

Regional Report on Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe

Prepared for 43rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

by

KARAT Coalition for Regional Action

Regional Network among Women's NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe:
Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Rep., Hungary, Macedonia,
Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine

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Introduction

This 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.
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. All of the aforementioned facts are reflected by the lack or non-existence of a functioning national machinery embedded in the government structures of the individual countries.

Women's NGOs play an active role in our region; without their pressure there would not be any national machinery or a National Action Plan (NAP) in most of the countries. The NGOs remind governments about the commitments to act on women's affairs they made at the Beijing conference. The KARAT Coalition, which has undertaken responsibility to produce a report on the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women in the 10 above-mentioned countries wishes to play this role on a regional scale.

The KARAT Coalition is a network of women's NGOs from 10 Central and Eastern European countries part of which participated in the NGO forum of the UN Fourth World Conference. The Coalition was established at a conference held in Warsaw on 1 February 1997. Its mission is to promote and ensure de facto gender equality by promoting the Platform for Action in the Central Eastern European Region, and raising this Region visibility at international fora. The KARAT Coalition members take care of monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action as well as National Action Plans.

1. National Machinery for the Implementation of the Platform for Action

1.1. Initial establishment of National Machineries

The first national machinery was implemented just after the Nairobi conference in Poland (1986). The next ones were implemented in Albania in 1992 and Russia in 1993. In the rest of the countries a national machinery was established after the Beijing conference, 1995 (see: table 1).

Table 1. Countries according to establishment and functioning of a national machinery for the advancement of women
Note: In Romania, Russia and Slovakia there is more than one national institution involved in the advancement of women.

1.2. Transformation of National Machineries

Analysis of the former and present names of the national machineries shows that in six countries (Albania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine) women's affairs are linked with the family issues, in three countries (Romania, Russia, Ukraine) with youth or children, and in two (Bulgaria and Hungary) with social and demographic issues. In some countries the word "women" does not appear in the names of the transformed national machineries, which means that they cannot be described as national institutions responsible for the advancement of women, exclusively. It is noteworthy that the names of the national machineries have been changed frequently in Albania, Hungary and Poland.

Albania: The name of the national machinery was changed four times. In 1992, it was the Women and Family sector within the Ministry of Labor, Emigration and Social Affairs. In 1994, this structure was improved to become the Department of Women and Family. Two years later (in 1996) the Department was raised to a higher level - to the rank of State Secretariat for Women and attached to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Women. In March 1997, there was another change and this was a step back to the previous model. Instead of the State Secretariat, the Department of Women and Family was created within the same Ministry of Culture, Youth and Women. In November 1997, the Department moved back to the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Women. On 1 July 1998, the National Committee of Women and Family was set up by an act of the Council of Ministries, although not at the highest possible government level.

Bulgaria: Currently, a national machinery for the advancement of women does not exist. From October 1995 to January 1997 an inter-governmental advisory National Council for Social and Demographic Issues existed. In February 1997, the Interim Government (February-May) disbanded the Council. In December 1997, the current government created a new National Council for Social and Demographic Issues.

Czech Republic: The machinery was set up through a resolution passed by the government on 7 January 1998. It was named the Desk on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and it is a structural unit of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

Hungary: The national machinery was previously called the Department for Policy on Women. It existed within the Ministry of Labor, and started to work towards the end of 1995. In 1996 the name was changed to the Department for Equal Opportunities. Recently, after the change of government following the May 1998 election, it was renamed and reorganized. The new name is the Section for the Representation of Women enclosed within the Ministry for Social and Family Affairs. Most of the former staff remains.

Macedonia: An independent Department for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs was established in January 1997.

Poland: Currently, a national machinery for the advancement of women does not exist. The first step to establish a national machinery was taken in 1986 by a government decision after the Nairobi conference, when the position of Government Plenipotentiary for Women was created. It remained in such until 1991 (though from 1989 to 1991 there was no leadership), when its name was changed to Plenipotentiary for Women and Family, by government decision. In 1995, it was renamed once again to the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women and it continued to function up to October 1997, when it was closed down by the new right-wing government. In its place the Plenipotentiary for the Family was established in November 1997.

Romania: There are several bodies that are responsible for the advancement of women presently in Romania. The Department for the Advancement of Women and Family Policy, the title of which was changed in 1998 to the Department for the Advancement and Assurance of Women's Rights and Family Policy, by government decision. It is located within the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. There is also the Department for Child, Women and Family Protection within the Ombudsman institution. At the parliamentary level there is a Sub-commission for Equal Opportunities, set up by a decision of parliament, within the Parliamentarian Commission for European Integration.

Russia: The Department for Women, Family and Demography within the Ministry of Labor and Social Development was established. There is also the Commission for Women, Family and Demography at the presidential administration level and the Committee for Women, Family and Youth at the parliamentary level.

Slovakia: The Government Committee for Women and Family was established in 1991, but lasted only two years. Currently, there are two institutions which could be counted as national machinery: the Coordination Committee for Women's Issues, established on 13 February 1996 by the Slovak Government, and the National Gender Center for Equality, set up in 1997 by agreement between the government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The first is located at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, and the second, with NGO status, is formally independent, with a budget based on a two-year project duration (to 1999). A special department for women's issues within the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family is presently under construction.

Ukraine: The Ministry of Family and Youth Affairs (set up by Presidential Decree) is theoretically responsible for the advancement of women, but its Gender Council (created in 1998) is not empowered to formulate or to implement government policy relating to equal gender status.

1.3. Mandates of the Existing National Machineries

Albania. The National Committee of Women and Family is responsible for the implementation of government policy for women and women's issues as well as the implementation and evaluation of government programs for women and families. Another responsibility of the Committee is to coordinate programs for the promotion of equality between women at local and central administrative levels, and to provide support as well as to coordinate activities of women's NGOs. Initiating proposals for new legislation, or amendments to existing laws on children and women's rights to bring them into line with international standards, is also the responsibility of the Committee.

Bulgaria. The previous National Council for Social and Demographic Issues had an unclear mandate to advise the government on minority and gender issues and to serve as a mechanism for dialogue between the government and non-governmental organizations. The Council was presided over by the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of social policy. The institution - under the same name - does not have a mandate to follow up on gender issues, but only on minority issues. However, the government reported to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in January 1998, that this Council is currently working on the implementation of the CEDAW convention, the Beijing Platform for Action and the NAP.

Czech Republic. The Desk on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, in accordance with a governmental resolution, is committed to emphasize equal gender status and to support women candidates for decision-making posts in governmental bodies. It has also established an Inter-ministerial Commission in order to implement the Beijing conference commitments, however the Commission consists of personnel clerks who have never been in contact with

the international agenda of the UN, or any other international agenda relating to human rights. As yet, the work of the Commission has not yielded any concrete results.

Hungary. The Department for Equal Opportunities has been implementing the projects and activities of the Government Decree known as National Action Plan (Women's rights, Implementation of women's equal opportunities, Improvement of women's social equality, Elaboration of recommendations regarding gender education in public schools, Violence against women, Creation of a database and information system for women and on women); the new Section for the Representation of Women will be working on this base too.

Macedonia. No information available.

Poland. Although the mandate of the transformed national machinery does not include women's issues, it binds the government to continue the implementation of the National Action Plan. In fact the Plenipotentiary for Family concentrates on family and children's problems only; the social role of women is reduced to fulfilling maternal and family duties.

Romania. The Department for the Advancement and Assurance of Women's Rights and Family Policy is responsible for the integration of equal opportunities for women and men in social policies; to harmonize national legislation upon the recommendation of the European Union; to promote collaboration and dialogue with civil-society. It also must coordinate national strategies for the advancement of equal opportunities for women and men and to ensure that women's rights are respected. The Sub-Commission for Equal Opportunities disseminates recommendations, regulations, and other international standards related to gender issues and facilitates the implementation of equal opportunities. The Department for the Child, Women, and Family Protection within the Ombudsman institution executes the rights of the aforementioned groups.

Slovakia. The Coordination Committee on Women's Issues is officially "an advisory coordinating body to the Government on issues concerning women". The Gender Center for Equality has a mandate limited by NGO status.

Ukraine. The Gender Council which was created within the Ministry of Family and Youth Affairs does not have a clear mandate for implementing government policy relating to empowering of women.

In conclusion, it is evident that the mandate of the national machineries for the advancement of women is either unclear, undefined or powerless in a majority of the countries.

1.4. Structure of National Machineries

1.4.1. Location

In the countries where the national machineries exist, there are usually located within a ministry of labor and social affairs (Albania, Czech Rep., Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine).

1.4.2. Legal Basis

In none of the countries was the machinery backed up by a separate act of parliament, making it vulnerable to political decisions of frequently changing governments. The most often it was set up by the order of the Council of Ministers: in Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Rep., Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia. In Russia and Ukraine it was set up by Presidential Decree.

1.4.3. Authorities

In most of the countries where a national machinery exists, it does not have the authority or tasks to formulate governmental policy relating to gender status (Czech Rep., Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine). In some countries the national machinery has the authority to initiate legislative actions, as is the case in Albania, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, and Slovakia with limited success. The national machinery functions as an opinion maker on governmental policy at national and local levels in Albania, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Ukraine (with limited effectiveness). Almost all of the machineries (except in the Czech Rep. and Russia) have the authority to conduct direct international cooperation.

1.4.4. Functioning and Human Resources

The majority of the countries have not clearly defined the structure of the national machineries, which results in their malfunctioning, lack of their stability and de facto authority. Human resources are understaffed, usually without perspective of further training, mostly not gender sensitive and vulnerable to political changes. Due to these facts, gender mainstreaming is not introduced at all and collaboration with NGO sector is not developed.

1.4.5. Financial Means

Only in Albania, Hungary, and Romania the national machinery has a separate budget. However, the budget is limited to personnel and administrative costs, with the exception of Hungary, where the national machinery gives grants to NGOs.

1.4.6. Accountability and Reporting

Some of the existing national machineries have the obligation to report on their activities to their governments or prime ministers at least once a year: Albania, Macedonia, Romania. In case of: Czech Rep., Hungary, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine frequency of reporting has not been stated. In all countries, governments de facto are not accountable to NGOs.

1.4.7. Local Counterparts

The national machineries do not generally have local counterparts (except Romania and Ukraine).

Conclusions

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 affairs 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. There is more than one national institution that is involved in advancement of women in Romania, Russia and Slovakia. 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:

- *Create guarantees for the continuity and sustainability of national machineries on a legal basis in the form of an "Equality Act".
- *Treat the national machinery for the advancement of women independently.
- *Locate the national machinery at highest possible level.
- *Define clearly the mandate and accountability of the national machinery.
- *Empower the national machinery to exert direct influence on government policy, initiate legislation, and take control of its own budget and executive functions.
- *Establish a communication channel between national machineries and NGOs on a regular basis.
- *Ensure accountability of national machineries to NGOs, including regular reporting of their activities.

2. National Programs and New Legislation since the Beijing conference

2.1. National Action Plan (NAP)

In the majority of the countries a National Action Plan has been formulated, based on the Beijing Platform for Action. As yet, such a document has not been formulated in Czech Republic and Macedonia.

2.1.1. NGOs role in the Consultation of NAP

Women's NGOs participated at some point of the process of formulating the NAP in Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine. In Bulgaria, it was the very first consultation process with NGOs. In Poland, the process of formulating the NAP was a spectacular example of partnership and effective cooperation between NGOs and the government.

2.1.2. Priority Areas

A large number of specific areas of concern are included in the National Action Plans in Albania, Bulgaria, Poland and Romania. In Ukraine no priority areas have been identified. In The Czech Rep. and Macedonia there are no National Action Plan (see table 2).

Table 2. Priority areas included into the National Action Plans

2.1.3. Resources for the Implementation of NAP

The resources for the implementation of the NAPs have been allocated by the governments of Albania, Hungary and Ukraine. Such steps have not been taken in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

2.2. Other Programs and Projects

Only in some countries has the government implemented additional programs or projects for advancement of women (Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovakia).

Bulgaria

1. UNDP Business Incubator for women - a small scale pilot project in the Rhodopes region of Devin - in cooperation with the National Employment Agency.
2. Family Planning Project implemented by the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the Bulgarian Association of Family Planning and Sexual Health.

Poland

1. The program "Against Violence - Equal Chances" implemented by Plenipotentiary for Family and Women in cooperation with UNDP (1996-97) and suspended in November 1997.
2. The program of small grants for NGOs implemented by the plenipotentiary (1996-97).
3. A training for women's NGOs for women running for parliamentary and local elections (1996).

Romania

1. Counseling Pilot Center for Women (1998).
2. Training and re-training courses for women organized by the County Offices for Labor Force and Unemployment Issues.

Slovakia

1. "Slovak Women on the Move" - a media project released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with UNDP and the Canada Fund, which aims to present the status of women, improve gender awareness and advance women's contributions to the development of the country.

2.3. New Legislation

*** equal gender status mechanism**

Bulgaria: the mandate of the national machinery (in force since December 1997) does not include gender equality issues.

Poland: the office of the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women was replaced by the Plenipotentiary for Family the mandate of which no longer includes gender equality and women issues (1997).

Czech Republic, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine: national machineries for the advancement of women have been established.

*** health**

Hungary: The Constitutional court ruled that the Law on the Protection of Foetal Life (Abortion Law) has to be modified by 2000, in order to formulate clearer measures by which the rights of the foetus are protected.

Poland:

- the subject of "sex education" was withdrawn from schools (1999),
- legal provision of abortion for social reasons were withdrawn (December 1997),
- family planning services are not included in the package of free health care services available to women,
- five of the eight contraceptives designated for reimbursement were dropped (1998).

*** violence against women**

Albania: additional amendments concerning violence in prostitution and sexual relations have been made.

Bulgaria: amendments concerning trafficking of human beings, sexual exploitation of children and women in the Penalty Code have been made.

Czech Republic: Laws concerning on financial support for victims of violent crimes obligates investigative bodies to inform victims about the possible financial support in case of bodily injury, or even death.

Hungary:

- The Criminal Code has been modified to include marital rape.

- A new regulation on prostitution inside of "organized criminality" law has been passed. This is a step towards the legalization and exploitation of prostitution (red-lamp districts where prostitution is allowed, establishing registers of prostitutes, etc.). It is contrary to the New York convention.

Romania: A draft law on legalization of prostitution, which has yet to be passed.

Ukraine: The Criminal Code has been modified to include illegal actions for adoption of children and trafficking in people.

*** employment**

Czech Republic: A new Earnings Act, which directly expressed the rule of coincident pay for the coincident job results, has been passed.

Hungary: A test-case ruling stated that employers have no right to advertise job openings as suitable for men only was passed in 1998.

Poland: Rules on the equal rights and equal treatment of men and women, as well as the inadmissibility of gender discrimination at work were introduced into the Labor Code in 1996. However, no procedure on how to execute this provision was included.

Romania: A law on parental leave was passed in 1998. It promotes the equal sharing of family responsibility by providing 5 days paid leave for the father when a child is born and an additional 10 of leave days for fathers who attended courses for child rearing. Draft laws await legislation on regarding the obligation to disregard gender and marital status in job applications; the other regarding sanctions against sexual harassment.

2.4. Legal Guarantees for Equal Gender Status

Constitutions. There are de jure guarantees for gender equality in the Constitutions of all these countries. According to the Constitutions, all citizens are equal regardless of social status, religion, ethnic origin, gender, etc. In some Constitutions it is additionally stated that women and men have equal opportunities in public, political and cultural activities, education and vocational training, and that they receive equal pay for work of equal value (Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine). In the Bulgarian Constitution there is no legal guarantee for equal pay for equal value of work; women are mentioned only in connection with marriage, and "mothers" are subject of special protection. In the Hungarian constitution it is stated that positive discrimination is allowed in the case of groups discriminated against in the past, which may include women, depending on the interpretation.

Law on equality. In none of these countries is there any special legislation on equal gender status. In Poland a draft of such a bill was prepared but has received a negative reaction from the Polish government. In Romania, a similar act is a subject for parliamentary procedures.

Labor and Family Codes. In Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Russia and Ukraine, the Labor and Family Codes include the guarantees for equal treatment of women and men. In Hungary in the Labor law there are no explicit provisions that provide for equal wages for equal work, but the Labor Code prohibits gender discrimination in work.

It is important to state that although the guarantees for equal rights have been declared, no procedures for implementing those rights are provided. Romania is the only country where an institutional guarantee of equality in the form of an ombudsman exists.

Conclusions

1. Although the National Action Plan was formulated in nearly all of the countries, in the majority of them the resources allocated for implementation were either insufficient or non-existent.
2. Several positive examples of cooperation between NGOs and governments during the formulation of National Action Plans have been observed.
3. Although most countries provide several legal regulation concerning gender equality, in nearly all cases no procedures for implementing these laws and no complaint mechanisms have been developed.
4. No special legislation on equal gender status has been introduced in any of these countries.

Recommendations:

- * Introduce gender equality laws.
- * Review legislation from the perspective of women's human rights (i.e reproductive rights in Poland).
- * Provide financial means for the implementation of National Action Plans and other programs for the advancement of women.

3. Gender-Disaggregated Data and Research on the Situation of Women

3.1. Statistical Data and Research

The gender-disaggregated data is only partially or exceptionally presented in the statistical yearbooks in all of the countries. Governments do not support directly (Albania, Bulgaria) or indirectly some kind of women's research and surveys (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia and Slovakia).

3.2. Gender Studies

Gender Studies courses are mostly the result of personal initiatives. In Romania an MA degree in Gender Studies was initiated in October 1998 at the National School of Political and Administrative Sciences. In Russia the government supports the Gender Studies Laboratory of the Russian Academy of Science and the Laboratory of the Development of Gender Studies at the pedagogical division of Moscow State University. Some courses on women's or gender studies are taught at several State Universities in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

3.3. Opinion Polls on Women or Gender Equal Status

In only a few of these countries do state institutions carry out public opinion polls concerning women's issues (Czech Republic and Poland). More often such polls are conducted by independent agencies, NGOs or independent researchers with the support of the European Union, UNDP, ILO or other western institutions (Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, Russia, Slovakia). Only in Slovakia the opinion polls ask women whether and how their lives had improved since the Beijing conference.

3.4. Media

The media does not pick up the issues of equal gender status (Albania, Czech Republic, Russia), or does so rarely and mostly thanks to NGOs' efforts. Often women's issues appear in sensational context, for example in Hungary where the media reports if there is a blatant case of discrimination or violence or an extraordinary event connected with women's reproduction (e.g. underage pregnancies, abortion debates etc.). Media advertisements usually show the stereotyped image of women as good mothers and housewives.

3.5. Dissemination of Statistical Data and Research by Governments

Statistical data and research on the situation of women are not being disseminated by governmental institutions in most of the countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia). Only in Ukraine do NGOs ensure that the government disseminates data and research through conferences and publications.

Conclusion

Usually governmental programs do not include research strategies regarding the situation of women in all spheres of social life.

Recommendations

- * Collect, compile, analyze and present gender-disaggregated data on a regular basis.
- * Use gender-sensitive data in the formulation of policy and the implementation of programs and projects
- * Support and develop curricula on Gender Studies for universities.

4. Evaluation of the Functioning of the National Mechanisms in the Opinion of NGOs

4.1. Impact of Political Changes

Political changes have had a visible impact on the sustainability of the national machinery for the advancement of women, observance of women's rights, as well as the implementation of programs on women (in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia). For example, the frequent changes of government in Bulgaria (seven governments in 8th years period of transition) have caused many difficulties for NGOs - it is hard to identify the representatives responsible for implementation of strategies and programs on women. In Poland the lack of continuity in policy making on women's affairs is obvious; the national machinery has been canceled, the commitments of the previous government are not being respected, and access to information and funding is being hindered for all women's organizations other than Catholic ones. The political changes have also strongly affected women's rights. For example, the right to abortion and contraception have been seriously limited in Poland. In Slovakia, the female chairperson of the coordination Committee for Women's Issues holding the position of Minister of Labor, Social Affairs and Family left the post and her successor is a man. The new minister appointed a woman State Secretary to the position of Chairperson (which was against the statute) and changed the mandate of the Committee.

4.2. Competence of the Government and Local Officials

In the opinion of the representatives of NGOs, officials at all levels of governmental structures are not introduced to gender mainstreaming and those responsible for the implementation of the programs on equal gender status are not well prepared, or insufficiently trained, for their task. Government officials are not considered gender sensitive. Here are some examples: "We had a curious situation with officials, who told us that our report was very interesting for them because they did not think about some of proposed questions at all" (Ukraine). "Here you wait endlessly for your letters to be answered. In the Plenipotentiary office, nobody knows anything. The present Plenipotentiary is interested only in families with many children and seems not to notice any issues related to gender equal status" (Poland).

4.3. Observance of International Commitments

There is no continuity in the implementation of the Platform for Action or for monitoring steps taken towards conformity with international documents and the resulting governmental obligations. Real implementation of the Platform for Action is not visible. For example, in Poland only NGOs are concerned about implementation of this document; Women's Association for Gender Equal Status - Beijing 1995 has sent 88 questionnaires to the 39 central officers and institutions, and 49 voivodship offices (the local state administration organs in Poland) asking for information on implementation of the National Action Plan. Association received only 5 questionnaires from central institutions and none from voivodships. This reaction was a direct result of written order of the present Plenipotentiary for Family ("it is not sensible to give any information to the Women's Association for Equal Gender Status for the questions asked in the questionnaire").

4.4. Government Budgets for Women's Programs

After the Beijing conference financial resources allocated from national budgets for women's programs have been increased only in Hungary (by 30%), in Slovakia and Ukraine. In the other countries information on special budgets for women's programs is not available.

4.5. Cooperation Between the National Machinery and NGOs

In general, sustainable communication and cooperation between national machineries and NGOs is not developed on regular basis. However, there are some positive examples:

In Bulgaria, an inter-ministerial working group headed by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs succeed in developing a National Action Plan after consultations with women's NGOs, which was then adopted by the Government in October 1996.

In Hungary, a so called "Civil Forum" initiated by the Department for Equal Opportunities will cooperate with the Section for the Representation of Women. The government intends to set up a number of Councils to prepare decisions concerning various disadvantaged groups such as handicapped, women, etc. The one dealing with women's issues will be of the deputy state-secretaries of the competent ministries, the representatives of women's NGOs and experts. Its tasks will be to express an opinion on provisions of law, government action plans and to initiate new programmes related to women's equal opportunities. It seems that in the future NGOs opinions and needs will play an important role in the formulation of the Section's policy. The Section wants also create local Committees of NGOs to cooperate with them in the countryside to implement gender policies.

In Poland, the cooperation forum of NGOs and the Plenipotentiary was established upon the initiative of the Plenipotentiary of Family and Women (May 1996-October 1997). The Forum was an institutional form of cooperation and held a monthly meeting. It used to be consultative, advisory and opinion-making body that included 38 NGOs. The work on National Action Plan was the most spectacular cooperation within the Forum.

In Romania, despite the growing involvement of women's NGOs in social life, the national machinery seems to favor the cooperation with human rights NGOs. The Pilot Center for Assistance and Protection of Women - Victims of Domestic Violence was established in 1997 under the direct coordination of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. Two important NGOs cooperate in the program: the Romanian Independent Society for Human Rights and the League for Human Rights Defense. However, the cooperation agreement has been concluded between national machinery and some women's organizations established within the main Romanian trade union confederation.

In Slovakia, representatives of NGOs are part of the national machinery: members of the Coordination Committee for Women's Issues, together with the representatives of research community, trade unions, churches and other relevant organizations.

4.6. Cooperation between the National Machinery and Parliament

Cooperation between the national machineries and parliaments of these countries has not been experienced yet. There exists a Women's Commission within the Parliamentary Health Commission in Slovakia, though its work does not have the impact on general decisions and a Parliamentary Sub-Commission for Equal Opportunities within the Parliamentary Commission for European Integration in Romania.

4.7. Cooperation between Parliament and NGOs

No regular cooperation between parliament and NGOs was observed in Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia or Ukraine. Polish NGOs cooperate with the Parliamentary Group of Women within the cooperation Forum which was established in early 1998. The Romanian Sub-Commission for Equal Opportunities cooperates occasionally with women's NGOs in seminars, debates on legislation and training activities. Women's NGOs were also consulted by the Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights Promotion (chaired by a woman senator) on the issue of legal abortion. In Russia, the Moscow Center for Gender Studies (Gender Expertise Project) collaborates with the Committee on Women, Family and Youth of Duma on equal gender opportunity. In Slovakia, such cooperation has been established within the frame of political parties.

4.8. Mainstreaming Gender Concerns by Governments

In the opinion of the representatives of women's NGOs, these governments do not mainstream gender concerns in their policy and decision-making processes (in Russia some initial steps have been taken). In Poland, representatives of women's NGOs perceive the present government's approach to women's issues as conservative and traditional, which is not in conformity with the Beijing commitments.

4.9. Implementation of the National Action Plan

Although the National Action Plans were officially adopted by these governments, in Bulgaria nothing has been done at all, in Albania only a tiny amount of work has been accomplished, in Slovakia NAP has been insufficiently implemented, in Hungary and Russia only partially. In Poland, according to the Women's Association for Gender Equal Status research, under the present government the NAP is not being implemented at all by the vast majority of central bodies. Implementation has been carried out only by few of them and in a very limited scope, and at the local level there are not personnel responsible for the implementation of the NAP. In Romania, in the Governing Program and Strategy of the government, elected in November 1996, there is no mention of a strategy or of measures for promoting equal opportunities. In the background of the general political and economic instability of the country, the NAP and its provisions are still desirable. However, no consistent change has been achieved yet in women's status in Romania. In Ukraine, the NAP is implemented regularly. National Action Plans were not based on funds allocated for their implementation.

Conclusions

1. National mechanisms for the advancement of women are not functioning properly, mainly due to a lack of sustainability, authority and clearly defined mandates, competence and gender sensitivity of governmental and local officials.
2. International commitments taken by governments at the Beijing conference are not being observed. Hardly any steps have been taken towards implementation of the Platform for Action.
3. National Action Plans are implemented on a very limited basis.
4. Although women's NGOs are strongly interested in implementing the National Action Plans, no effective mechanisms of cooperation between the national machinery and NGOs have been developed.
5. The policy of the present decision makers is not focused on women's issues or the promotion of equal opportunities in society. No steps have been taken in mainstreaming gender issues.
6. Women's NGOs do not have access to information about resources and programs.

Final recommendations

- Provide guarantees for the existence, sustainability, mandate and authority of the national machineries for the advancement of women.
- Define clearly the exact structure, competence, tasks and authority of the national machineries.
- 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.
- Implement the NAP and allocate adequate resources for its implementation.
- Work out the NAP in the countries where it doesn't yet exist.
- Introduce and implement gender equal status law.
- Revise the existing legal regulations from a gender perspective and develop legal practices for the implementation of necessary changes.
- Collect, analyze and present gender disaggregated data on regular basis and use them in policy and decision-making processes.
- Institute gender mainstreaming in government policies.

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