally make the promised reference to the invocation dei. **Polish representatives to the European Convention have proposed for the preamble to the European Constitution to include invocation dei, a reference to God.** During meetings addressing the Convention on the Future of Europe the presence of those for whom this is very important is evident. Sometimes the persons addressing the topic are clergy, sometimes politicians and sometimes “average” people. But are they really? The composition of the meetings addressing the Convention is everything but diverse. Beside the politicians they are usually frequented by people who seem to be academics, intellectuals and bureaucrats. All of them extremely “European”, all very middle-class and all, despite some differences of opinions, extremely homogenous. This is where I notice a difficulty in talking about diversity. If we assume that the discussion about the Convention is a discussion about diversity, since European Union is to reflect various differences between European people, can this discussion be really effective if only specific kind of Europeans participate in it? **Can we talk about diversity during meetings to which only the “right” kind of people are invited? Or does it simply show that we ourselves cannot cope with the fact that society consists of people from different social, economic, intellectual strata?** What is important here is that such an exclusive approach to discussions about diversity is not limited to Polish meetings on European Union.





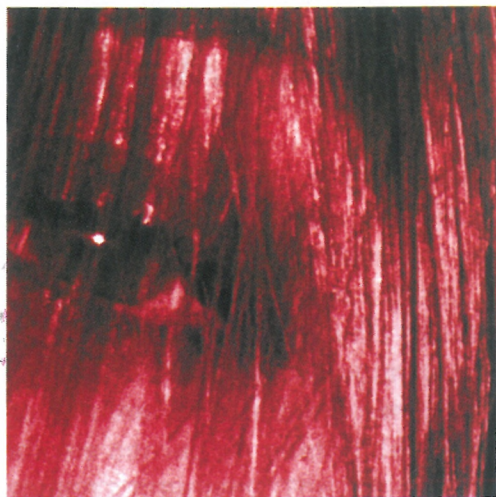
In fact most discussions about diversity including this one taking place on the pages of Fair Play are conducted by an exclusive group of people.

**But coming back to Polish meetings addressing the Convention on the Future of Europe Some issues such as gender in the context of European Union integration, are never mentioned (unless brought up by somebody from Karat !), poverty is never mentioned, desperation and lack of information of those who are horrified, for whatever reasons of Poland becoming part of the Union is never brought up.** And this is another concern: can diversity be truly addressed if already a very selective group of people in some way narrows down the discussion through selecting “appropriate” topics? So while participants in debates about the EU may disagree this difference of opinion is usually limited to supporting or being against EU enlargement. This is hardly diverse! Participants of debates about the EU either objects to joining the Union in fear of losing Poland’s national identity, or jump with joy at it finally it being “proven” to the rest of the world that Poland is a European nation. To me either of those approaches seem to be a product of elitism, snobbery and conservative social structures, or in other words lack of diversity.

**But there is something else extremely relevant that comes up during any discussion about diversity. What comes into my mind when writing these words? I will tell you what does as this will be very suggestive of how difficult it is to talk about diversity, let alone live it and believe that others will accept you if you are a little bit different. The thoughts that come to my mind are “Ah dear, I criticized conservative social structures and called people elitist. They (the readers of the Fair Play, the editors) will dislike me because I am using the vocabulary so abused during the communist system. They will think I am different! Or maybe they will think that I am jealous because I feel that I do not belong to this elite? Or maybe they will think that I am do not support Poland joining the EU”. This is probably why I thought should explain myself to position my views in the context of experiences which allow me to be different. I want to tell the reader that I lived outside Europe for a long time, and this is why everything that I notice here seems foreign to me. At the same time I want to point out that I have probably more in common with the intellectual snobs from conservative social structures than the “others” who are not included in the debates about the EU. And what would I achieve through saying all this? I would say “Look I am really not any different, I am just like you, I am “normal”. So what is the conclusion of this? Writing**







about diversity scares us! Simply because we do not really want to be perceived ourselves as different. And I have not even started writing properly about the invocation dei... So let me return to it.

In one of the articles I have read preparing for this essay it is stated that the representatives of two Polish parties lobbying for the invocation dei stress that such an invocation makes sense because European civilization is built on Christian values. The thought which first came to my mind when I heard this statement was far from acknowledging economic diversity of polish parliamentarians (in this instance translated into an ability to travel within Europe), intellectual and academic diversity (in this instance translated into ability of interpreting of what they see and and/or analyzing it in the context of social theory) and I am sure few other form of diversities. I thought **“Have you ever been to Yugoslavia or Germany or United Kingdom? Have you seen who walks on the streets there? Did you look at those people? How many of them looked to you like Christians? OK, OK if you want to everybody can look like Christian to you, even a men in skull cup and a woman in a veil, but How many of them did you ask if they identified as Christians?”** I do not think I need to give any answers here. Since my point is precisely the one: while arguing for diversity my own attitude also shows that I have a problem with accepting diversity. I position myself as the better informed, more open minded, better traveled, more entitled to an opinion, simply a better person then those arguing for the invocation dei! I use the language and arguments of those whom I am criticizing. I am saying “I am better so even if you are different to me you are simply wrong, I am not going to accept your views they are not important, only my views and views of those who think like me are the right ones’.”

**S**o what should be said in conclusion of this essay, especially since I did not even attempt to answer any of the questions I have posed here. I do not think that such a conclusion, beyond stating since talking about diversity is so difficult that we have a long way before we can truly accept and understand diversity.





# Amazons of Fiction

## The New

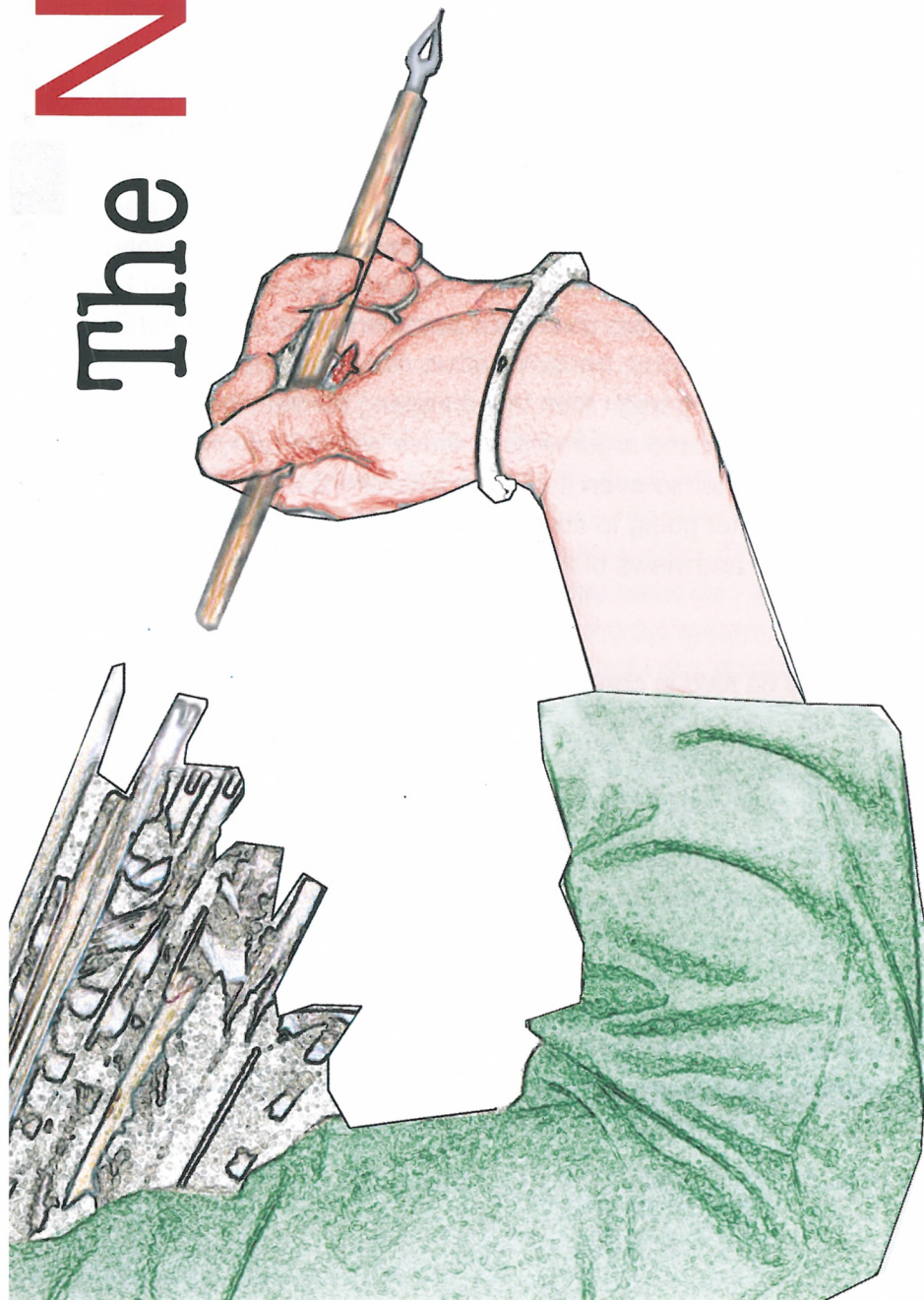
by **Nadezhda Azhgikhina**,  
Russia

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The awarding of the last Booker prize to Liudmila Ulitskaya was a significant event for Russian literature. The enormous amount of publications, interviews and TV and radio broadcasts about the Russian writer revealed not only the interest that the literary world has shown in the first woman to win the most prestigious modern writing award, but also the fact that the

**phenomenon of women's writing has itself received unambiguous recognition in the eyes of Russian critics.**

Ulitskaya's success became a kind of finale for the discussion that has been





going on for years about the nature and value of women's prose and the characteristics of women's world view and writing style.

The past ten years, coinciding with democratic changes in Russia, brought to the world some brilliant creations of women writers. During perestroika from the late eighties into the nineties, collections of women's prose appeared one after another with accompanying manifestos from authors and editors, while the literary periodicals carried on heated debates about women's creativity. The critics' articles were sprinkled with the names of well-known writers such as Ludmila Petrushevskaya and Nina Sadur, and new ones such as Tatiana Tolstaya, Svetlana Vasilenko, Marina Palei and Ludmila Ulitskaya. Their work evoked contradictory responses in Russia as well as among Slavonic scholars in the West.

**I have to say, none of our researchers of literature expected such a turn of affairs.**

In the beginning of perestroika the literary community of the USSR, waiting for changes, created its mythology (which is not surprising, considering the mythological character of Soviet culture) according to which, once censorship was lifted and press freedom began, Russian literature simply had to become the most brilliant and talented in the world, astonishing mankind. It was thought that free marketry, which was just beginning, would raise our intellectuals to the heaven of personal well-being and creative uplift.

Many people linked the coming Russian literary renaissance to young male writers; leading Russian critics compared Oleg Yermakov, writing about the Afghan war experience, with Lev Tolstoy,

who began his career with the Sevastopol short stories about the Crimean campaign.

*But* a Russian literary renaissance did not take place.

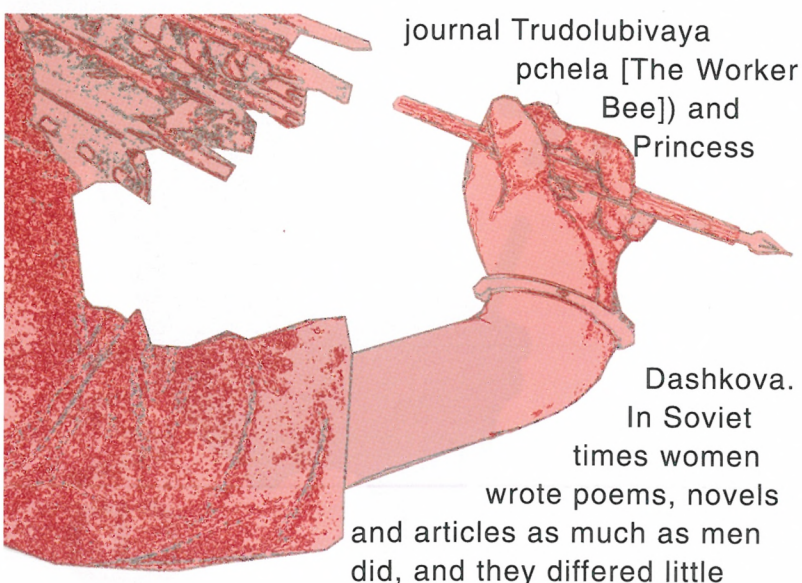
**The only sign of a new development in Russian literature was the increase in women's writing, which no one expected or hastened to welcome.**

Many critics were hostile towards women's writing; for example the well-known Pavel Basinsky wrote in *Literaturnaya gazeta* [The Literary Gazette] that there cannot be a women's prose because the woman's soul is too focused on the body. Despite such blows, women increasingly attracted the attention of readers, first of all because these authors brought something new both esthetically and ethically. They opened up a hidden unspoken world and disclosed their own particular knowledge and way of comprehending and reflecting the world.

It has to be said that the upsurge of women's literature in the late eighties and early nineties owed a lot to the preceding development of Soviet and post-Soviet culture. Women have long been a part of Russian literature, beginning with the era of Catherine the Great (who wrote interesting works and published the literary







journal Trudolubivaya pchela [The Worker Bee]) and Princess

Dashkova. In Soviet times women wrote poems, novels and articles as much as men did, and they differed little

from the men in their approach to and interpretation of subject matter, adhering to socialist realism in letter and spirit. The famous Soviet women writers Lidia Seifullina, Vanda Vasilevskaya, Vera Panova and others, with all their originality, were first and foremost Soviet writers, and did not fully express their own female view of the world.

**In Soviet times women writers were not subject to special gender discrimination - they suffered equally with men.**

Under the pressures of totalitarian ideology and government, many of them along with men became prisoners in Stalinist camps. Yevgenia Ginzburg wrote about her experience in the women's camps in Krutoi marshrut [The Steep Journey], adding to and broadening the picture that Alexander Solzhenitzyn described in Archipelago Gulag [Gulag Archipelago]. The well-known poet Olga Bergoltz was arrested when pregnant, and in the process of interrogation and torture she lost the child, a tragedy which af-

ected the rest of her life. In the unique book Naskalnaya zhivopis [Rock paintings] Evfrosinya Kersnovsky depicts the hell that women went through in the bowels of the gulag, in a work which is a "female version" of Varlam Shalamov's prose.

After Stalin's death and the slight liberalization under Khrushchev, a discussion began in society that divided the intellectuals into two camps reminiscent of the old dispute between "westernizers" and "slavophiles" in nineteenth century Russian culture. New literary journals appeared and around some of them - Yunost [Youth], Novy mir [New World] and Literaturnaya gazeta [Literary Gazette] - gathered writers and critics who advocated the westernization of Soviet life and culture. The supporters of the patriarchal peasant past clustered around Molodaya gvardiia [Young Guard], Nash sovremennik [Our Contemporary] and Moskva [Moscow]. Both orientations were in one way or another opposed to the official Soviet ideology and both were striking examples of artistic creativity that became the basis of large trends in subsequent decades.

The "westernizers" were represented especially by the urban prose of Vasily Aksenov, Anatoly Gladilin, Andrei Bitov, and then by Yury Trifonov. The "slavophiles," brought up on Solshenitzyn's short story Matryonin dvor [Matryona's House] - Victor Astafyev, Valentin Rasputin, Vasily Belov - created the trend of so-called ontological nature-philosophy prose. The leaders of both trends were male writers. It is interesting that each had its ideal woman.

**The urban authors presented an image of a sexy, romantic heroine who liked pretty clothes and was very dependent on men**

(at odds with the official image of Soviet



women). The heroine of Vasily Aksenov's cult story *Zatovarennaya bochkotara* [The Overstuffed Barrel] thinks not logically but by interjections, and her flow of creativity is a selection of unrelated sounds (aaakh, okh, um, o), while her partner-hero is full of interesting ideas and thinks altogether normally. This heroine has no interests of her own, and neither profession nor society concerns her.

The "village writers" placed on a pedestal the patriarchal peasant women who is also totally a-social and lives by the laws of nature. She too regards man as "number one," and is often compared to objects of inanimate nature. Valentin Rasputin's old women are associated with ancient trees and in Vasily Belov's story *Privychnogo delo* [An Ordinary Matter], the wife Katerina metaphorically ranks with the cow in description.

In the 1960s new women writers appeared. Nina Grekova, Galina Shcherbakova, Inna Varlamova and, later, Victoria Tokareva did not stimulate such heated arguments as the authors of "urban prose" or the "village writers." No one saw them as the future of literature. Quite often they were criticized for their "shallow, petty-bourgeois" themes, because they wrote about the hard lives of Soviet women, family problems, raising children, mutual relations with men, and the difficulties of being a good wife and mother as well as a good specialist.

Natalia Baranskaya's story *Nedelia kak nedelia* [A Week Like Any Other], published in the era's leading journal *Novy mir*, tells of the

**hellish life of a young woman who wants and is trying to meet the requirements of society,**

both in the home and the workplace.

It had great resonance abroad and was translated into many languages, but was hardly discussed in the USSR. There arose a sort of new gender division in culture: a man's search for identity and meaning in his life, no matter how weak and depraved he was, was acknowledged to be a serious theme in literature, whereas a similar search by a woman heroine was judged to be a shallow theme.

All this reflected entirely state policy, which loudly proclaimed "equal rights and opportunities for men and women" in the USSR, but in fact gave women the double burden of working in the economy and taking care of the family. (Men in the USSR never participated in child raising, and social services were exceedingly weak). In this situation,

**the belief was instilled into generations of Soviet women that their problems were not important,**

and even that they should be ashamed of having them.

Ludmila Petrushevskaya began to write about the hopeless existence of women in the USSR, but her works were not published for a long time. Her heroine was a crushed woman who had no self-confidence and often underwent terrible sufferings and





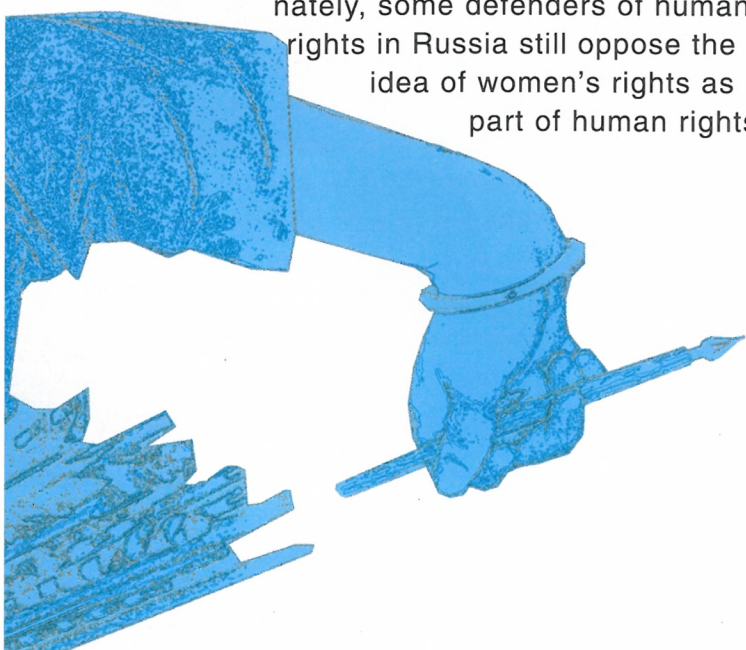
degradation. In post-Soviet times Petrushevskaya's stories and plays (especially the novella *Vremya Noch* [Night Time]) created a furore and delighted critics, by throwing a challenge to the "male" view of women. However, it is worth mentioning that Petrushevskaya in no way associated herself with feminist ideas.

Feminists were then expressing themselves in a variety of genres, and especially in journalism. In 1979-80 in Leningrad, four female writers put out an uncensored "samizdat" [self-published] almanac *Zhenshchina i Rossia* [Women and Russia] which, for the first time, spoke openly about discrimination against women in the USSR. It included articles about the terrible conditions in maternity hospitals, violence against women in Soviet prisons and in their own homes, and about the obstacles that women face when they try to talk about their problems.

## The KGB put a stop to the activities of the four women

(Tatiana Mamonova, Natalia Malakhovskaya, Natalia Goricheva and Yulia Voznesenskaya), deporting them in 24 hours. It is noteworthy that dissident circles in the West did not embrace the women into their ranks, although in every respect the writers were in the situation of dissidents who had been expelled by the Soviet authorities because of their beliefs. Unfortu-

nately, some defenders of human rights in Russia still oppose the idea of women's rights as part of human rights



However, let us return to literature.

## Perestroika created space for new literary forms and experiments, and female prose-writers made the most of it.

The appearance of Tatyana Tolstaya's first short stories was like the birth of a new planet; a fresh, juicy style, similar to that of the 1920s, with fine details and infinite artistry captivated critics in Russia and abroad. For several years now the American conference of Slavonic scholars has included special sections on Tolstaya, and very interesting works have been written about her, first among which is a book by Elena Goshchilo. Ludmila Ulitskaya, whose work was appearing at about the same time, presented a new view of the widespread "family novel", and her novella *Solnechka* [Darling] became the event of the decade.

In parallel with these works a new movement appeared, which called itself "New Women's Prose". The collections *Ne pomnyashaya zla* [Not Remembering Evil], *Chistenskaya zhizn* [Clean Little Life], *Zhenskaya logika* [Women's Logic] and *Novye Amazonki* [New Amazons] became manifestos, as it were, for the movement.

## "Women's prose exists, just as the world of women exists separately from the world of men.

We have no intention whatsoever of disowning our sex, and still less of apologizing for its "weakness." That would be as stupid and pointless as rejecting our heredity, our historical soil



and our destiny. We must preserve our dignity, even if that means affirming the fact that we belong to a particular sex. (Maybe it is above all through this that we preserve our dignity.)” This quotation is from the “New Amazons” manifesto. Many of the “New Amazons” have already become well-known not only in Russia but also abroad.

**K**abiria s Obvodnogo kanala [Cabiria of the Obvodny Canal] by Marina Paley, Shamara [Shamara], Durochka [Little Idiot] and short stories by Svetlana Vasilenko, Duna Rubina’s perceptive collections, Valery Narbikova’s brave experiment, the Christian strivings of Olesa Nikolaeva and Larisa Vaneeva, Nina Gabrielyan’s psychological experiences, Polina Slutskina’s prose, compressed as a space station, and Olga Slavnikova’s intellectualism. For two years now the Vagrius publishing house has been producing a series of books of women’s prose, and the books have vanished fast from the shelves of bookshops. Two years ago in Peredelkina there was a conference of female writers, the printed texts of which have already become collectors’ items. A second conference is being planned. A new collection of women’s prose is about to be published.

**Mass literature is increasingly becoming “a female affair”.**

This began with journalism. Over the last years female journalists have been actively conquering fields that were previously “male territory” : war reporting, investigation, surveys of international politics, security, the army and so on. And their work has often evoked particular interest, as in the cases of the reporting on Chechnya by Anna Politkovskaya, Yulia Kalinina and Yelena Masyuk, the investigations by Larisa Kislinkaya, Evgenia Albats and Natalya Gevorkyan, Yulia

Latynina’s economic surveys, and Ludmila Telen’s analytical journalism.

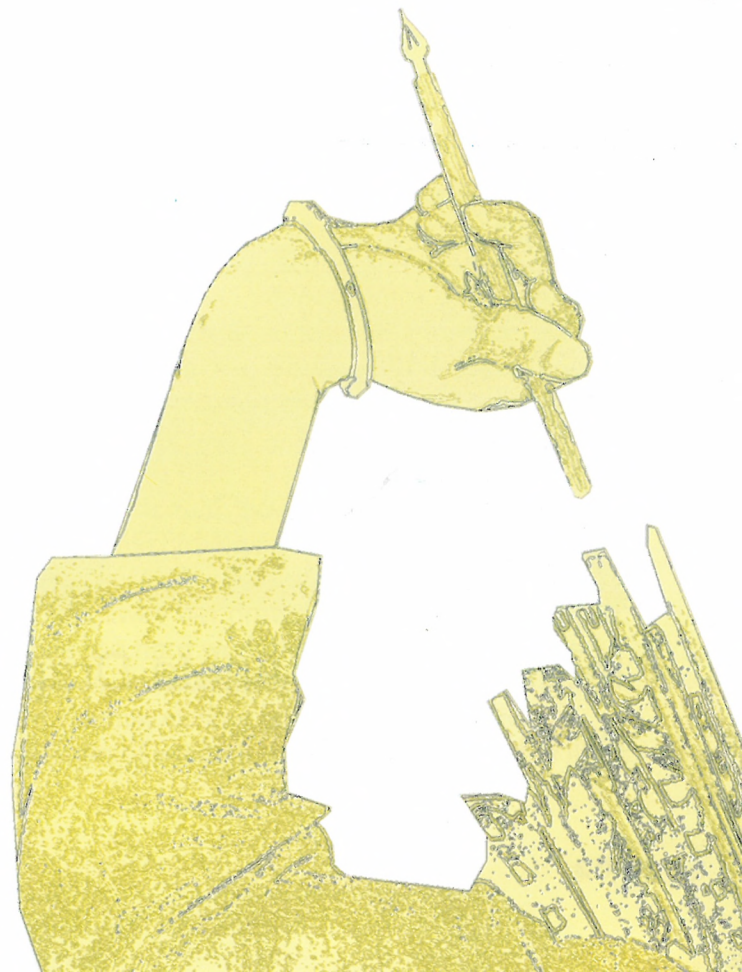
**Women have carved out a firm niche for themselves in scandalous literature;**

Maria Arbatova’s I am 40 and Darya Aslamova’s Notes of a Good-for-Nothing Girl have every right to be considered masterpieces in the genre of erotic thrillers (or “striptease literature”), and have received wide-spread recognition.

The success of female Russian authors in detective writing is also undoubted. For a long time Aleksandra Marinina topped the best-seller list, and Darya Dontsova, Polina Dashkova, Tatyana Polyakova, and Galya Mavlutova come hard on her heels...

What will it be next?

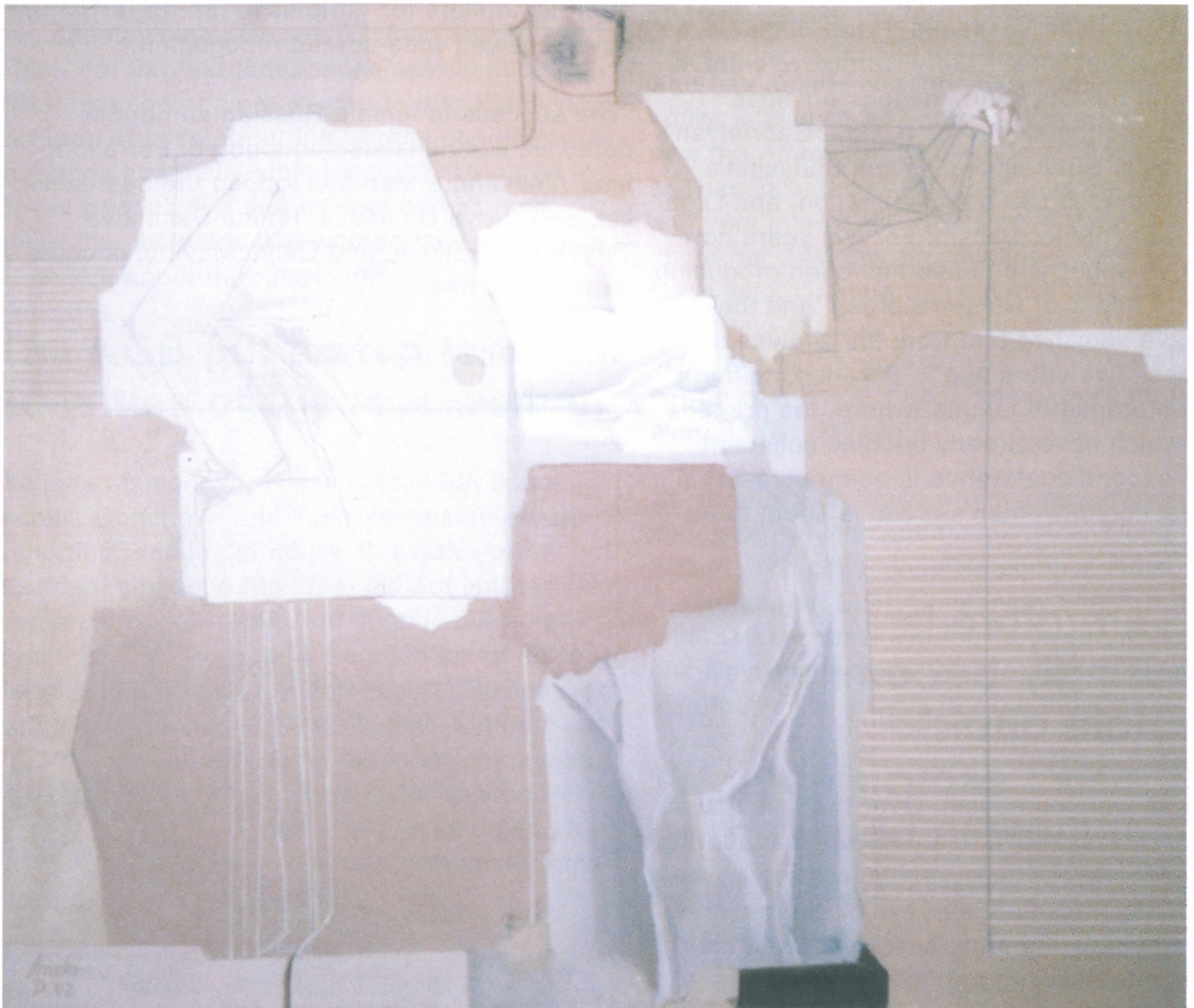
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“My first impulse was always to think that something should be done to ease their lives, but the next second I’d find myself painting not victims, but astonishing forces.”

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Interview with Aneta Dragushanu  
by **Eugenia Kirilov**



**Aneta Dragushanu is one of the most active and appreciated painter both of Romania and Bulgaria, the country where she comes from, and the country where she lived and worked for the past 40 years. Her paintings found their ways in museums , private collections and galleries, in Bulgaria, and around the world. She is also a founding member of "The Romanian Community in Bulgaria"**

**Eugenia Kirilov:** Aneta Dragushanu, I look around and I think that it is fair to say that most of your paintings represent women, why?

**Aneta Dragushanu:** Maybe it is all because of the place I come from, the spiritual universe in which I grew to draw. I started drawing long before I had studied Arts, I drew women, a particular kind of women, the women overwhelmed by burdens, worn out by work, carrying something heavy in their arms, on their shoulders, the Cinderella, never the princess. As I said, it could be because I come from peasants myself. The woman that my memory singles out as the main figure of my childhood is my grand mother. I remember how one time after she lost patience waiting for my grandfather to fix the roof to the house she got up on the roof herself and began throwing down the broken tiles cursing. Once that was done, she went and hired two men from the village and replace them. That is how the roof got fixed.

**E. K.:** She doesn't look like a Cinderella.

**A. D.:** It depends on how you see Cinderella, I see her as a very strong character.

**E. K.:** The women you painted are from here, from Bulgaria, where you live for the past 40

years, are they the same?

**A. D.:** The absolute same; caryatids defying a cruel climate, the hot sun burning upon fields with no horizon, striking with their hoe a soil as hard as stone. I have a painting with a women working the land with a hoe that I called "The front". The tools in their hands seemed like weapons, and them soldiers on the first line fighting for the lives of the loved ones at home.

**E. K.:** You went on the fields to draw them?

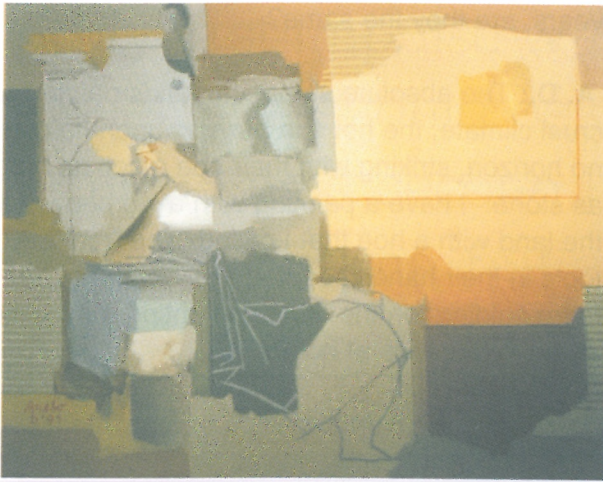
**A. D.:** Many times, I drew them working, resting, eating. The most interesting of those hypostases I find the one of them getting at the end of the line: exhausted to the point of disintegration, their face would change entirely. By this time they would lose most of the things they would wear, and the ones still kept would be hanging on them as if in despair. Totally abandoned to that exhaustion, to rearrange their features, to the sun to burn them they would be. No sign of resistance, no opposition, no victimizing themselves. They were magnificent. They would then sit in a circle, get their



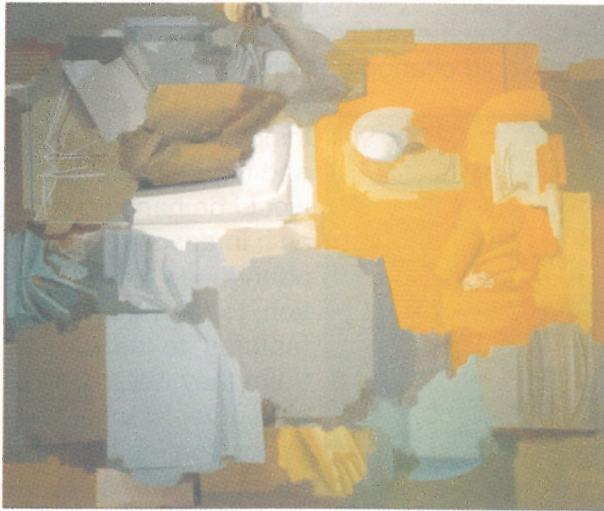
Aneta Dragushanu in her studio in Vidin

food out , and start eating and talking. I wrote down many of those conversations, for they were always so colored by humor, and wisdom. I remember this one instance, when while we were all sitting for lunch, a sudden little tornado came and scattered all my drawings. All these women they left off their lunch and ran to get them back from the winds. And so they did, to the last one. While handing them to me one of them says addressing herself "now you work the land if you did not like school like Ana". To which another replays "so what if Ana went to school, the wind still blew away her drawings". So as you can see, despite the hard work they seemed condemned to for ever, one would have a hard time thinking them victims; victims do not speak like that. Treasures of wisdom they were, so I painted them





"Composition 4"- 2000, oil on canvas



"Composition 7"- 2001, oil on canvas

"Composition 15"- 2002, oil on canvas



as such as well. I painted them sitting. Sitting and looking afar; over the things we call essential in life, into the world of the wind that does not care about University degrees. Look at them "I sit here - they seem to say - , but do not let yourself fooled by my stillness, the fruit of my hands ripens somewhere far in future" just as a Romanian poet said. It has been always a mystery to me how they could do the hard work on the field, keep their gardens so neat - this is a Romanian thing as you know, - bake the most sophisticated cakes to bring to church this many times a year for all holidays, and sit like only they could do it, as if they never moved a finger in their lives. Carried on the traditions they did too.

**E. K.:** And the men? What was left for their men to do?

**A. D.:** Oh, I don't know, cut fire wood, make the wine. The only man left in my memory was the supervisor on the field. He was the only masculine presence on those fields. Do nothing but move around, saying now and then "come now, it is time to get back to work" when they would be lunching. A prison guard, that is how I perceived him.

**E. K.:** Does that mean that the women were prisoners in your eyes?

**A. D.:** Maybe, but not in their own eyes they were not.. They presented themselves rather like forces of nature, giants, never victims.

**E. K.:** Were there other reasons for your painting these women besides your coming from peasants you think?

**A. D.:** Maybe my professor at the Art Academy in Bucharest, the great painter Corneliu Baba. He kept on telling us "do not describe things as they appear to the naked eye, get inside the things you paint, tell their stories from there". So I did. These women to me were all the faces of an indestructible force: the hard work, the deep wisdom, the faith in God, and things unseen.

**E. K.:** Ana you come from Romania and lived in Bulgaria for 40 years now. How do you see the two countries in relation as neighbors?

**A. D.:** Not much of anything really. Very few



Bulgarians know anything about Romania, just as few Romanians know significant things about Bulgaria. I hardly ever hear any cultural names of Romania mentioned here besides Eliade, and Ionescu, but there so many of them. I think it is a Balkanic thing you know, we all look towards the West, only what comes from there is good, as if we have nothing worth mentioning. And really that is not the case at all. I believe all of us in this region would benefit from an exchange of values, from knowing eachother better. Romanians and Bulgarians know more about America than about eachotehr.

**E. K.:** Tell me something about the Romanian community in Bulgaria.



"Two women"- 1976, drawing on paper

**A. D.:** Well, there are two parallel realities here : the one of the women I painted, they were all Romanian women from here, women who kept all their ethnic traditions regardless, and the other of the organizations and associations that did mainly nothing but tell people how nothing can be done. For various reasons, money, fear, etc.

**E. K.:** Were they objective these reasons? Real I mean, the fear?

**A. D.:** Of course, but so was the stone like soil those women were forcing to give them food. That is not the point. The point is these people should step away and let others speak in the name of this community, people more like the women I painted.

**E. K.:** Do you think your work helps the women's cause?

**A. D.:** I don't know, I painted them and still do for I find them fascinating. My first impulse was always to think that something should be done to ease their lives, but the next second I'd find myself painting not victims, but astonishing forces. I don't know what impresses me the most: their hard lives, or their magnificent lives, and I hope I caught them both. My paintings now are interpretations; I paint a detail like the uncovered breast here symbolizing the abandonment to the cruel climate, a corner of a mouth twitched in bitterness of their condition, the rest is interpreted, and the end result is always force, the force of a rock in the way of storms. They may get chipped here or there, but not smashed. If I did anything I hope to have made it known what they really are, what they can do. Just about anything really.

Looking at Ana's paintings and drawings that got so much recognition around the world I wonder if she shed any light on the women's story, and I will have to say that with her light she simply made their mystery deeper, just as Blaga, the Romanian poet she referred to earlier, once said in reference to his own attitude towards the mystery of the world.



"Sleeping women"- 1977  
drawing on paper



"Working women"- 1977  
drawing on paper



The 'Gender and Economic Justice in European Accession and Integration' Project so far...

## **G e n e r a l**

# **I n f o r m a t i o n**

'Gender and Economic Justice in European Accession and Integration' is undertaken by Karat in partnership with NEWW-Polska. It is funded by the UNIFEM.

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Project's goal: to use the process of European Union enlargement to advance economic rights of women and gender equality in the entire CEE/CIS\* region, including candidate and non-candidate countries.

### **Main components of the project:**

- 1. Economic Literacy.** Goal: to increase women's economic knowledge in order to enhance their capacity to advocated for gender economic justice.
- 2. European Union Accession.** Goal: promotion of EU's gender equality standards and to enable women from the CEE/CIS region to gain from the accession process.
- 3. European Integration.** Goal: to increase the EU citizens' knowledge about our region and its women's NGOs.

### **January 2002**

Organizing of Karat Secretariat.

The first month of the 'Gender and Economic Justice in European Accession and Integration' project were dedicated to setting in structures allowing for its effective implementation.

Karat News

In January the first issue of the Karat News have been published. The News are produced twice a month and provide readers with an overview of the progress of the project, as well as other Karat activities and initiatives. The News also provide a comprehensive overview of relevant news from the region, member countries updates on achievements and activates member organisations. They also dedicate space to specific project related EU information. All issues of Karat News can be viewed to on our website, but they are also distributed to subscribers to Karat CEE-CIS list.

### **February 2002**

Karat Website

From February Karat Website started operating in its current form. The Website is consistently updated.



## March 2002

Preparation for the Economic Literacy workshop.

From February onwards we commenced the preparation for the Economic Literacy Workshop planned to take place in Warsaw from 25th to 28th of April 2002, but in March the preparations became main focus of our work. The preparation included identification of presenters and experts, development of the workshop program and recruitment of the participants. Karat received almost 80 applications from women (and one man) from all over the region. Unfortunately we could only accommodate 30 participants. Since the standard of the applications was very high the selection process was very difficult.

## April 2002:

Economic Literacy Workshop

The workshop took place in Konstancin near Warsaw between 25th and 28th of April 2002. It was attended by 34 participants from 14 countries as well as numerous guests such as representatives of the UNIFEM. Including organisers and presenters more than 60 women took part in the event.

The workshop was organized over four days. The first day included presentations by invited guests such as Polish Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Woman and Men Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka and representative of UNIFEM – Zina Mounla, as well as experts addressing the leading themes of the workshop. This included Ewa Ruminska-Zimny, Bettina Musiolek and Silke Steinhilber.

Day two focused on economic literacy training provided by Emily Kawano of WIDE. Day three was dedicated to working groups addressing selected issues relevant to the workshop. The aim of those working groups was to develop proposals of activities which can be undertaken as part of the project or would enhance Karat's economic expertise.

The final day was dedicated to the meeting of the strategic group.

Beside the obvious increase of the economic literacy of the participants other important outcomes of the workshop included the initial planning of writing National Shadow Reports to Regular Progress Reports which are compiled by European Commission, and securing commitment of involvement in the writing process by some of the workshop participants. Another important outcome was a decision regarding establishing of the reference group for the project. Several other project proposals (including reports on the impact of SAPs [Structural Adjustment Programs] on women in our region; and addressing issues related to social security) which were the outcomes of the workshop will require securing funds which would make implementing them possible.

## May 2002:

EU Project discussion egroup.

Karat established a discussion egroup for the project. The objective of the group is to allow for communication between persons actively involved in working on initiatives which were the outcomes of Karat's Economic Literacy Workshop.

The initiatives undertaken by the egroup will include writing of Alternative Reports to Regular Reports prepared annually by the European Commission for all the candidate countries. If your organization would like to participate in this egroup and its activities or you would like more information please contact Anita on [HYPERLINK "mailto:Anita.Seibert@karat.org.pl"](mailto:Anita.Seibert@karat.org.pl) Anita.Seibert@karat.org.pl

## June 2002:

National Project for Poland: 'Europolki' egroup.



One of the important aspects of the Karat's EU project is facilitating establishing of and co-operating with related national projects. First such project has begun in Poland with establishing of an egroup called 'Europolki'. The group's goal is to provide a forum for Polish women to discuss issues related to Poland's EU accession. The participants of the group will develop lobbying strategy and lobbying tools which aiming to ensure that Polish women will take advantage of the process of European accession and integration. Development of lobbying tools will include writing of Polish Alternative Report to the Regular Progress report, as well as writing of appropriate position papers. Karat will be co-operating in carrying out of this project with two organisations Pre-Election Coalition of Women and the Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995. To cover the cost of the project Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995 have applied for funding to the Heinrich Boell Foundation. If you are able to communicate in Polish and would like to join this group please write to Malgorzata Peretiatkowicz at [HYPERLINK "mailto:karat@zigzag.pl"](mailto:karat@zigzag.pl) karat@zigzag.pl

#### EU\_Project egroup- Task 1.

Anita Seibert from Karat Secretariat developed a summary of the first task undertaken by EU\_Project discussion group. The discussion was related to the Opinion on the state of the Enlargement negotiations prepared by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities.

#### July 2002:

##### UNIFEM's visit

Osnat Lubrani UNIFEM's Regional Programme Director for Central and Eastern Europe has visited Karat's Secretariat from 7th to 9th of July. Osnat's visit was extremely valuable for Karat as it gave us an opportunity to talk in detail about various aspects of 'Gender and Economic Justice in European Accession and Integration' project which is sponsored by the UNIFEM. The visit overlapped with Karat's Board meeting which provided an opportunity for Osnat and our Board members to meet.

##### Project Related Initiatives.

During the Economic Literacy Workshop strategic working groups developed proposals for initiatives which are closely related to this project but cannot be funded by the finances provided by the UNIFEM. Those initiatives had to be approved by the Karat's Board. The Board has met in Warsaw from 5th to 7th of July and decided that following project related initiatives should be undertaken: further economic literacy training; Social Security project aiming is to build expertise in social security in the region; Karat conference focusing on women's employment in the context of EU enlargement. The board has directed Karat Secretariat to seek funding for those initiatives.

##### Europolki: Contribution to the Convention

'Europolki' have produced a document titled 'Contribution of Polish Women's NGOs addressed to the NGO Forum of the Convention on the Future of Europe'. The Contribution has been submitted to the Forum and has been published on the Forums website [HYPERLINK "http://www.europa.eu.int/futurum/forum\\_convention/index"](http://www.europa.eu.int/futurum/forum_convention/index) www.europa.eu.int/futurum/forum\_convention/index . The summary of the contribution has to be translated by the Forum to 11 official languages of the EU. Karat distributed it to international persons and bodies including members of the Convention and Youth Convention, EU parliamentarians, Members of European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities. OsKa, one of Polish women's NGOs actively involved in the preparation of the Contribution, distributed this important lobbying tool to all relevant persons and organizations in Poland. If you would like to use the Contribution as a model for your own Contributions to the Forum feel free to do so, as so far there is only few contributions from the NGOs from candidate countries. To receive a copy (English version) of the Contribution, please write to Karat Secretariat [HYPERLINK "mailto:karat@org.pl"](mailto:karat@org.pl) karat@org.pl .



#### EU\_Project egroup: Regional Contribution

The EU Project egroup is working on the development of the Regional Contribution to the Forum of the Convention on the Future of Europe. Writing of this contribution is a part of the process of developing Alternative Reports to the Regular Progress Reports prepared for the candidate countries by the European Commission. The Contribution will be an important lobbying tool used by Karat on the EU arena, as well as on national and other levels.

It will also make the view of women from the region, including women from non candidate countries visible on the EU arena.

#### Cooperation with Heinrich Boll Foundation.

Karat has started a dialogue with Heinrich Boll Foundation regarding partnership in variety of project related activities. So far this resulted in plans of conducting jointly in 2004 of a workshop addressing women and economics.

#### August 2002

##### Karat Conference Announcement

Karat made first initial announcement of plans to conduct Karat conference focusing on Gender and labour market in the context of European Enlargement. The conference is planned for December 2000.

##### Research Project

Commissioning of a Research Project addressing women's employment in the CEE region in the context of the EU enlargement was made in July. The research is to indicate recent trends and changes as far as women's employment is concerned and inform Karat in decision making regarding planned lobbying actions. Karat has entered discussion regarding this project with Centre for Social and Economic Research Foundation (CASE). CASE has provided us with project proposal which is now being revised after receiving Karat's and UNIFEM's comments.

#### Future Planned Activities

Further development of lobbying materials

Conference: Gender, EU enlargement and Labour market in CEE/CIS (December 2002)

Further economic literacy training

Further lobbying of the EU and national structures

New partnerships between Karat, its members and women's NGOs from EU

#### Related Initiatives

Karat is undertaking initiatives related to the project but for which additional funding is being sought (Example: social security project)

#### How to get in touch, contribute, participate:

More information: [HYPERLINK "http://www.karat.org" www.karat.org](http://www.karat.org) or [HYPERLINK "mailto:karat@zigzag.pl" karat@zigzag.pl](mailto:karat@zigzag.pl)

For current project discussion and to receive Karat News join: [HYPERLINK "mailto:Karat\\_CEE-CIS@yahoogroups.com" Karat\\_CEE-CIS@yahoogroups.com](mailto:Karat_CEE-CIS@yahoogroups.com)

Information on EU Project Group write to [HYPERLINK "mailto:anita.seibert@karat.org.pl" anita.seibert@karat.org.pl](mailto:anita.seibert@karat.org.pl)

Information on 'Europolki' [HYPERLINK "mailto:karat@zigzag.pl" karat@zigzag.pl](mailto:karat@zigzag.pl)

Project manager: [HYPERLINK "mailto:Kinga\\_Lohmann@zigzag.pl" Kinga\\_Lohmann@zigzag.pl](mailto:Kinga_Lohmann@zigzag.pl)



Copenhagen, 14-15 September 2002

Conference on Gender Equality in the EU Candidate Countries  
with a particular focus on institutional mechanisms, labour market and economy

## Gender and economic justice in European Accession and Integration

info by **Anita Seibert**, Poland  
Karat secretariat

I am very pleased to be invited, together with the colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe, to the conference on gender equality in EU candidate countries organized by Women's Council in Denmark during the Danish presidency of European Union. I would like to stress that it's very important for women from accession countries to be present here, have an opportunity to speak in their own voices, and enter into discussion with women and officials from EU.

The women from Central and Eastern Europe having a similar legacy from previous system would like, on one hand, to understand the main concerns regarding implementation of the gender equality in EU and, on another hand, to make their perspectives understandable for EU women and officials.

Our great hope associated with joining the EU is related to the introduction of democratic mechanisms which would allow for implementation of gender and economic justice on national levels. At the same time, we are aware that only an active participation in the accession process will teach us how to use the democratic tools in our own countries. Hence, it's essential for us to learn democracy through practice and to have a good model for democratic cooperation on the equal footing with you. Further, we are disappointed with the Convention on the Future of Europe which is not a good model of gender equality. The women (16%) are greatly underrepresented in this body which is shaping the future of Europe. We would like to be involved in influencing the future policies of Europe as women and as citizens of candidate countries. European women from non-accession countries such as Balkans or European countries of former Soviet Union should also enter the discussion on the future of our continent. Avoiding divisions between member and non-member countries is crucial for the common good of the entire Europe.

### Institutional mechanisms

The national machinery is necessary for the promotion of gender awareness and women's human rights. Establishment of gender focused governmental bodies and policies leads to gender equality be perceived as a legitimate issue by the broad society. Governmental body and policy on gender equality increases an understanding and credibility of this issue in the eyes of society.

The existence and correct functioning of the national machinery for the advancement of women are perceived as a very important tool for development of democracy. It is crucial for the voice of all, including groups as women that are underrepresented to be heard. Democracies in the candidate countries remain fragile because of 50 years' break in democratic tradition. The implementation and protection of women's human rights are not fully guaranteed. Weakness of institutional mechanisms, insufficient financial and human resources and lack of gender awareness at all levels of the society are the main obstacles. Existing national machineries are vulnerable to political changes. Changes of government mean lack of continuity, including elimination of national machinery or lowering its status or mandate, and changing its staff. In these cases very often the women's NGOs are the only ones which continue to work for the advancement of women and gender equality, without government support, including financing. It is noteworthy that within a relatively short period of time, women's NGOs in particular have become visible and committed representatives of civil society. Slowly, thanks to their expertise and experience gained at the international arena, and mostly thanks to the EU gender equality requirements in the accession countries, the women's NGOs started to be recognized by governments.



The example of establishing the national machinery in Poland shows that. The new 'power' of women's NGOs in influencing the national policy also illustrates that. The election of the new left-wing government in Poland in autumn 2001 led to some promising developments as far as women's issue is concerned. On the basis of the decision of the Council of Ministers from 27th of October 2001, the position of the Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men have been established. The position is held by Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, who is well known and respected in Polish feminist community. The position of the Plenipotentiary have been placed in the Office of the Prime Minister which suggest a commitment of the newly elected Polish government to setting at least some structures which may lead to the improvement of the position of women in the country. It is important to highlight the fact that the position of Plenipotentiary would not be introduced if it was not for the active lobbying of Polish women's NGO's. Furthermore it was the result of their actions that the position was named Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men, and not as it was originally planned, the Plenipotentiary for the Family and Equal Status of Women and Men. Placing the emphasis on the family would seriously jeopardize the effectiveness of the Plenipotentiary as far as feminist agenda is concerned. Furthermore, originally the Plenipotentiary was to be placed in the Ministry of Employment and Social Policy, and again it was due to the efforts of the women's organizations that it was placed in the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men established the Advisory Board that includes women's NGOs mostly. This is a great opportunity to influence decisions and actions of this office. However, the most important aspect of setting of the Advisory Board and inviting women's NGOs to be its members is the fact that women's NGOs are finally being treated as important partners by the Polish government representatives (or at least by this particular minister), that was quite unusual till now.

As far as other institutional mechanisms that emerged recently in Poland are concerned, the sub-commission on equal status of women and men was established in the lower house of the Polish parliament (Sejm). Further, a draft of legislation on gender equality has been submitted to the upper house (Senate). These are a result of discussions held between the Women's Parliamentary Group and the ruling coalition SLD-UP and the fact that an appropriate law on equality is required by the European Union standards.

## Labour market

The previous communist system in candidate countries was characterized by full employment and high rates of participation in paid employment. However, the high level of participation by women in the labor market did not automatically change the model of the family to one based on partnership. The introduction of the free market economy and its subsequent adjustment to meet the requirements of Copenhagen criteria while accelerating economic growth has had negative impact on the situation of women. Budget cuts deprived women of various forms of social security and lead to significant increase of difficulty in reconciling paid employment with family life. The deterioration of socioeconomic position of women has been presented by decision makers as a necessary sacrifice rendered to the development of market economy. Labour rights have been seen as low priority and not-market oriented. Any reference to social security system has been perceived as retrocommunist - something nobody wants to be accused of. Contrary to the European Union countries, which thanks to their gender mainstreaming policy in the area of employment have made a progress in women rate of participation in the labour market, the rate of CEE women participation has decreased during the transformation process creating a gender gap in employment, unemployment rates and pay. The EU directives concerning gender equality in the labour market were introduced in Polish Labour Code as it is required for joining EU. But the implementation and understanding of gender mainstreaming in the employment policy leaves much to be desired.

Karat's initiative: Using the process of European enlargement to strengthen the economic position of women and gender equality in CEE

Since January 2002, Karat Coalition in partnership with NEWW-Polska, thanks to the support of UNIFEM, advocates for gender and economic justice in Central and Eastern Europe using the process of European Union Accession. We assume that highlighting and disseminating EU gender equality standards in CEE will promote the protection of women's rights.



In most CEE candidate countries there is little civil society information and understanding of the process, little citizen involvement, and no organized women's participation to address women's rights. At the same time, in the European Union, there are fears of the economic impacts of enlargement. Citizens lack understanding of the capabilities and culture of CEE citizens.

### Why this initiative is needed?

While CEE institutions and the private sector are not respecting or protecting women's economic interests, the women of CEE lack sufficient understanding of economic issues or expertise related to gender mainstreaming in economic policy, law reform and implementation to ensure economic justice.

While government institutions lack capacity and resources, there are limited opportunities at the national level to achieve gender equality. Through entry to the EU, CEE women have greater possibilities with EU machineries and standards than with their national one.

### What is special about this initiative?

This initiative has a regional approach and perspective and is addressed to the women from candidate and non-candidate countries.

It raises awareness throughout the region of gender equality, especially in the labour market.

It represents CEE women to the European Union and communicates the needs of CEE women within EU.

It is proactive and foster connection between EU and CEE women's organizations.

### Conclusion

i. The era of 'iron curtain' is over but a division between developed and 'less developed' countries in Europe has remained. It's Karat's belief that the economic situation of the candidate and non-candidate countries should not determinate their political status in Europe. This should be particularly relevant in the current and the future process of European enlargement.

Ensuring of equal status of women and men should continue to be a fundamental goal of future Europe. Further, the equality for all citizens of European continent regardless of their sex, economic status, nationality, country, religion, culture or tradition should be ensured in practice. The vision of many women of Central and Eastern Europe is for all people to be equal in Europe. They do not want to be seen as part of "another Europe", nor as second-class citizens from accession countries, and third-class citizens from non-accession countries. Towards that end, the EU accession process is seen as a window of opportunity to introduce women of Central and Eastern Europe, their society and culture to EU citizens. The weaknesses and frailties of Central and Eastern Europe, particularly the economic ones, are better known to the EU member states than the strengths and potential of our region.

The sincere debate on stereotypes of citizens and particularly women from Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Europe should be introduced in the dialogue on future of Europe to break the division resulted from different background, political system and economic development. The goal of this debate should be fostering a better understanding and cooperation between the EU and other countries of Europe.

ii. The present model of the European Union is perceived by us as too complicated and bureaucratic. The future Europe should ensure that all of its institutions, administrative processes and laws are easy to understand for all the citizens of the members and not-member states alike.

Further, the way of taking decisions should ensure that the women of Europe are truly included in making decisions. It should be also ensured that civil society including women's NGOs has access to institutional mechanism to influencing policy of Brussels.



# W o m e n f r o m   t h e   1 0 c a n d i d a t e   c o u n t r i e s a b o u t   t h e   E U an overview of attitudes and opinions

There are very few informational programs about the European Union which are addressed specifically to women. also when we look at the available data find the general results with some notes concerning the existing differences in opinion and attitudes between men and women. Very often these data are lost between the analyses. That is why NEWW-Polska decided to write the Ngendersensitive reports on attitudes and opinions about the European Union. This report was created mainly on the basis of the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2001 and additional data from our research. We also used some of the results from the opinion polls conducted by 11 Applicant Countries.

Looking closer at the data we can observe many significant differences in opinion and attitudes, expectation and knowledge about the issues connected with the European Union. While sharing the positive image of the EU, an analysis of the expectations from the EU in people's daily life in five years varies significantly from women to men. More men than women declares that they would vote for membership in the referendum (65% of male vs.57%women). Women are more undecided 24%(as opposed to 13% men answered "I dont know")said that they do not know whether they'll vote for or against membership in the referendum. This is the general trend, visible in the report that women more than men would answer with "I don't know, or I have no answer". They are also more pessimistic and expect less from EU than men do.

NEWW-Polska's activities concentrate mainly on raising awareness amongst women of their rights and equal position with men. In the context of the EU integration, we want to prepare women for "new life" in the EU, to make them believe that they will not be perceived as "second class" citizens withing the European Community. Of the data taken into account, the most interesting for us were the issues connected with information about European Union, preferred sources and methods of informing about EU.

According to these data, almost every citizen from the Candidate Countries is informed about EU, which is a very good result. There are no major differences between women and men at this level of respondent's self-perceived knowledge. When we look into the subject, we see that, although the informational campaign does not explain what is Eu itself, there is a lack of information about the implication of the EU accession and enlargement for the citizens. The results show that only one third of the respondents feel very well, or well informed about the enlargement and accession processes. These data significantly varies between women and men - about 10% less women than men feel very well, or well informed about the EU processes. We meet with the same situation when we look at the issue of paying attention to he news about EU. Although they show interest in Eu information, almost 10% less women than men declared their attention to the news.

When we anticipate to inform, educate and thus empower women, extremely important is to identify the most popular information sources to address their need in the most sufficient way. The results indicate that respondents are most likely to use the media sources :TV, radio, daily newspaper. The internet was used by 28% of the respondents, which is a big audience. When we know how to deliever information, it also to be also identified what information is mostly needed. The analyses of the data gives us a divers picture with many common characteristics. Thethe most frequent is information about: the Euro 99 out of 10 ) youth policy, social policy, pre-accession institutions of the EU.

The general trends observed in the research show that women are less informed about the Eu and its implications, and more likely not to have an opinion. It shows the need for targeting women as a priority group in need to obtain greater knowledge about EU. Knowledge will help women from the Candidate Countries to succesfully exist in the new European reality.





by **Petra Hejnova**  
Czech Republic

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When SLOVO 21 a non-governmental organisation from Prague, Czech Republic, decided to establish a Roma women's group, a lot of our friends were sceptical. Especially when we explained that the main goal of the group would be a well-educated, independent, emancipated and self-confident Roma woman.

"What a strange goal! Certainly, you will not be able to gather together Roma women ready to contribute to such issues? On top of everything else, their husbands and parents will never allow them to participate in workshops, seminars, and all other activities you have planned", was the usual comment on our idea.

But we were stubborn and decided to try. Then we thought about a name for the group, manushe (which means human in the Romani language) appeared

as the best solution - not a woman, not a member of a minority - just a human being, that all of us are. Later we were told that there was a mistake in the spelling of manushe and that the translation was not correct.

Thus - we are "Manushe" with the mistake, but with 54 active members, network in seven places of the Czech Republic and over 150 friends - Roma women and prominent human rights and gender activists.

"Manushe" works within the Czech Republic, in particular in Prague, Brno and Ostrava where the Roma communities are large. On the other hand, our wish is to become a part of the international women movement and to actively participate in creation of "the fair World" in which one's human rights do not depend on gender, color, origin and religion.

#### Goals

The Roma women's group "Manushe", established in the fall of 2000, recognizes education as one of the key issues which can empower women in any society. We also believe that the building up of women's self-confidence and self-respect as well as women's solidarity can enable women to fight strongly against any violation of their rights.

The aims we want to fulfill cannot be reached "from above". In contrast, the only possible approach is to start "from below" and to enable Roma women to strongly express their needs and requests and to fight for their realization. They could not do it individually, but only if they are organised and supported by other women from their environment.

"Manushe's" main target group is Roma women, who have graduated from secondary schools. But, indirectly, target groups are also their families and their communities. With knowledge and self-confidence these women could have an important positive influence on their mothers, fathers, relatives and neighbors. Thus, primarily Roma young women would benefit from the "Manushe" activities, but indirectly their environment, as well.





## Activities

Since its establishment Manushe has implemented the following activities:

Project "Let's Break Down Walls" (workshops and Grassroots Advocacy Training sessions)

In general, the project aimed to enable Roma women to obtain the necessary skills for active participation in a society.

In particular, the project aimed to :

1. give information about fundamental human/women's rights, with a specific focus on the right to education, the right to equality before the law and the right to work;
2. inform Roma women about the definition, the strategy and mechanisms of the non-governmental sector;
3. stimulate Roma women to actively participate in the non-governmental sector;
4. provide Roma women with the skills they need to lobby for their interests in the non-governmental sector.

## Free Legal Aid to Roma Women

The Free Legal Aid is based on questionnaires. The questionnaires contain name and address, space for the legal problem and the space for answer. These questionnaires have been distributed to Roma women within the Czech Republic. The fulfilled questionnaires have been collected and passed to the team of legal experts. After expertise, the questionnaires with answers and advises have been sent to recipients by mail.

In the end of the project, the most often questions and answers will be published in a special booklet. These booklets will be distributed through the Roma Women network and enable Roma people to learn more about possibilities of solving their own problems concerning legislature.

Training sessions on increasing of self-confidence and self-respect

In these sessions Roma women have learned how to present themselves in public, how to promote their interests, how to behave during job interviews, about "body language" and its importance, etc.

## International Day of the Roma

The Roma Women's Group Manushe participated in the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the proclamation of April 8-th as the International Day of the Roma. In the framework of the project, the group launched a postcard campaign aimed at making the public aware of this international Romani holiday. The postcards were distributed to citizens in eight towns in the Czech Republic.

## Plans

The Roma Women's Group Manushe has prepared a program with the aim of extending its activities and involving almost all Roma women in particular issues, according to the interests of specific demographic groups among them (educated, illiterate, young, older, employed, unemployed, etc.)

In the realisation of the Manushe's main goal "well educated, self-confident and emancipated Roma women" in 2002 the group plans to implement the project "Education, Self-confidence, Emancipation". The project will be, in some segments, a follow up to the projects we have implemented this year, like the workshops on specific issues closely connected with the position of Roma women in our society, training sessions on increasing self-confidence and self-respect and grassroots advocacy training sessions. This will help us to achieve our goal of enabling the greatest possible number of Roma women to obtain various skills.

## The new activities we plan are:

### Summer School "Roma Women : Tradition and Emancipation"

The summer school aims to underline the position of a Roma woman between her traditional role and her present ambitions to actively participate in all segments of





a society. The summer school will be focused on traditional Roma values and the possibilities for their successful implementation in the process of emancipation.

In the summer school three generations of Roma women will participate : daughters, mothers and grandmothers. Such an interactive approach and exchange of experiences and opinions would express similarities and differences between the position of the “old fashion” generation and the new ones in the best way. In the summer school 30 Roma women from the Czech Republic will participate. The summer school will last one week, and lecturers will be well known activists in gender and Roma issues. During the summer school Roma women who are successful in their professions (politicians, artists, journalists, etc) will visit the participants and speak about their experiences.

#### Handbook “How to enter primary school”

Roma children in large numbers attend “special” primary schools, instead of “normal” schools, not because the Roma children are “less intelligent and more problematic”, but because admission tests are not multicultural, are too abstract and sometimes the Roma children simply could not understand them. The handbook will contain psychological advice on how to prepare a child for school and answers to the most frequent questions from previous admission tests. This handbook will be prepared in close cooperation with Roma advisers in select municipalities. It will be printed in 5,000 copies in the Czech language and distributed to parents via the network of the Roma women’s group Manushe and with the assistance of the Roma advisers

#### Brochure “Position of Roma Women in Society”

The international seminar “Position of Roma Women in Society” will be held in the framework of expert seminars at The World Roma Festival “KHAMORO 2002”. In the seminar Roma women from ten European countries will participate. The brochure will contain discussions and conclusions from the seminar. It will be printed in 3,000 copies in the Czech, Romani and English languages and distributed to state institutions, international organizations and NG’s focused on gender issues and human rights.

#### Research about the educational level of the Roma women in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic there are no data about this issue. Manushe will, through its network, conduct a poll within the country. Expert analysis of the poll will be worked out by the Socio-club - Department of the Ministry of Labour.





# Sleeping conscience

by **Ana Marincic**,  
Bosnia

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**A**fter I read "THE VAGINA MONOLOGUE" of Eve Ensler in a past issue of Fair Play not only was I touched, but I was inspired, motivated, as if my whole being wanted to say something, do something.

Do what?

Write, talk, ask, speak, scream if necessary!

To spread the words of pain that no one listens to or hears them often enough. Here where I live, whether it is the town, country, community, a place like many others all over the world, there are hundreds, a thousand of women who are living their life in fear. Day by day trying to build and find a future for themselves, and at the same time fighting the future by living and hiding the fear that is hurting and eating them from inside. Fear that is breathing at the corner of their mind, hidden somewhere even from their own self. Fear that it could happen again. It could happen to each

**Gordon Carter** "Dream" 2002  
Oil on canvas





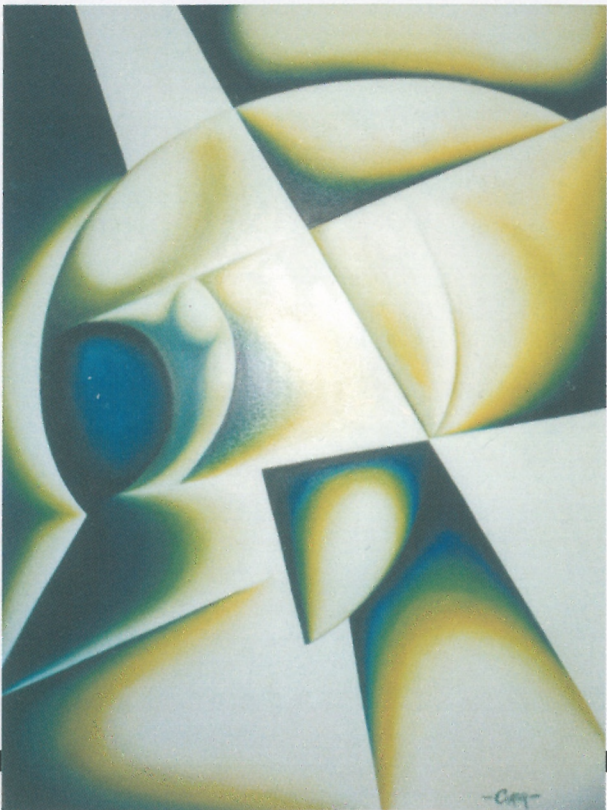


**Gordon Carter** "Freedom" 2002

Oil on canvas

**Gordon Carter** "Dream 2" 2002

Oil on canvas



one of us.

Something was taken away from them, no asking, no warning, in a violent, brutal way. Piece of their life, of their soul, their smile and happiness, piece of their today and tomorrow was taken. Now, only few of them want to speak about it hear about it, wants to remember. Mainly they are wrapped up in a coat of silence and shame. After all, something even worse could happen. They could be brought up to the accusation bench by the system that showed itself so many times insensitive in investigating sexual offence and whose attitude toward the victim is rather o to pass judgment on her character and appearance than consider the physical and psychological trauma that she experienced. At least that is what is happening here , where I live.

Nevertheless in each of these cases we should ask ourselves plainly; don't we share some of the responsibility for something like this going on in our own front yard, happening to our sisters, our mothers, our friends?

Don't we share it through our silence and indifference?

If the culture is an instrument that influences the way of living, feeling, behaving, if it has impact on our thinking and values that we carry and grow inside. Can we really be happy with the way that it is shaping it, the way we are accepting it, and living it?

The mentality and atmosphere that we are building and breathing day by day evokes in a way the exploitation and violence against women in many different ways. Sometimes the face of the exploitation and violence it is not even recognized by the woman herself. It happens in every town, every country, and every community all over the world. It seems I that the human conscience is sleeping upon some subjects, or is it just easier not to see, not to act?

These are just some of the questions, some of the words that should be spoken in the name of each victim who went through this kind of suffering, in the name of each girl that will become a woman tomorrow. And there are many more to be brought up.

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*I want to express our deep sympathy for the victims of September 11-th, whoever they might be, wherever they might be. Parents, brothers, and sisters of all who died, and still do an year later. To express also our deep concern with a world in which, though apparently advanced, the basic right to existence cannot be secured as it seems anywhere.*

*Whatever September 11-th means from the point of view of the politicians, law makers, and statistics, for the human kind it is a major set back, an awakening to the reality that despite the accomplishments of our era, the fast traveling, communication, the means to know each other better than ever before, the fact of so many of us becoming citizens of the world with no longer ruts in a soil or another, but in the sky, we are as incapable as ever to accept the differences between us, to coexist as a diversity.*

*From this perspective it seems less important who could conceive something like September 11-th, than the fact that it can happen. As human beings we should seriously ponder on our incapacity of accepting the diversity of the world. For it is precisely that incapacity in each one of us that results in tragedies such as September 11-th.*

*editor in chief*



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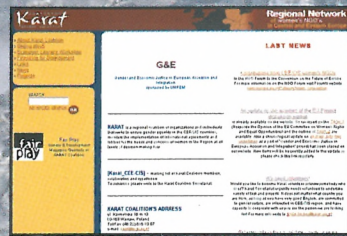
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**Make your voice heard! Send in your articles and art work.**

The mission of quarterly FairPlay is to provide a forum for women in the CEE/CIS countries, to exchange ideas and best practices to improve social, economic, political, and legal conditions for women, their children, their families, and their countries. It also aims at being a voice that carries, and interprets grassroots women's concerns with the national and international policy and decision-makers.

**What kind of submission are we looking for?**

- Interesting, readable articles with compelling titles, and subtitles, which:
    - \* illustrate the plight of women living under conditions, and show how conditions, cultures, laws, and financial situations can affect women's life, and the life of their family.
    - \* show how women overcome certain negative circumstances, individually, or working in group, with decision-makers, through NGOs, and benefited of support from funders, or from changes in laws, or policies.
    - \* present analytical views of a given topic - analyses of situations, tendencies, policies, and possible solutions to women's concerns.
- Submissions should express the views of the writer on the situations. The use of statistical data is also recommended, only make sure to quote your sources. Materials providing regional view will be highly appreciated.

**Please remember :**

- \* Contributions must be written in English;
- \* Articles must have a clearly defined structure, ideas.
- \* Art work should be accompanied by a brief explanatory text, and a few personal information about the artist (not a list of exhibitions)
- \* send in a few words about the writer
- \* attach contact information, including website, email if available.

**We strongly encourage writers to contact our editor-in-chief in advance, to make sure that their submission is suitable.**

**Articles will be edited. FairPlay retains the copyright for original contributions.**  
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