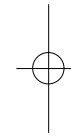
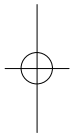

**CENTERS FOR
PLURALISM –
NETWORKING FOR
DEMOCRACY:
10 YEARS**



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Cover Photo: *Participants at the Bratislava Meeting of the Centers for Pluralism came across the following graffiti walking through the Old Town: "A Democratic Society is Political Pluralism".*

Credit: IDEE

Introduction

Out of the Rubble: Building Free Societies Ten Years of the Centers for Pluralism

by Eric Chenoweth and Irena Lasota

Eric Chenoweth and Irena Lasota are co-founders and co-directors of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

The Centers for Pluralism formally began in 1992 as a project of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe. Its first meeting, involving twenty-five people from eight countries, was held in March 1993 in Warsaw, Poland. The idea for organizing such a network was first presented by Irena Lasota at an informal meeting with Carl Gershman, President of the National Endowment for Democracy. The idea was met with enthusiastic support and the NED financed the program from its beginnings until the spring of 2003.

The origins of the CfP are earlier, however, developed out of our experience supporting anticommunists and democrats, first as the Committee in Support of Solidarity (established at the end of 1981) and then as the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (created in 1985). We had in that time acquired many friends and contacts in East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union. Since 1988, we had also published *Uncaptive Minds*, a journal of information and opinion on Eastern Europe and a forum for a wide-range of oppositionists and, later, newly victorious democrats to express themselves. In this time, traveling among Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the western states of the post-Soviet empire, we were meeting people with similar experiences opposing communism, similar pro-democratic views, similar needs, but often with different and original ideas for how to solve or approach problems. In each country, we tried to put them in touch with each other individually, knowing that each contact would be beneficial. But after a few years we started to explore with a number of IDEE's colleagues in the region the idea of establishing a network of people and non-governmental organizations in East-Central Europe committed to bringing a profound transformation from communism to their countries, one based on the dynamism of pro-democratic movements that emerged in 1989 and composed of people who were neither conformists nor neo-communists.

Already, so quickly after the 1989 revolutions, most international donors were frowning upon the idea of an overtly political network of pro-democratic civic organizations. The most important trend at the time was to work with whatever existed, whether it was pro-democratic, post-communist, or communist. Indeed, Western institutions were desperate to find technical

competence in spending the vast amounts of money being bestowed on the region and they believed often that this competence was best found in the old structures or the pseudo-new structures of the communist machinery that had turned out tens of thousands of supposedly professional apparatchiks. It took too long, in the view of many institutions, to train and educate a new generation of professionals and community leaders. But, whatever their inexperience, it was the new generation of activists who were in fact committed to democratic ideas and not Western money. Such individuals, working at the crossroads between political parties and NGOs, between politics and civic activities, not only existed but also were desperate for support.

The idea of the Centers for Pluralism was simple: to identify key pro-democracy non-governmental organizations in each post-communist country that would serve as vehicles for helping develop other civic organizations and networks within their own countries as well as promote contacts and working relationships with counterparts in other countries. In this way, IDEE hoped that the Centers for Pluralism could strengthen the foundation of civil society as well as the networks of democrats for the region. The educational premise was that it is easier to learn from each other and together; the political premise was that under authoritarian regimes and in times of transition to democracy, it is necessary to fill the social vacuum with authentic, honest civic organizations that can create the necessary environment for liberal democratic politics to emerge and function.



IDEE co-directors Irena Lasota and Eric Chenoweth, far right and second from left, meeting in Bulgaria with J. Dimi Panitza, second from right, president of the Free and Democratic Bulgaria Foundation, and Mihail Berov, far left, director of the first Center for Pluralism.
Credit: IDEE

Today, the term civil society (or Third Sector, as it is called in Europe) has become so commonplace and all embracing that it is hard now to understand its meaning and importance. It is hard, in fact, to remember that the term regained its importance and use in countries that emerged from communist dictatorship, where the free functioning of society had been almost totally repressed and nearly forgotten after so many generations. The idea of civil society was revived by intellectuals and workers seeking alternatives to communist social organization in the form of independent human rights groups, political organizations, trade unions, and other institutions such as scouting, educational societies, or clubs built around hobbies. In the minds of East European intellectuals, the political meaning of civil society was clear: it was the anti-state, the place where members of society, if they decided to

risk the repressive consequences, could find some measure of freedom to think, speak, write, and act independently as fully developed individuals. It meant individuals choosing to reject privilege based on membership in the Communist Party and one's adherence to an anti-human state. It meant individuals sacrificing their careers and educations for the sake of principles and adherence to human rights.

Soon after the beginning of communism's collapse two different interpretations of the meaning of civil society clashed and nowhere was this clash more evident than in the distribution of large amounts of foreign aid for "building of civil society." On the one hand there were the same foreign



Irena Lasota speaking with Mustafa Djemilev, chairman of the Crimean Tatar Meclis, at the meeting of the national Kurultai in 1996. The CIP program in Crimea helped a model democratic community to rebuild civic structures after returning from 50 years of deportation.
Credit: IDEE

social engineers who believed that with a few million dollars they could create a set of non-political, non-partisan, "professional," and technically proficient non-governmental organizations; on the other hand, there were each country's indigenous organizations, driven by passions and politics deriving from the experiences of previous decades, ready to learn through trial and error, and neither pliant nor obedient toward foreign donors. Quite happily, we worked with this more impoverished but for us more interesting part of the so-called Third Sector.

Although the period of 1989 to 1991 seemed like an uninterrupted period of freedom emerging from dictatorship, the "revolutions" at this time were not uniform in bringing freedom to the countries of Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. In some countries the years 1989-90 marked the end of communism, while in others it was the painful beginning of the end – an end that is not over yet. The twenty-eight independent countries that emerged out of the communist world had different political, social, cultural, historic, and other pasts and circumstances. While some countries quickly adopted the basic institutions of democracy (new constitutions, elections, free media, etc.), in many countries, former communist leaders used their positions to establish new dictatorships by using the old state machinery of repression. Often, they used nationalist and ethnic conflict as a new ideological foundation for their rule. In other countries, postcommunist elites, trained not in the ideas of civil society but in the hard rules of communist hierarchy, emerged as the most important political force in their countries, often delaying or dis-

torting economic, political, and social reforms but still able to convince Western governments and funders of their competence.

In such a situation, the emerging civil societies in these countries found themselves without the same networks as the communist elites; only the informal networks built fighting communist repression and promoting democratic principles. IDEE had traditionally worked with dissidents, independent journalists, independent trade unionists, teachers, human rights activists, and students – those who were at the forefront of the democratic changes. The Centers for Pluralism program set out to help strengthen those democratic circles and bring them together in an overall regional network of civic organizations and groups committed openly to pro-democratic goals and organizing a broad range of civic and political activities aimed at building their country's civil society following decades of communist rule.

Why Pluralism?

Pluralism as the network's central concept came to mind as a natural antidote to communism. Under communism there was one party, one leader, one friend, one enemy, but also one past, one history, one society, one future. In the first years after the collapse of communism too many people looked to replace one dictatorial system with another, or simply assumed that there is only one, right way. Our friends gathered in the Network of Centers of Pluralism were people with open minds. Not adhering to any dogma, sometimes they might define themselves as "liberal conservatives," sometimes as "conservative social democrats." Most often, they were escaping definitions. They were looking for different ways and different approaches to bringing about genuine democracy and building a free society on the rubble of communism.

Thus, by pluralism, we meant bringing together differences within the community of democrats. This meant political differences, social differences, linguistic differences, regional differences, national and ethnic differences, religious differences, and geographical differences. The Centers for Pluralism was in fact the only network that spanned all the regions of the former communist (or socialist) world, bringing together democrats from all parts of Eastern Europe (southeastern and northeastern) with all parts of the former Soviet Union, and bridging the gap between individuals coming from different and distinct socialist systems (Yugoslav and Soviet).

The word pluralism thus functions also in the sense of diversity, embracing people from many countries, many regions, diverse cultures, and different religions. In today's post-9/11 world, it is significant to note the span of the Centers for Pluralism across a wide array of religions – Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism – as well as individual denominations. Visiting a church in Lviv, participants counted their denominations: thirteen (not including agnosticism or atheism). At each meeting of the Centers for Pluralism, there is always a display of the host country's cul-

ture; in nearly all cases it means a display of the many cultures and ethnic groups within the host country. (In Tirgu Mures, it meant seven groups performing their culture's distinct dances.)

More importantly perhaps, pluralism means different political viewpoints on some of the key issues affecting the region (privatization, the pace of democratization, the new social stratification). There have been heated discussions about the roots of nationalism and whether it can be a positive foundation for representative statehood or whether it is a destructive political force (or, as most have agreed, both); about the need for decommunization and the need for compromise on the past; or about whether there was any compromise on human rights.

Pluralism means a range of strongly held ideological views but also a willingness to face issues with the assumption that there may be different answers to social and political problems. The network is open to different ideas, but within the framework of democracy, freedom, and respect for human rights. Within this framework there is debate about what is democracy, the limits of freedom, the paradoxes of human rights, and different approaches to building civil society.

What Are the Centers for Pluralism?

The first Centers for Pluralism began networking in 1992-93 in six countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia). In the next three years, the program quickly expanded to Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Crimea, Croatia, Estonia, Russia, and Yugoslavia (Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo). The CfP Network began to work next in all three countries of the South Caucasus, in Chechnya, and in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and other countries of Central Asia. Today, there are twenty-four Centers for Pluralism and twenty-five Centers for Pluralism Partners in twenty-three countries and regions (see Annex I).

What are the Centers for Pluralism? In most cases, they are organizations that have broad civic and educational programs and are committed to networking within and across borders as a means of strengthening civil society. In fact, as Miljenko Dereta of Civic Initiatives in Serbia has noted, "the Centers for Pluralism are often the most important and significant NGOs in their countries." His own organization, for example, played a central role in fostering and mobilizing civil society and citizen participation in the democratic movement that brought an end to the Milosevic dictatorship. Today, Civic Initiatives is among the most important NGOs in Serbia promoting civic life and civic education. Other Centers for Pluralism are as well known for their work in their own countries: the Armenian National Committee of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, the D. Aliyeva Association for the Protection of Women's Rights and the Inam Center for Pluralism in Azerbaijan, Supolnasc in Belarus, the Forum of Tuzla Citizens in Bosnia, the Jaan

Tõnisson Institute in Estonia, the Center for Development and Cooperation in Georgia, Kosova Action for Civic Initiatives, the Center for Civic Initiatives-Prilep in Macedonia, the Center for Democracy and Human Rights in Montenegro, the Foundation for Pluralism in Romania, and the Karta/Memorial in Russia. In each case, these organizations play distinct and special roles in promoting democracy, human rights, and civil society in their countries and regionally. This Network was enhanced over the years by many other key NGOs in different countries that played important roles in different parts of the CfP program but were not acting as overall coordinators in their country. We called these organizations CfP Partners.

A number of Centers for Pluralism played important roles early in the program's history but later their organizational activity diminished for a variety of reasons. For example, the Foundation for Free and Democratic Bulgaria/Center for Pluralism-Bulgaria, directed by Mihail Berov, was the first Center for Pluralism and it set the tone for the overall program. In one year, it developed a computer training center and publishing center for independent media, a shelter for homeless Roma children that provided education and access to the schools (one of the first programs of its kind in Bulgaria), a voter participation program, a small grants program supporting initiatives of local NGOs in the regions, and an HIV education program (including the first Eastern European translation of Earvin "Magic" Johnson's groundbreaking book on AIDS for teenagers). In 1991 and 1992, it also organized the first series of regional conferences on decommunization involving many Centers for Pluralism (and hosted a similar IDEE conference in 1996). Its most recent CfP-related activity, in 2001, was a regional conference on the opening of secret police files and regional truth commissions.

One organization must be mentioned on a less happy note. The only organization founded by IDEE itself was Foundation "IDEE" in Warsaw, also known as IDEE-Warsaw. For many years, it played an important coordinating and facilitating role for the Centers for Pluralism. Its original director, Monika Agopsowicz, hosted the first regional meeting of the Centers for Pluralism, and she initiated the Centers for Pluralism Newsletter, the information data base, and in part the exchange program. While the statutory president was Irena Lasota, in fact Foundation IDEE operated mostly independently but with regular oversight of programs and finances. It was a situation that worked well under the initial leadership. Unfortunately, though, under a different leadership beginning in 1998, IDEE-Warsaw succumbed to unethical and corrupt practices and hid its behavior from the organization's president and founder. When, finally, the president acted and replaced the management board, it was too late. The organization had to be placed in liquidation due to high indebtedness. The investigation into Foundation IDEE's finances also made clear that these practices extended to other related Polish organizations and went beyond anything imaginable within the Centers for Pluralism community (see www.ideae.pl.org). The report on Foundation IDEE

by Zofia Romaszewska, a leader of Poland's democratic opposition movement, is a cautionary tale as we enter a new period of civic development in the region.

The Regional Network

The CFP Network is the only network in CEE/FSU region that has been functioning for over ten years and, over that time, has seen a constant growth of participants and extension of programs. It is a network without any formal organization and without a separate administration that would otherwise eat most of the funds. IDEE plays a coordinating role, especially in specific activities of the program and in organizing the region-wide meetings. The network operates on a cost-necessary basis. The Centers for Pluralism Network was built in a variety of ways and through complementary means: a grants program providing different levels of support to CFPs and Partners; an information database provided by members of the Network and deposited in IDEE-Warsaw; an English-language *Centers for Pluralism Newsletter* edited by IDEE and co-produced with IDEE-Warsaw; exchanges and internships between organizations from the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe; common programs across borders developed by two or more Centers (such as various Schools for Young Political Leaders, monitoring of elections, NGO training programs, among others); the Network of Independent Journalists (which developed a Weekly Service serving 300 different users); and semi-annual and annual meetings (18 full meetings and 9 regional meetings of the Centers for Pluralism).

The *Centers for Pluralism Newsletter* was among the first common projects of the program. Initiated at the first meeting in Warsaw, the *Newsletter* was begun as a means for sharing advice, skills, and information among NGOs in the initial Centers for Pluralism Network. It quickly became a resource for the whole region. In addition to publishing meaningful articles on key issues affecting civil society in the region and how-to columns, the *Newsletter* offered sections for NGOs to advertise their activities and needs as well as a section for exchanging basic contact information by name, country, and type of activity. In short, the *Newsletter* aimed to reflect the principles and ethos of the CFP Network itself.

The basic framework of the *Newsletter* was copied by a number of Centers in their native languages: Karta-Memorial/Ryazan started a Russian-language edition for the former Soviet Union; Supolnasc published a Belarusian *Newsletter*, Inam Center for Pluralism an Azeri-language version and the Institute for Statehood and Democracy the Ukrainian-language version. Finally, a Mongolian-language *Newsletter* was introduced this year. In each case, they shared material with the English-language edition, as well as the basic framework, but adapted their *Newsletters* to their own countries. Finally, several CFPs developed their own distinct newsletters, like the Civic

Initiatives' *Mreza*, using a different framework but on the basis of the CFP Newsletter. All of them distributed their issues free of charge to the hard-pressed NGO community, reaching a total circulation of more than 5,000 with a much more extensive readership. In addition, the English-language *Newsletter* became an important resource for Western donor and other organizations doing work in the CEE/FSU region, using it to find potential grantees and partners.

The Centers for Pluralism initiated and inspired several models. The main CFP grant program itself was a model for NGO development: in nearly all cases, support grants for 24 Centers for Pluralism helped these organizations expand, later become self-sufficient through direct grants of the NED and other donors, and assist other organizations within their countries. The CFP small grant program has provided nearly 200 grants of between \$200 and \$2,700, giving needed help to both emerging and established organizations, especially those outside capital cities, to carry out important in-country and cross-border projects. They have ranged from a grant for Liga Pro Europa's College of Democracy to support for the transborder forum in Batumi carried out by the IDP Women's Association, from a grant to the *Worker* newspaper in Belarus to publish three issues around the time of elections to a cross-border conference on civic education in the Ferghana Valley involving activists from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. When introduced by IDEE, such grants were rare; today they have become the model for the region.

Similarly, the study tour and exchange program of IDEE, introduced in 1993, has provided an important means for more than one hundred democratic activists to exchange information and to gain a deeper knowledge of the work and situation of their counterparts in other countries. This, in turn, allowed activists to compare and learn from different countries in the region. No organization has taken more advantage of this program than the Inam Center for Pluralism. Building on CFP programs, it has raised additional funds for a total of several hundred interactive study tours and exchanges, bringing CFP lecturers to Azerbaijan for workshops with local civic



Hungarian MP Jozsef Szajer with Cuban opposition leader Felix Bonne Carcasses, in 1996. Bonne was sentenced to four years in prison soon afterwards as one of the four signers of the "Cuba Is for All" Proclamation. Jozsef Szajer went to Cuba with Irena Lasota on one of the first exchanges in an IDEE-organized program sponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy bringing East European opposition veterans to the island to meet their counterparts. The program was inspired by the cross-border cooperation of the Centers for Pluralism.

Credit: IDEE

activists and sending key and emerging leaders to Belarus, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, and Serbia. Inam's director, Vahid Gazi, in his article "The Mission is Not Yet Accomplished," describes their importance. But there are other important examples: the exchange for Georgian CfPs to the Czech Republic helped provide important insight on its constitution and legislation, especially its lustration law; the Belarusan-Serbian exchange of CfPs helped these organizations compare and contrast their countries' movements for democracy; the exchange of the IDP Association in Georgia with the Crimean Teachers' Council shared information on the organization of youth reconciliation camps on the one side and the development of Parent Teacher Associations on the other.

The Meetings of the Centers for Pluralism are perhaps the most important part of the CfP program: it brings together all the members of the Network in one setting in order to discuss common problems, issues, and solutions for bringing about a democratic transformation for the whole region. They also combine elements of the CfP study tours, since each meeting is an opportunity for all the participants to learn about a new country. And each meeting introduces new members to the CfP community. As noted, there have been 18 full meetings and 9 regional meetings of the Centers for Pluralism. The first meeting in Warsaw in 1993 had twenty-five participants from ten countries; the last full meeting, the 18th, had more than 80 participants from twenty-one countries.

The meetings have been held throughout the region in part to integrate as many Centers for Pluralism as possible into the Network and in part to expose all of the participants to different situations in different countries having different historical, cultural, and social circumstances. The list of cities is impressive: Baku, Belgrade, Brasov, Bratislava, Bucharest, Budapest, Eupatoria, Lviv, Minsk, Tallinn, Tbilisi, Tirgu Mures, Tuzla, Vilnius, Warsaw, among others. Each host Center for Pluralism presented its own theme, whether it was exploring the self-government movement of the Crimean Tatar people, to the quick exit from communism offered by Estonia, to the theme of multiculturalism in Tirgu Mures and Tuzla, and the issue of multinationalism in Lviv. CfP meetings were generally not events for "important people," meaning for us people with titles. We did not have obligatory guests from government, parliament, or society; we never invited Ambassadors or other foreign dignitaries. We wished to discuss important issues. Still, important figures, representing a broad range of democratic thought, came because they wished to participate and contribute: President Vytautas Landsbergis in Vilnius, Mustafa Djemilev, MP and chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, in Eupatoria and Baku, Isa Gambar, the head of the Azerbaijan democratic opposition in Baku, M.P. Jozsef Szajer, for ten years the head of the Fidesz parliamentary caucus in Hungary, future president Emil Constantinescu in Bucharest, former prime minister of Bulgaria, Philip Dimitrov, among many others.

From these meetings came all of the CfP's important cross-border initiatives: Schools for Young Political Leaders, exchanges and study tours, NGO training programs, civic education programs, solidarity campaigns, newsletters. IDEE itself drew on the CfPs and CfP meetings for all of its other programs. It appealed to its members to find participants for the four groundbreaking symposia on nationalism and decommunisation, for starting the Civic Bridges programs in Yugoslavia, for the Women's Networking Programs in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the Community Building Through Tourism program in western Ukraine and Crimea. It has also been the basis for collaboration on a number of training manuals and civic education materials in a wide range of countries.

Together, the Centers for Pluralism and partner organizations that contribute to the CfP program form a unique regional network that is described in the twelve chapters of this ten year anniversary publication. In each of the chapters, the authors describe the basis for the network and its importance to their work. What is clear from reading them is how interactive and value-based this network is. Other networks, it is made clear, are not based on equal participation and openness, but rather on imposed priorities and controlled agendas. The Centers for Pluralism Network remains a unique contribution to the democratic movement in a strategic region of the world.

Today, the Centers for Pluralism program is in jeopardy. For ten years, it was generously funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, but in 2003 NED funding stopped and IDEE has yet to raise replacement funding.

It is clear from the articles in this book that the Centers for Pluralism has made a serious contribution to the development of democracy movements. But, while the authors of this volume speak of successes, it is also clear, as one contributor writes, that the mission of the Centers for Pluralism is "not yet accomplished," not only in stabilizing and institutionalizing democratic gains but also – and especially – in assisting civic and democratic movements struggling against the region's persistent and unfortunately numerous dictatorships and semi-authoritarian regimes. The need for the Centers for Pluralism and similar programs is expressed by another author in a single plea, "H E L P !"

Finally, there is another role that the Centers for Pluralism looks for: assisting their colleagues in other, less regionally contiguous, communist and "former" communist regimes. As Gabriel Andreescu, Alexander Podrabinek, and others relate, the Centers for Pluralism has played an active role in supporting Cuban democrats and their struggle against the Castro dictatorship. Podrabinek's Prima Human Rights News Agency is a voice for the repressed in many communist, former communist, and other dictatorships. The activists in the CfP Network believe they have a great deal of experience to share with their colleagues.

An Open Window to the East

by Petruška Šustrová

Petruška Šustrová is an independent journalist, former editor of Lidové Noviny, and winner of the prestigious Karel Havlíček Borovský Award for exceptional journalism in 1999. Before 1989, she was a spokesperson of the Charter 77 movement and member of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS).



Petruška Šustrová at the 18th Meeting of the Centers for Pluralism. Credit: IDEE

The history of my contacts with the Centers for Pluralism is a long one and long histories are best recounted from the beginning, so I shall start at the beginning.

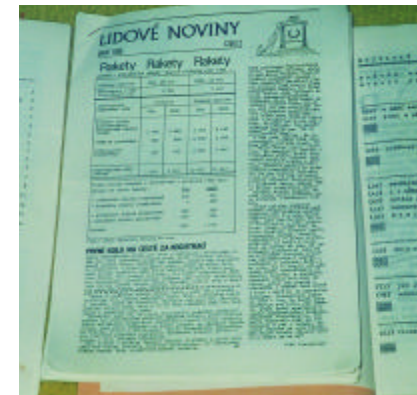
I got to know Irena Lasota and Eric Chenoweth long before the establishment of the Centers for Pluralism. Sometime at the beginning of 1988, two foreigners, a man and a woman, rang at my door. I did not feel in the least like conducting a conversation in a foreign language and I secretly hoped that the visitors would go away once they realized that they could not have much of a conversation with me in English or in French.

But everything turned out quite differently. I conversed with the woman visitor in Russian, while after a while my husband talked to both visitors in English. After a chat lasting several hours and covering a whole spectrum of political problems, the two people went away and ever since I have considered them to be my friends. During those few hours I discovered that Eric and Irena really understood the situation behind the Iron Curtain, that they knew the facts, that they were capable of imagining themselves in our position and understanding it while also bringing their own experiences into the discussion. And those were the kind of experiences which neither I (nor most of my friends) were able to grasp in the late 1980s. I had never experienced life in the free world. I was born and grew up in Czechoslovakia and until 1989 I was always refused a passport. Up to that time I had never experienced a discussion on politics that was based on a thorough knowledge of the latest specialized literature, analyses, or debates that at the time were absolutely unobtainable in Czechoslovakia.

The meeting impressed me deeply also because I did not feel the slightest handicap; the visitors were clearly interested in what we thought about the current situation and about the future, and it was evident that they took us seriously. Irena took a photograph of *samizdat* publications, which we spread out on the bed for her to see, and when the first issue of the magazine *Uncaptive Minds* reached us after some time we found the photograph in it. And that was not all: the text introducing the Czechoslovak section in the magazine ended by quoting a former spokesman of the Charter, who was reported to say: “We are not waiting for Gorbachev. He wants economic reform; but without democracy, even this is impossible. And if he allowed the real truth to be told about the system, it would collapse.” These were my words and I was moved and pleased that my visitors had quoted me since, after all they had visited a number of more distinguished members of the opposition during their visit to Czechoslovakia at that time.

Apart from this, I found interesting information in *Uncaptive Minds* about Poland and Hungary, and though my knowledge of English was far worse than it is today, I made every effort to plod through the texts. I was convinced that Eric, Irena and their associates had prepared the issue of *Uncaptive Minds* precisely for people like myself. The same applied to subsequent issues of *Uncaptive Minds*, which someone had smuggled to Prague: it had become my magazine. Irena Lasota paid several more visits to Prague and brought us money to help us issue *samizdat* publications. But her questions and her accounts on what was happening elsewhere were equally important for me.

When communism was collapsing in Czechoslovakia after November 17, 1989, some friends and I set up the Independent Press Centre. Starting on November 20, it issued a daily information bulletin, which later turned into the weekly *Respekt*. I was preparing for my new profession as a journalist but before that I had to make one significant diversion. In April 1990, Jan Ruml, a fellow dissident who from one day to the next was appointed First Deputy Federal Minister of Interior, asked me to come and work at the Ministry as an adviser.



The photo of underground Czech publications that appeared in the first issue of Uncaptive Minds in 1988. Credit: IDEE

Those were quite exceptional times and exceptional conditions. Ruml and I sat down in an office and together we planned how to demolish the old State Security (secret police) and how to create a new security service to replace the old one, one that would not hunt for genuine or invented opponents of the regime but rather compile and evaluate information important for the security of the state. In the autumn of 1990 I was appointed Deputy Minister and remained in this post until the summer of 1991.

During that period I met Irena Lasota several times but when she told me about her plans regarding a network of non-governmental organizations, all this sounded a bit remote to me: as a civil servant I naturally did not intend to set up non-governmental organizations, and I had simply no time to think of what would happen once I left the Ministry of the Interior.

Early in 1991, I received an invitation to attend an international conference at Timisoara; Irena was driving to the conference from Paris together with Jakub Karpinski. She suggested stopping over in Prague and taking me along. I naturally agreed. By a coincidence of circumstances, Irena and Jakub arrived in Prague on the eve of the day the so-called Commission of November 17 presented its final report to Parlia-



Petruška Šustrová speaking at the Moscow Symposium on Postcommunism, organized by IDEE and Express-Khronika. Jakub Karpinski on her left and Polish opposition veteran and historian Karol Modzelewski on her right. Credit: IDEE

ment. The report examined the background of the brutal repression of the student demonstration of November 17, 1989, which sparked the mass protests that brought down the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. In the course of its investigation, the parliamentary commission discovered that former agents of the communist secret police were among members of Parliament; the deputies decided to suggest to these people to resign their public office. The deputies resolved to publish the names of those members of Parliament who were listed in the archives of the secret police as secret agents but who declined to resign their mandate. And to make the publication of the names even more effective, the national television broadcast the presentation of the final report in a live report.

I shall never forget how Irena, Jakub, and I watched television for some two hours as history was being made on the screen before our very eyes. It all appeared symbolic to me but at the same time almost natural because we had frequently discussed the secret service with Irena and Jakub. After that we set out on a journey to Hungary and across the Romanian border to Timisoara.

My visit to Timisoara taught me an important lesson. At the beginning of February 1991, the city still showed signs of the battles fought there in December 1989. There was nothing to buy in the shops and in my hotel room there was no more than one bulb for six fixtures. When I asked for another bulb at the hotel reception, the receptionist said she could not give me another one with the explanation that the guests were stealing them. An endless queue was outside the one and only store in the city that sold meat 24 hours a day. The people standing there told us that they had to stand and wait the whole day and throughout the night.

Coming from relatively well-supplied Czechoslovakia, this was something I could not even imagine. And I was convinced that my friends and acquaintances, too, could not imagine such a thing, just as people who had not seen this for themselves. Of course, the Czech media had told me that there were shortages in Romania, yet I never dreamt that the term shortages meant 24-hour-long queues. But for people there, this was nothing new. I have not forgotten that experience.

I left the Ministry of Interior early in 1992 since the state security had been abolished – the Orwellian Ministry of Love ceased to exist. This was the end of my work in the civil service; I did not intend to be an office worker forever and so I returned to my work as a journalist. And this history finally brings me to explain what the chance of participating in meetings of the Centers for Pluralism meant for me.

In actual fact, I did not really belong at the Centers for Pluralism meetings. I did not work in a non-profit organization but I was most grateful to the organizers, and above all to Irena and Eric, for nevertheless giving me the opportunity to attend meetings of the Centers for Pluralism.

This was no tourism experience but a real school of knowledge. At each meeting it became more and more evident to me how close all the people I met there were to me. Our destinies were as near to each other as those of our countries. The meetings were arranged in such a way that in only a few days I discovered more about the country where we were meeting than after weeks of study. By writing about everything I learned and discovered at the meetings, I am convinced that I made a contribution to the transformation of Czech society and its knowledge after communism.

The bonds of friendship that I forged with other participants at the meetings became a commitment for me. I was eager to convey to my Czech fellow citizens everything about the countries so dear to my friends and that I, too, had fallen in love with. This intention could appear commonplace but I am aware of the mistrust a large proportion of Czechs feel for foreigners and especially foreigners from the East. I wanted to demonstrate to them that despite the post-communist backwardness of many countries and their host of serious problems, the people living there had the same experiences under communism, read the same books, saw the same films, and worried and rejoiced in the same way as we did.

It was only in the course of gatherings and meetings of the Centers for Pluralism that I became aware of how little we in the post-communist world knew about each other and how an extensive exchange of information between our countries could play not only an enlightening and educative role, but also a most practical one. After all, there are not so many paths leading away from communism and their pitfalls resemble each other like two eggs. If we know what happened wrong yesterday in the country of our neighbours, we could tomorrow avert the same problem.

After 1989, the Czech media give very little attention to foreign, especially to post-communist countries. The journalists on the Czech scene who do pay attention to these countries are an exception. I remember when, in the autumn of 1996, I found out that the next meeting of the CfP would take place in Crimea and that once it was over I could fly to Moscow to attend an IDEE-organized conference on post-communist transitions. I went out of my editorial office and exclaimed to my colleagues: I am going to Yevpatoria and Moscow! They stared at me in

total disbelief until one of them finally told me only an idiot would want to go to countries where nothing is working and where there is no comfort. Isn't it far better to travel to the West? I understood that I lived in a world that was different from his.

During the meeting at Yevpatoria, the organizers, who were Crimean Tatars, took us to the site of a future Tatar housing development. It was early evening, there was a mild drizzle and it was getting dark. We stopped at a muddy road across a field and we were in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but fields; an outline of a building under construction could be seen in the dusk. Aydir, our guide, told us with great enthusiasm that a suburb, called Ben Izmail, would grow up at the place where we were standing. And can you see that building over there? That will be the mosque. It all sounded unbelievable.

Six months later we again met Aydir at a CfP meeting in a different country. He proudly showed me a photograph depicting a vast room with only part of a roof. In one corner there were wooden boards, in another corner several barefoot men were kneeling down and praying, their backs facing the camera. That is our mosque, Aydir said. It is hard to explain the deep impression the photograph made on me. I remembered only too well the path leading nowhere at the time and where your feet sank deep into the mud on that grim rainy evening.

At the meeting of the CfP in Romania in the autumn of 1999, our Georgian friends told us that parliamentary elections were planned in their country and that their organization was looking for volunteers who would like to act as international observers. I put my name down and a few weeks later I was able to see for myself how people went to vote in the Caucasus. The number of election frauds that I myself saw in Batumi left me stunned. But I was staggered when I subsequently heard an assessment by international observers who claimed that the elections had been a step towards democracy!

I was present also the next year at the elections in Azerbaijan as an international observer sent by IDEE, and my experience there was very similar. Some 8 percent of all registered voters came to the polling station where I sat the whole day, from morning until late at night. How was I to believe that the total number of voters throughout the country had in fact reached 52.5 percent as claimed by the Azerbaijani authorities?

However, I do understand why international observers inevitably fail in their mission and are unable to discover all the swindles that occur at elections in the Caucasus. Of course, I, like most international observers, do not speak either Georgian or Azeri. I have only one life and I will definitely not manage to learn the languages of all the countries I have come

to love through the meetings of the Centers for Pluralism. If I had to rely only on the authorities it would be possible to deceive me just like other international observers. But I am at a great advantage compared to them: I do not come to a strange country. My colleagues and friends in the non-governmental organizations explain to me in great detail all the characteristics of the parties putting up candidates, who represents them, and what their attitude is to the current regime. In the polling station, I meet other observers and we help each other in the course of that long day of voting and we take each other's place. Moreover, the local observers realize that I am no total stranger, that I know some of the local people and that my interest in their country is not simply official. These matters are most important.

I was glad to have had the chance of observing these elections since that made me feel that I was able to repay, at least in part, the debt I feel towards the Centers for Pluralism. But I believe that my commentaries about the elections in the Caucasus were significant also for my Czech fellow citizens. Czechs are frequently unhappy about the conditions that prevail in their country; they love to complain about all sorts of things. They now just take for granted that in the Czech Republic elections are held under quite regular conditions. The idea that this is not something that can be taken for granted has perhaps made some readers aware that the state of democracy in the Czech lands may not be as bad as is often claimed.

When I try to sum up all this, I must admit that my incorporation into the CfP Network has significantly changed my life. Up until my involvement, I did not really take much of an interest in the post-communist countries with the exception of Poland, whereas now they form part of my journalistic specialization; certainly, the possibility of making comparisons has greatly enhanced my journalistic criteria. The Eastern countries are not merely new topics to write about; understanding them gives me a far better understanding of all that is taking place around me. Had I not attended the meetings of the Centers for Pluralism, I would never have thought of making documentary films for Czech television about Georgia or Romania and no one would have entrusted the job to me.

I have gained a great deal of personal satisfaction through the Centers for Pluralism. I am convinced that the network of CfPs succeeded in bringing exceptional human beings closer together, people with a profound feeling for freedom, democracy, and pluralism. It is an honor for me to regard them as my friends and it gives me great pleasure and teaches me important lessons to be able to continue to have discussions with them through the Centers for Pluralism.

IDEE and Romania

by Gabriel Andreescu



Gabriel Andreescu at the 18th Meeting of the Centers for Pluralism in April 2003. Credit: IDEE

Gabriel Andreescu is director of the Association for the Defense of Human Rights of Romania-Helsinki Committee (APADOR-CH).

With the passing of time, there is a considerable decrease in the impact of interventions on a society that has undergone revolution. Few analysts of the transition in Eastern Europe seem to recognize the importance of this fact. But this statement is certainly true when speaking about the changes that have taken place in Romania since the end of 1989. Until then, this country, led by Ceausescu's clique, had not known the meaning of civil society. The power vacuum created immediately after the revolution triggered, in its turn, various opportunities in the competition for leadership. As a consequence, even small initiatives could influence substantially the chain of events.

It was the moment for the West to get directly involved in building a political structure for Romanian society. The West, it is true, sent in a lot of humanitarian aid. It took years, however, for leading foundations to investigate and define a program to support civil society and, more generally, the political arena. There were, however, some activists and NGOs who landed at the Bucharest airport in the first weeks of January 1990, bringing along the know-how for building a democratic society, activists such as Jeri Laber, the executive director of Helsinki Watch. The meetings she had at that time led to the creation of the Association for the Defense of Human Rights of Romania-Helsinki Committee (APADOR-CH), without which the history of human rights in Romania would be totally different.

Also in 1990, riding the first wave of democratic assistance, Irena Lasota came to Bucharest. A veteran opposition activist, Lasota left Poland for France and then the US, where she co-founded the Committee in Support of Solidarity and then the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE). As the name

shows, IDEE was an organization with very general goals and fields of action. I discovered later those IDEE members were activists in the old “American tradition” of the frontier, helping push forward the frontline of democracy. This time, the frontier followed the falling communist dictators. As soon as contacts were possible, IDEE members went in the field. In other words, IDEE activists were present in the most difficult, most dangerous places, wherever they were needed most. During the ‘80s, Irena assisted Poland; during the earliest ‘90s, IDEE launched programs in Romania and Bulgaria; during Milosevic’s regime, IDEE members took risks in order to assist the anti-nationalist opposition in Belgrade. The beginning on the new millennium has found them also in Georgia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and so on.

I did not meet Irena Lasota in the grayish city of Bucharest in that early period, when secret services (Ion Iliescu’s this time) were again watching closely those who fought for democracy. Rather, I met her in an apartment in Paris, where Mihnea Berindei introduced me to an inquisitive, obviously intelligent, friendly and slightly ironic Polish woman.

What was the connection between the two people, or three, counting myself? As a vice-president and most active member of the League for the Protection of Human Rights in Romania (based in Paris), Mihnea Berindei had dealt with my case during Ceausescu’s regime. He had published the protests I had written during the last years of dictatorship; he had sent journalists to Bucharest; he had taken care of everything that was concerned with the protection of Romanian dissidents. We met immediately after the revolution, in Bucharest, where Berindei had come to help set things on the right track. He was the one who, practically, created the Group for Social Dialogue, the most important civic group in Romania in the months after the revolution.

Mihnea Berindei had come to know Irena Lasota because they both were working with French journalists who supported the Polish opposition. Friendships cemented with liberty in mind are strong, long lasting, and noble. Here I found myself in Paris meeting Irena and Mihnea, two names which should find their place in any history book telling the story of how one of the worst forms of totalitarianism was defeated.

I am relating all of this because I have noticed another thing about IDEE members which makes the organization special: people are involved in its programs based on their traits of character. Inter-human relations count more with IDEE than is usual with most organizations. Trust is essential. Not that the method is totally foolproof – witness the recent case of Foundation IDEE. But in general, the flair of IDEE in developing the network of the Centers for Pluralism – meaning that of Irena Lasota and Eric Chenoweth – is working. They considered that people are the source and they were right. A person’s personality and character plays a major role in difficult, perilous, and changing conditions. And this really is the working environment of IDEE.

When she arrived in Bucharest, Irena Lasota contacted me and a few other people introduced to her by Mihnea Berindei. She lent – through IDEE – a helping hand to the *22 weekly* newspaper, then the most important voice of the Romanian democratic intellectuals. Not only did she finance projects, but she also helped design a few projects that were less elitist in conception and that proved very successful – such as newspaper subscriptions for students and pensioners. She was involved in the broader area of independent media, whose importance for the democratic movement she correctly seized. She provided funding for the Helsinki Committee. She contacted the leaders of Liga Pro Europa in Tirgu Mures – Smaranda Enache and Elek Szokoly – an organization with a key role in the dialogue between the Romanian and Hungarian communities. The first computer and copier of Liga Pro Europa came from IDEE. *Gazeta de Mures*, the daily newspaper that defied nationalist hardliners in a critical period of the city, the site of violent ethnic confrontations in March 1990, was also initiated with IDEE assistance.

Irena and her colleagues witnessed in 1993 the creation of the Foundation for Pluralism (FFP) in Bucharest and invested in the organizational capabilities and good intentions of its director, Luminita Petrescu. They funded all the initial projects of the FFP, Romania’s Center for Pluralism. The Romanian branch of the network is just another proof of Irena’s formidable human flair: Luminita Petrescu became Romanian President Emil Constantinescu’s adviser for NGOs, a position in which she never betrayed the values she had promoted before gaining her position. After 2000, she was able to go back, unashamedly, to the NGO sector, to which over four years time as state secretary she had been so loyal to.

IDEE opened the pages of the *Uncaptive Minds* quarterly to Romanian problems. It was almost surprising that the editor-in-chief of the periodical, Eric Chenoweth, recognized so well the most sensitive issues for this country. It was on this international arena that a first conceptual confrontation took place between the leader of the Hungarian community in Romania, Marko Bela (“The Minority Question in Romania” in Vol. 7, no. 3, Winter 1994) and the author of these lines (“The Minority Question. A Few Observations” in Vol. 8, no. 1, Spring 1995). *Uncaptive Minds* also hosted an English translation of the first debate on the Hungarian issue among Romanian intellectuals (Vol. 6, no.1, 1993).

Years have passed by, Romania has become more democratic and less of a puzzle. And therefore less relevant for the “diehard activists” of IDEE. For us, Romanian activists who had benefited from the support of IDEE, the time had come to make our own contribution to the organization’s more challenging campaigns. So there we were, involved in projects in Serbia, where a number of NGOs fought Milosevic’s criminal regime. We met Civic Initiatives, an organization involved in several of the major events that led to the dictator’s

demise. Miljenko Dereta, the charismatic film director who founded the group, had helped stage the great carnival-like protests in Belgrade in 1996-97 that forced the regime to accept the results of local elections. The Serbian imaginative but often bleak sense of humor had scored a point against Milosevic. NATO bombardments were not enough to defeat the leader who had reinvented the ethnic atrocities of Balkan wars. It took living people on the ground to do the job.

The Helsinki Committee, Liga Pro Europa, and the Foundation for Pluralism each managed to offer assistance to Serbian activists, through the help of IDEE. FfP provided a framework for training new political leaders. From my organization's and Liga Pro Europa's part, our assistance was mainly centered on minority issues. Not only did I share my Romanian experience of the Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation model, a "success story" by comparison, I also managed to establish human relationships that, in turn, ensured long-term cooperation. Thus, I established contact with Sonja Biserko, president of the Serbian Helsinki Committee. It was with her that I discussed the idea of the first Shadow Report on the Serbian minority issue. It proved to be a very useful instrument to prepare Yugoslavia's signing of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

On the same occasion, I also made contacts among the organizations of Romanians and Vlachs in Serbia. The latter, especially, complained – and for good reasons – that the Serbian government was infringing on their rights and was showing a total lack of consideration towards their community. The dialogue was useful for both parts. Liga Pro Europa later initiated common projects with the Romanian communities in the Serbian Banat, the Timoc Valley, and Vojvodina.

The Serbian experience mattered to me from more than an "organizational" point of view – and I am sure it is also the case for my colleagues from the Foundation for Pluralism and Liga Pro Europa. We kept in touch with the hot areas of the battle for democracy, where confronting death teaches one enormously about life. Sometimes, civic activism turns bureaucratic. Other times, it requires long academic pursuits, making one forget basic values, such as freedom and people. It was not easy to stand up again in arms, side by side with Milosevic's opponents in Belgrade, to be traced by the dictator's agents who had killed many undesirable people. All the more impressive then was the courage displayed by IDEE's activists, who traveled across Serbia even in the late '90s, in the midst of the Kosovo conflict, when Americans were considered as enemies.

Another experience linked to IDEE, one which I consider an exceptional moment in the history of democratic solidarity, is Cuba. I found out that there was a connection between IDEE and Cuba only when Luminita Petrescu announced to me that Irena Lasota had been imprisoned by Castro's men and

that we have to gather signatures on a letter of protest. Irena had gone to Havana to assist the Cuban opposition – I learned it was her fifth trip over several years – and she was arrested for several days. She was later released and banned from the country ruled by Fidel Castro. But the event was not without cost for the Cuban regime.

Irena Lasota's initiatives were part of a more substantial help that IDEE and others had decided to offer a growing civic movement in Cuba. The main trend among Cuban Americans, but not the only one, as Castro's regime alleged, was for a tough policy, even for a military intervention, to overthrow the regime in Havana. In other words, the Castro regime should collapse under an external attack, a coup led, of course, by the Cuban diaspora in Florida. Another trend was to support open resistance from within the island and to help extend that resistance throughout Cuba, in the hope of producing the foundation for non-violent change.

IDEE worked with several organizations supporting this second approach, among them the Cuban Commission for Human Rights of Ricardo Bofil and the Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano, both in Miami. IDEE involved the Directorio in the meetings of the Centers for Pluralism, first in Belarus in 1999 and then in 2000 in Tbilisi. At that latter meeting, one of the leaders of the organization, Javier de Cespedes, the great-grandson of a hero of independent Cuba, Carlos de Cespedes, explained to the IDEE network the situation in Cuba and his hope to gain the solidarity of Eastern European organizations on behalf of the Cuban opposition. States where the communist regimes had collapsed were symbolically significant to Cuba. No signal from America could have had the same impact as events in Havana's former allies.

And who could convey a stronger message than Romania? The violent revolution which ended the last communist dictatorship in Europe was in accordance with the most daring dreams of the Cuban heroic tradition. I invited Javier to come to Bucharest the same year. He arrived carrying the posters of five dissidents imprisoned by Castro and we staged a protest in front of the



Smaranda Enache, president of the Liga Pro Europa from Tirgu Mures, Romania, at the Kyiv conference on "The Rise of Nationalism in the former Soviet Union."
Credit: IDEE

Cuban Embassy chanting “Freedom for Cuba!”, “Free the Prisoners of Conscience!”, and other slogans. In 2001, Javier returned to Romania with a different goal. It took place after a meeting of the Centers for Pluralism, organized by IDEE, where an annual award was created in support of the Cuban dissidents. It was the first ever award dedicated to Castro’s opponents. It was only from 2002 on that the opponents who risked their lives or imprisonment in Cuba for their activity would enjoy, among other prizes and awards, true international recognition.

The Award was named after a Cuban hero who died in a communist prison in 1972 during a hunger strike meant to change conditions of incarceration. “The Pedro Louis Boitel Award Network of Eastern European Countries” was created and provided an award of \$1,500.

In 2001, the winner of the Pedro Louis Boitel Award was Juan Carlos Lebya, a blind dissident. The ceremony organized in Bucharest was turned by Directorio into an exceptional event. Radio Marti announced the award every day for a month. The name of the winner was to be announced on May 25, the day Boitel died. The ceremony was also broadcast live in Cuba. On May 25, the information was on the air every hour. I was able to have a live radio talk show with Directorio in Miami and Juan Carlos Lebya himself, who was brought to Havana, on a phone that was not intercepted by Cuban security.

In 2002, the ceremony took place in Miami, since it corresponded with the celebration of Cuba’s century of independence. This time, the award went to Angel Moyo Acosta, a 37-year-old Cuban worker who had founded the Alternative Option Independent Movement.

Anticommunist activists in Romania and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe showed a high level of solidarity with their Cuban colleagues. For some of them, the transition, a complex yet dull period, does not live up to their dreams “to change the world.” The creation of the Pedro Louis Boitel Award, dedicated to people who risk everything in their fight for liberty, but more so the creation of a solidarity network for Cuba itself, gave them a new sense of action.

All of this could not have happened without the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe and the Centers for Pluralism. Nor without IDEE’s leaders, Irena Lasota and Eric Chenoweth, who combined efficiency with the true spirit of activism for democracy.



The Romanian Centers for Pluralism: Luminita Petrescu, president of the Foundation for Pluralism, at the 2nd Regional Meeting of Centers for Pluralism of Southeastern Europe, hosted in January 2002 by the Foundation in Timisoara, Romania.

10 Years of Networking – A Success Story

by Agu Laius



Agu Laius, director of the Jaan Tõnisson Institute, with Irena Lasota, right, JTI coordinator Tiiu Evert, and Jakub Karpiński at the 4th Centers for Pluralism Meeting, held in Tallinn, Estonia. Credit: IDEE

Agu Laius is director of the Jaan Tõnisson Institute, in Tallinn, Estonia, and the first chairman of the Estonian NGO Roundtable.

The Jaan Tõnisson Institute was established in 1991 with the aim of fostering democratic processes in Estonian society. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, democratic state institutions were lacking and the Estonian economy was facing a serious crisis, especially since large military factories had stopped functioning. Although independence was restored mainly through massive civic organizations such as the Popular Front, the Association for Cultural Heritage, the Green Movement, and Estonian citizen committees, nevertheless Estonia lacked diverse and numerous non-governmental or civic organizations, a so-called third sector.

In addition, during the 50 years of Soviet rule, the composition of the population living on Estonian territory had significantly changed, creating serious tensions within the society. Not everyone in the country had stood up for the Republic of Estonia and after restoring its independence the issue of acquiring Estonian citizenship became an issue of passionate debates. Because Estonia’s independence was restored on the principled basis of the legal continuity of the state that existed until 1940, the pre-occupation Act of Citizenship was also restored. But the people who came to Estonia during the Soviet period demanded a so-called zero-version of citizenship, that is to automatically granting citizenship to every person living in Estonia in the moment of the restoration of independence. The population of Estonia was also divided by language: nearly 40 percent of the population could speak only in Russian and did not communicate in Estonian. In the northeastern part of Estonia, Russian-only speakers formed a majority.

Clearly, there were difficult problems that had to be faced after the restoration of independence. There were no skills, structures, or experience

for solving them. The Jaan Tõnisson Institute, established in such conditions, also lacked experience even to arrange its work. It had no contacts, not to mention any possible cooperation, with foreign NGOs. We made the best effort we could and today we can say that no large mistakes were made.

Happily, Irena Lasota wished to make the Institute's acquaintance. Our first meeting took place in 1992 and we had an open and rather long discussion. At this moment, my English was very poor but we did realize that many of our views were alike. Later, we found out that Irena was establishing a new network of cooperation for Central and Eastern European NGOs – called Centers for Pluralism – at the initiative of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

During the first Centers for Pluralism Meeting in Warsaw in March 1993, NGOs sharing the same viewpoints had gathered from all the East Central European and later from most every postcommunist country. We started communicating and started to realize how similar our problems were, that we lacked the sufficient experience of managing and organizing NGOs, and that therefore we could not effectively participate in the democratization processes of our countries.

From the start of the CfP Network, we had the possibility to discuss regularly the developments in our countries and to exchange our experiences. We regularly met experts from Western countries who attended the meetings, as well as representatives of foreign donors, who introduced possibilities for applying for funding. Personal contacts play an important role in creating mutual trust between NGOs and funders. However, a small NGO from Estonia lacked any opportunity of making such contacts without outside support. Thanks to the meetings of the Centers for Pluralism taking place twice a year, we could discuss specific projects with the representatives of foreign funders, introduce the situation in our country, and explain why some project was important for us at that very moment.

The CfP Meetings played a key role in creating and developing the international relations of the Jaan Tõnisson Institute. Without the CfP network it would be difficult to imagine how time-consuming it would have been to make such contacts. The participation in the CfP network had another positive effect: since international funders trusted IDEE, their trust instantly broadened to the organizations of the network. At CfP Meetings, we could also express our expectations and needs and explain how IDEE could help the democratization processes in Central and Eastern Europe. For many years, an important journal was published, *Uncaptive Minds*, the *Centers for Pluralism Newsletter* was started, and a number of regional events took place. Through such activities, the CfPs became a close and effective network of cooperation for NGOs.

The CfP network also plays a significant role in giving the representatives of NGOs from newly independent countries a very good overview of the developments in other countries with a similar background. During CfP

events, we often had meetings with top politicians of the host countries who talked about their understanding of politics and the possible paths of development in the country. In short, the most energetic exchange of thoughts and experiences took place.

It must be noted that CfP Meetings have always been characterized by informality. Despite the hard work accomplished in the meeting's agendas, a great deal of exchange of experiences and development of ideas occurred outside the formal program, often late in the evening and instead of a good night's sleep.

Participation in the CfP Network significantly helped the JTI in establishing an NGO Center in Estonia where we could speak about the relevance of NGOs, explain their role and functions in society, share our experiences, organize training for the directors of NGOs, and help them with know how. From this center, the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) emerged. It is now independent but still deals with similar problems.

At CfP Meetings, we had very serious discussions for years about the relations between NGOs and politics, to what extent must or can we be political, how much should we interfere in the political processes of the country, to what extent can and must we involve the NGOs of other countries and the world in general. It is difficult to reach a united viewpoint and in fact it is still lacking. In many autocratic countries where democratic freedoms were limited, it seemed perhaps that NGOs were too much involved in politics, taking active part in election campaign, putting up their own candidates, and establishing democratic alliances. In some countries, such as Estonia, democratization of society was achieved rather quickly and NGOs working in such countries more easily learned the roles and functions of NGOs characteristic of Western democracies. At the same time, we must bear in mind that the restoration of independence in Estonia was precisely due to the key role of large civic associations with huge membership. Fast democratic reforms after the restoration of independence forced civic associations to return to their statutory goals. Political movements, such as the Popular Front, were reformed into political parties.

In the countries that remained undemocratic, everything was different: it was almost impossible for NGOs to have just a traditional role. The necessary democratic guarantees were missing and their large intervention in political affairs blurred over the essential role of NGOs, not only in the eyes of Western democracies but within the country itself.

These arguments, sometimes even quite emotional, brought us to a meeting of similar minds concerning both our behavior and further steps. We reached a definite understanding that NGOs cannot and may not stay away from politics, that they cannot lose their ability to influence political processes, and that they must be active and promote civic participation in politics. Differences of opinions remained mainly in the methods used.

The countries that quickly took a democratic path also faced the problems. The foreign aid received at the beginning of the 1990s helped them build a diverse structure of NGOs. They were found in every field of activity where there was the slightest space and need. However, fast democratization and economic success also meant that foreign foundations withdrew support from NGOs in Estonia earlier, leaving the country or simply setting new priorities of action. The funders hoped that the Estonian state could already bear this burden. Unfortunately our politicians and public officials had a different idea. The state was not willing or prepared to support its NGOs or even cooperate with them.

Therefore we were faced with another challenge where we had to start energetically influencing politicians to change their attitude towards NGOs and the idea of civil society in general. The first attempts to communicate with politicians and raise their awareness of the need to assist the third sector completely failed. The NGO representatives were told to do what they wanted but not to disturb the public authorities. NGOs were seen as money wasters and problem makers in the society. They never received any financial support from the state and were definite outsiders in the decision-making processes.

Obviously, we needed to act much more systematically and powerfully if we wished to change the attitudes of society and politicians. At the initiative of NENO, we started a project for elaborating how relations between public authorities and NGOs in Estonia should be arranged. We developed the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept (<http://www.emy.ee/alusdokumendid/concept.html>) and gave it for approval to the Estonian Parliament. Parliament was not ready to discuss such a concept, however. We had to begin educating politicians and convincing them that while many long-term democracies do not formally adopt such a concept, they work precisely according to the principles we had written down. We were supported by the experiences of Great Britain, Canada, and many other countries where similar relations between the state and NGO sector are elaborated in such documents. It took one and a half years of hard work before we managed to convince politicians of the importance of the civil society concept for democracy of Estonia. As a result, the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept was unanimously adopted in parliament. The document has a lot of perspective. It guarantees the cooperation between the Estonian Government and civil society organizations beginning in 2003. Together they should start solving problems that are challenging the sustainability of NGOs in the country.

During the process of getting the concept adopted, a problem became apparent. Public authorities claimed that they would be willing to negotiate with us all the time, but it is impossible given the more than 18,000 NGOs in the country. They wished for a partner, an acknowledged representative council of civil society organizations to negotiate with. And of course, they offered us a hieratic structure, very characteristic of public authorities. We opposed it

and elaborated more democratic principles of civil society representation by establishing the Estonian NGO Roundtable. It is an open and broad form of cooperation where annual General Assemblies are held electing a 33-member Representative Council. Its first meeting in February 2001 included representatives of 428 NGOs. State authorities did not support the idea of the Estonian Roundtable but within just two years the Estonian NGO Roundtable has become the acknowledged representative of NGO interests by civil society and public structures. (For more details, see: <http://www.emy.ee>.)

Like many other Central and Eastern European countries, Estonia has reached the accession point with the European Union. They have reached the path of stable development. NGOs working in these countries and our long cooperation through the CfP network have played a significant role.

Unfortunately we must also admit that during the 10 years of the CfP network differences have grown among us. Many countries have been successful in the democratization process, whereas in many developments stopped or in some cases conditions became worse. Hence the CfP network needs a thorough re-interpretation. The EU accession countries together with their NGOs should start helping the others more. The key importance lies in the NGOs which so far worked side by side through the CfP network. Such a proposition should be made to the EU structures.

By its name, IDEE should be limited to Europe. The widening of participants to the CfP network have indeed offered many interesting contacts but also probably decreased its effectiveness. Again and again we start our discussions from the beginning and from topics which have already been discussed and argued years ago. I do not exclude the possible separate branches of CfP Europe, CfP Asia and, why not, CfP America. However, the development of one region – Europe – needs a purposeful completion where in the end we can say: in Europe there are only democratic societies and countries.

In February 2001, 428 representatives of Estonia's third sector came together to form the Estonia Roundtable of Non-Profit Organizations, an "open and broad form of cooperation . . . [and] the acknowledged representative of NGO interests both by civil society and the government." Its code of ethics for NGOs (in its brochure) has become a model for the region.



The Network of Independent Journalists

by Stojan Obradoviæ and Eric Chenoweth

Stojan Obradoviæ is editor-in-chief of STINA Press Agency, in Split, Croatia, founded in 1991. Since 1995, he has been coordinator of the Network of Independent Journalists. Eric Chenoweth is co-director of IDEE.



Stojan Obradoviæ at the offices of STINA Press Agency, in Split, Croatia. Credit: IDEE

The Network of Independent Journalists (NIJ) was founded in 1993 by the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe as a means of fostering greater cross-border reporting by independent newspapers and publications in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In this way, IDEE wanted to help to break through the entrenched insularity of postcommunist countries.

The need was clear. After the events of 1989-1991, there was surprisingly little cross-border coverage of the historic events in Eastern Europe in the region's own media. Even today, more than a decade later, many independent newspapers and agencies wanting to cover events in postcommunist countries still must rely on reporting from state-run or semi-official press agencies, since very few independent media can afford their own correspondents or to use expensive Western wire services. This is especially the case still in the former Soviet Union, where much of the media space is still state dominated, but not only. As a result, readers are unable to find accurate reporting, much less independent analysis, on issues affecting postcommunist countries in general and thus have had little if any information of how other countries in the region may be addressing problems similar to their own.

At first, the NIJ was distributed in individual articles through the *Centers for Pluralism Newsletter* and in individual emails. In 1994, IDEE looked for a more organized distribution of articles using the new opportunities of the

internet. STINA News Agency had rich experience in utilizing the internet for cross border projects in the Balkans. STINA had begun as a news agency of the former Yugoslav republics, with the aim of providing independent and accurate reporting in the face of nationalist pro-war media.

STINA and IDEE had met already in several seminars on media and journalism organized by IDEE, the World Press Freedom Committee, and their partners in the region. So, in the summer of 1994, after listening to Irena Lasota describe the project at a conference in Bratislava organized by the Milan Simecka Foundation, a member of the Centers for Pluralism Network, we were happy to embrace the NIJ idea. We began establishing our first contacts with NIJ reporters and started organizing distribution of their articles as part of the STINA service. After the Centers for Pluralism meeting in Tallinn, Estonia in October 1994, Eric Chenoweth and Irena Lasota traveled to Split, Croatia and formally asked STINA to be the coordinator of the Network of Independent Journalists as well as to cooperate with IDEE's quarterly journal *Uncaptive Minds*. (The journal's next issue featured an article on Croatia's embattled *Feral Tribune*.) Since that time, STINA has been coordinating this exciting and unique project.

For more than eight years, the NIJ has provided the region's independent newspapers and news magazines with access to regular, up-to-date, and accurate coverage by leading journalists from the region covering nearly all post-communist countries. Until 1996, NIJ distributed individual articles. In 1997, NIJ was transformed into a regular weekly service with four to five analytical articles in each issue. In the past six years, the *NIJ Weekly Service* has developed a broad network and foundation both for providing high-quality reporting and analysis and for distribution to the region's independent media. We believe this foundation provides the basis for both continued qualitative service and quantitative growth. Indeed, the use of its texts and the interest of new journalists who wish to contribute to the *NIJ Weekly Service* has continuously increased. Its articles have been used by, among other publications and media outlets, *525-ci* and *Azadlyg* in Azerbaijan, *Naša Naviny* (formerly *Svaboda*) in Belarus, *Oslobodjenje* in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Demokratiya* in Bulgaria, *Novi List* in Croatia, *Lidové Noviny* in the Czech Republic, *Eesty Aeg* in Estonia, *Magyar Narancs* in Hungary *Koha Ditore* in Kosovo, *Puls* in Macedonia, *Monitor* in Montenegro, *Rzeczpospolita* in Poland, *Monitorul* and *22 Magazine* in Romania, *Vreme* in Serbia, *Sme* in Slovakia, and *Dnevnik* in Slovenia.

The *NIJ Weekly Service* has published 321 issues with a total of about 1,200 articles. While it has not had the ability to track use of its articles exactly, we estimate from reports we have received that each article on average has

been republished three to four times, or 12 to 16 republished articles per issue. The NIJ has covered 35 countries and special regions of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, including: Albania, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina (both the Federation and the Serb Republic), Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, the Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (including Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo), as well as special regions of Abkhazia, Chechnya, Crimea, Dagestan, and Nagorno-Karabakh. The NIJ has also had special coverage of the democratic opposition in Cuba.

The NIJ is the only network relying exclusively on journalists and analysts from the region covering the important issues affecting the entire post-communist area. Overall, 80 journalists from 30 countries have contributed to the *Weekly Service*. They include some of the top independent journalists and analysts from each of the countries – Mustafa Hajibeli from Azerbaijan, Paweł Bykausky from Belarus, Peter Karaboev from Bulgaria, Arkady Dubnov covering Central Asia, Petruška Šustrová from Czech Republic, Valery Kalabugin from Estonia, Ivlian Haindrava from Georgia, Asylbek Ismailov from Kyrgyzstan, Pauls Raudseps from Latvia, Slobodan Rackovic from Montenegro, Alexander Podrabinek from Russia, and Jakub Karpiński from Poland.

In the past period, there was special attention paid to conflict areas in East Europe and the former Soviet Union (the Caucasus, Balkans, Central Asia). Other areas of interest have been topical issues relating to postcommunist transformation to democracy, such as national and local elections, the development of civil society, minority rights and ethnic relations, problems of pri-



Ten years of sharing information and analysis across borders.

vatization and corruption, minority and human rights, media freedom, relations among CEE countries, and questions of NATO expansion.

Significantly, the NIJ focuses interest on ignored areas like the Crimea, where ethnic Crimean Tatars are dealing with conflict, discrimination, and economic and social difficulties through nonviolent means.

The NIJ *Weekly Service* has remained free of charge to most users, the only way in which most independent media in the postcommunist region could have access to the NIJ's circulation of high quality articles. Such coverage would be considered standard in more established and wealthy Western media, which have access to their own correspondents or can use high-priced wire services. But absent a service like the NIJ, such coverage is inaccessible to most independent media in the postcommunist region. More importantly, the NIJ offers in-depth analyses by some of the region's best reporters, people with on-the-ground insight into the events of their country, unlike foreign reporters who spend limited time in a place or region.

The NIJ is distributed to more than 300 recipients (media, NGOs, international organizations, research and educational institutions, etc.) in 40 countries. As a result of the NIJ, there has been a clear increase in cross-border coverage in independent media in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The regular republication of articles by many news outlets has given East European readers a broader coverage of events in the region and a larger understanding of postcommunist transitions.

The NIJ's quality is found in both its analytical background and its on-time reporting. NIJ's *Weekly Service* is at the top of the line with other specialized projects covering transitional processes. It ensures the circulation of different ideas and experiences of transitional processes in post-totalitarian societies, and perhaps more importantly, it allows for the evaluation of democratization processes and an awareness of deviations and manipulations that present governments in these countries use to cover up often repeated undemocratic behavior and practices.

The NIJ has also had a very important role in strengthening ties of independent journalists and newspapers and enhancing their professionalism, both to better serve their readers and to more effectively build a free and democratic media. In the initial years, IDEE sponsored meetings of NIJ contributors in order to strengthen the network and *Weekly Service* – in Bucharest, Tirgu Mures, and Bratislava. Since then, journalists and editors have called on NIJ and IDEE to provide contacts and suggestions for journalists, while journalists look to us for contacts in other countries.

Looking at the nearly ten years of NIJ's existence, STINA is proud of its achievements. Its work was not spectacular – we did not aim for splashy stories. But it was significant and important. NIJ was alone in covering some of the key transition stories of this period, whether it was the prevalence of corruption, the political uses of ethnic conflict and nationalism, the misuses of privatization, or the ignored stories of civil society. Most importantly, the NIJ covered the development of democracy – and lack thereof – in the postcommunist region. We brought to light the parties, individuals, and processes that many media ignored, but which proved to be among the most important actors in the decade's key democratic events.

Today, due to sudden financial difficulties, the NIJ has had to suspend service temporarily. Nevertheless, it is planning further development and growth in the future. The goal of the Network of Independent Journalists is to create a strong media channel that can offer better, more informed, and more accurate reporting and analysis on Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and the problems the region faces in its transition from communism to democracy. The NIJ tries to create a new forum for comparing the experiences of the countries in the region, how they address common problems, and strengths and weaknesses of different political alternatives. Equally important, though, is the goal of the NIJ to strengthen ties between independent journalists and newspapers and to enhance their professionalism, both for serving their readers and for effectively building a free and democratic media. For the next period, the NIJ intends to promote its service to a wider audience and increase the number of users, create a larger and better selection of texts, increase the network of journalists, improve production, establish a special features service on key regions and themes in this transition region, and, importantly, commercialize its weekly and special features services.

The Meaning of the Centers for Pluralism for Belarus

by Vincuk Viaëorka and Siarhiey Mackievië

Vincuk Viaëorka is chairman of Belarus' leading opposition party, the Belarus Popular Front (BPF), which was founded in 1988. He is also the founder and former chairman of the Belarus Center for Pluralism, the Civil Society Center-Supolnasc, a Center for Pluralism begun in 1996. Siarhiey Mackievië is Supolnasc's current chairman. He was chief of the National Headquarters of the non-partisan electoral mobilization campaign "Vybirai" (Choose) in 2001 and is vice chairman of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs.

Conditions in Belarus

Belarus is not a typical transitional country. Today, it is the only country in East-Central Europe with a dictatorial regime. Its citizens enjoy much less freedom now than they did even in the waning years of communism. Belarus is additionally the only country in the region whose leadership has attacked the national and cultural identity of the populace and is seriously talking about giving up the country's independence to Russia. This comes at a time when all of its neighbors are increasing their independence from Russia and declaring that they are choosing Europe.

Social and political life in Belarus is reminiscent of late Soviet times, when all forms of insubordination to the antidemocratic regime were seen as political opposition. Therefore, there are still no well-defined boundaries between political, social, and labor union activities in Belarusian society. Just as in Soviet times, democracy, national independence and Belarusian cultural identity are seen by democratic society as a single goal. On the other hand, what small experience there has been with relative democracy has resulted in a flurry of development among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which observers sometimes erroneously take as a sign of normalcy in their approach to the country.

Since Belarus was under Russian and Soviet control for the last 200 years, national independence and cultural identity are key issues here. The first independent initiative groups of the 1980s were culturally oriented, and many non-governmental organizations today concern themselves with culture, language, and historical memory. In Belarus, independence and a renaissance of national identity are synonymous with a return to European and Euro-Atlantic democratic values.



Lenin remains in a commanding position in Belarus outside the Parliament. Credit: IDEE

This is the context in which Centar Supolnasc works. Its mission is promoting the values of freedom, democracy, civil society, and independence.

The Genesis of Supolnasc

The name of the organization was taken from a samizdat bulletin of the 1980s called the Confederation of Belarusan Supolka, which brought together young participants in the freedom and democracy movement of the time. Centar Supolnasc considers itself the inheritor of the ideals of that movement.

The tasks that democratically inclined citizens of Belarus took on then are, unfortunately, the same ones that stand before us today, all these years later. Democracy, respect for human rights, and liberation from disgraceful colonial dependence have yet to be achieved in Belarusan society. The enthusiasm of democrats in the first years after the fall of the USSR proved unjustified. Instead, an aggressive populist dictator took power with the support of certain political elements in Russia. But it was clear even before then that a painstaking rebuilding of society would be necessary to overcome the Soviet heritage. The communist nomenklatura, against whom many of us fought in the 1970s and 1980s, has successfully adapted itself to the new conditions and remained in control, which has demoralized society and led to disappointment with the transition.

A crucial moment in the genesis of Centar Supolnasc came in 1993 with the meeting held by Irena Lasota, president of IDEE, with Belarusan participants in the 1980s freedom movement – the same people who founded democratic political structures in the late 1980s and early 1990s. That meeting was

tremendously significant for us. We found out that democrats were experiencing similar problems in many postcommunist countries and realized how important it is to exchange information and to pull together. She introduced us to the Centers for Pluralism program and invited us to participate.

The formal founding of Centar Supolnasc was in July 1995. Its goal was a resurgence of democracy and pro-independence activity on the level (and for the development) of civil society. The founding members were people active in Belarusan social and political life since the 1980s, such as Ales Bialacki and Hienadz Sahanovic, as well as younger people. The center began operating the same year. The number of people and organizations working with the center grew steadily, and the contacts thus formed began to bear fruit, especially with “informal” initiative groups.

We began to function as an informational and educational resource center for other NGOs, stimulating new initiative groups and seeking out leaders. According to the latest data, we now work with about 150 organizations and initiative groups. The mission of Centar Supolnasc is not just to carry out educational programs and publishing and providing resources for other NGOs. It is to advance ideas and values that matter through such activities.

At the end of 1997, we began courses for young Belarusan regional leaders. It was our first large educational project. We held a series of seminars for 50 participants from around Belarus who were leaders of registered and unregistered public organizations and initiative groups. We gathered together a group of Belarusan instructors for these courses, among them: Dr. Piotra Sadouski, member of the 12th Supreme Council; Dr. Valancin Holubieu, philologist and first Belarusan ambassador to Germany; Dr. Lavon Barsceuski, one of the founders of the Belarusan Humanities Lyceum, and many others. At the end of the project, we published a textbook based on material from the seminars, discussions and lectures. The majority of those who attended have since become public and political leaders and journalists.

Non-partisan does not mean apolitical. Centar Supolnasc gets its orientation from members of various democratic parties, as long as they are truly democratic political forces. The Centar invites members of the Belarusan



Vincuk Viaëorka, chairman of the Belarus Popular Front, with BPF vice chairman Viktor Ivaskieviè, outside the Supreme Court, which denied the latter's appeal of a two year sentence of “deprivation of liberty” and “involuntary labor” for “slandering the president” as editor-in-chief of Raboczy (Worker) newspaper. At the detention facility in Baranavicy (Brest region) where he is serving his sentence, he was elected to head the “open-type corrective labor facility's soviet.”

Credit: The Right to Freedom (Viasna Human Rights Center)

Popular Front Party, United Civil Party, Social Democratic Hramada, and other parties of the Coordination Council of Democratic Forces to serve as lecturers and trainers.

Today, Centar Supolnasc's activity on the national level consists of publishing, education, and working with Belarusian regions. Its latest programs include training of young leaders of regional organizations; training courses for local activists on legal aspects of civil rights defense; training for journalists from the local independent press; creation and support of the Regional NGO Informational Network for the Minsk Region; civic and methodological education for teachers; and mobilization techniques for election campaigns.

Centar Supolnasc has had its own publication, *Supolnasc Bulletin*, since 1997. At the time of its establishment, it was the only Belarusian publication of its type that informed nongovernmental organizations of civic initiatives undertaken throughout the country and that contained useful information and research and analysis on political and humanitarian topics.

There are two main areas of Centar Supolnasc's educational activities. The first is training for civil and political activists and providing education to improve the effectiveness of regional initiatives. The second is increasing a pro-democratic consciousness in society through civic education for the elite, mainly teachers and independent journalists. Due to their professions, these individuals are in a position to effectively influence public opinion and help form a democratic worldview in the younger generation. By giving this elite the necessary civic knowledge, methods, and skills, we hope to reach a wide circle of people. We are counting on a new generation, one espousing new values, to be the guarantee for our country's stable democratic transformation. In this regard, our "golden reserve" is 30 journalists and about 1,500 teachers who have been trained in Centar Supolnasc programs.

Supolnasc's Network

The organizational principle at the heart of the Centers for Pluralism Network is unity based on common values. When there are common values, there is also trust. Organizing a coalition on that basis is much simpler. No one and nothing encroaches upon the sovereignty of the individual organizations. They are independent, but each one of them is conscious of being part of a coalition of values.

Centar Supolnasc applied the same principle when it set up its own national network. The principles of democracy, pluralism, protection of human rights, deliverance from a demeaning colonial legacy, and a commitment to an independent, democratic, and European Belarus are the stated bases for this network. A desired but not necessary criterion for the founders of local branches of the center was their participation in the anti-communist movement of the 1980s because this was a sure sign of trustworthiness.

From the very beginning, Supolnasc has stated the importance of regional initiative groups acting outside the capital and we have actively developed a

network of partner organizations in the regions. They are generally located in the "second cities" of the regions, that is, not in regional capitals. Today, there are 14 organizations in that network, in Barysau, Zodzina, Maladecna, Ivianiec, Salihorsk, Baranavicy, Navapolacak, Horki, Sviethorsk, Pinsk, Lida, Slucak, Marjina Horka, and Niasviz. Their task is to establish themselves as a stable force in the local civil society and to provide information and material support to NGOs in their region.

Every center operates independently and in accordance with local needs and the level of development of local civil society. Thus, the Borisov Resource Center has several youth and social programs, in Maladecna the center works mostly with the intelligentsia, and in Navapolacak, where there are large oil refineries, the organization works closely with the free labor union in that area.

The regional network was very active in the last elections for local councils in March 2003. Despite the fact that these elections were thoroughly anti-democratic, they were not carried out under the total control of the authorities. As a result, several dozen pro-democratic deputies were elected or forced a runoff election in 10 of the 14 cities where Supolnasc is active.

Coalition Building

As part of an international network of like-minded organizations, Supolnasc sees its mission as the promotion of democratic values at the local level. This is accomplished not only through education, but also through building coalitions among democratically-inclined people and organizations in different fields.

The first serious steps in this direction were taken at several conferences held between the fall of 1996 and the summer of 1997. The topics were on independent journalism and the structure of independent publishing. Through these conferences, Supolnasc was attempting to bring together independent journalists and publishers and to allow them to become acquainted and find their common interests. As a result, they formed the Association of Regional Press Publishers.

After that, the basic strategic work of Supolnasc began in earnest in the consolidation of the growing number of genuinely pro-democratic public organizations in Belarus. A coordinating umbrella group was clearly needed, especially to counter the false presentation of civil society made by the dozens of former Komsomol, nomenklatura, or governmentally-organized NGOs (or GONGOs).

At the end of 1996, in December, Centar Supolnasc held the first Forum of Belarusian NGO Leaders, where the idea of an Assembly was brought up. Later, on February 22, 1997, more than 250 organizations participated in the first Congress of the National Assembly, united under the following four principles: independence of Belarus; market and democratic reforms; defense of human rights; and integration into European structures. The main tasks of

the Assembly were established as organizing the defense of NGOs' rights, facilitating informational exchange among NGOs, fostering a system of mutual assistance and service, expanding the influence of the third sector in Belarusian society, and involving new organizations in the Assembly.

Today, the Assembly of Pro-Democratic Nongovernmental Organizations operates effectively on the national level. This umbrella structure encompasses more than 600 public organizations, making it the leading umbrella for the Third Sector in Belarus. It has various concerns and is active in many activities in carrying out its mandate. Today, it is organizing the defense of NGOs that are being repressed, like the Belarus Students Association and the Ratusha Resource Center for NGOs, among many others; it publishes and disseminates information on the work of NGOs; and it works with international organizations for the defense of the Third Sector, training, and other activities.

For the presidential election, the Assembly established two non-political electoral campaigns: "VYBIRAI" (Make a Choice) electoral mobilization campaign and the national independent monitoring network. These were the largest civic actions ever organized in Belarus and the first such nationally coordinated campaign, involving tens of thousands of people. Notwithstanding the political outcome, the gains in building human resources through these campaigns are a permanent pro-democratic resource for our country [see Centers for Pluralism Newsletter issue no. 26, Winter 2002, and also the "Election Bulletin of the Mobilization Campaign," available in English from Centar Supolnasc or IDEE – Editor's Note].

The electoral campaigns have helped spark new forms of cooperation between NGOs, such as the "Let's Make It Better!" youth initiative in 20 Belarusian towns, the campaign to save the Kurapaty memorial in which thousands of people prevented the gravesites of tens of thousands of Stalin's victims from being paved over by a national road, the defense of independent newspaper editors and of freedom of religion in the face of new repression and legislation, among many other initiatives.

Also, Centar Supolnasc is involved in other networks and coalitions that have been sparked by its efforts, including the Belarusian Association of Resource Centers, which has six hubs in every region and 57 partners, and the Association of Civic Education.

International Cooperation: The Centers for Pluralism Network

Centar Supolnasc, along with similar organizations in other countries from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, is a member of the international Centers for Pluralism Network. This network unites active people who, as a rule, have a rich experience in struggling against anti-democratic regimes and who come from countries trying to overcome the dark legacy of communism and colonialism. Centar Supolnasc is not a political organization, but it does hold to political ideals. That is why it is associated with the

Centers for Pluralism Network, which means that we acknowledge our readiness to actively fight totalitarianism and the legacy of totalitarian regimes.

With the help of IDEE, we joined the ranks of Centers for Pluralism. For Centar Supolnasc, the network of Centers for Pluralism was a bridge to the world. There were CFP-sponsored international conferences (such as the ones in the mid-1990s on overcoming the legacy of totalitarianism held in Sofia and Moscow), as well as the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe's journal *Uncaptive Minds*, with its panoramic view of the processes underway in the transitional communist countries. There was the Centers for Pluralism Newsletter, with its important database on democratic organizations in our region and many opportunities to work with organizations and foundations from countries with "old" democracy.

As part of this overall IDEE CFP Network, we also benefited from our strong association with the CFP's IDEE-Warsaw. Due to its geographic, linguistic, and social closeness, it helped us gain knowledge in NGO management and establish new contacts in Poland and beyond. Through such connections for example, a training program was carried out with the Assembly of Welsh NGOs, IDEE-Warsaw, the Youth Informational Center, and the United Way Organization. The special Belarus program that emerged from Irena Lasota's trip to Belarus with Monika Agopsowicz gave important support to Belarus's developing civil society. The withdrawal of IDEE Warsaw and associated organizations from the network of values represented in the Centers for Pluralism is a great loss for Belarus.



Vincuk Viaëorka speaking at the Moscow Symposium on Postcommunism in 1996. At left is the veteran human rights and independence leader Vyacheslav Chornovil, chairman of the Rukh movement in Ukraine.
Credit: IDEE

The 13th Centers for Pluralism Meeting was held in Minsk in April 1999 with the title “Fighting for Democracy Together.” This meeting had great resonance in Belarusian society. We hosted our colleagues from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, the U.S. (who had trouble crossing the border), and Ukraine. Representatives of the Supolnasc national network took part in panel discussions, along with the leaders of other Belarusian NGOs, political parties, and labor unions. This allowed our friends from the CfP Network to get acquainted with the situation in Belarus firsthand, while the Belarusian participants saw that many of their problems were not unique and that their neighbors could provide some guidance for them. CfP guests also experienced a street demonstration by the organization Chernobyl Way marking the 13th anniversary of this nuclear disaster whose consequences continue to weigh on Belarus society and remain ignored by the government. The demonstration gave our foreign guests further insight into Belarus as they saw the police attempt to intimidate the marchers. Many participants joined the demonstration to display the solidarity of the entire CfP Network, an act that people have remembered long afterwards.

Thanks to the CfP Network, we have been able to establish an abundance of contacts with partners in other transitional regions and organize cross-border programs. Among these have been two meetings of Belarusian and Lithuanian NGOs, exchange programs at Kyiv think tanks and foundations, and exchanges with Serbia and Montenegro.

The importance of these exchange programs should be strongly emphasized. If dictators can trade experiences in repressing democratic civil society and in remaining eternally in power, democratic forces need to share their own experience. That is why we were so pleased to host our Azerbaijani colleagues from the INAM Center for Pluralism and Azerbaijani National Democratic Foundation, who observed how we built our coalition for a broad popular campaign. They were able not only to apply that knowledge to Azerbaijan, but also to give much valuable advice to Belarusian organizations based on Azerbaijani experience.

Another distinction of the CfP Network is its assistance in times of emergency. We have received valuable moral support through them in such situations, for instance, the Internet campaign and wave of letters of protest when one of us was imprisoned in 2001.

In a broader sense, the CfP Network serves as a compass in a sea of contacts. Recommendations from colleagues in the network are the most reliable when immediate orientation and contacts are needed in another transitional country. For example, when formulating a strategy for the electoral mobilization campaign, our colleagues at Civil Initiatives helped us analyze similar events in Serbia. To a large degree, the success of the VYBIRAI campaign was made possible by specialists in Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine, who were recommended to us through the CfP Network.

Centers for Pluralism is a means of solidifying values, even when they go against the mainstream. This was the case with the war in Chechnya and the Tbilisi Declaration on Elections.

Future Prospects

When the CfP network was first established, it seemed that people starving for freedom had only to be nudged in the direction of democracy and the transition was inevitable. Then the people who provided that impulse could return to their own business. However, in the majority of transitional countries, the role of those key figures has not diminished in the last ten years. In addition to the old authoritarian, totalitarian opponents of democracy who remain, there are new pseudo-democratic opponents, people who use democratic rhetoric, hold democratic-looking events, and occupy positions in existing regimes, thus discrediting democratic values.

This is the moral low path. It is important to offer an alternative to it. It is important that every country have its moral guardians who prevent the society from backsliding. And those people need international support and assistance. In order to anticipate a situation and react to it in a timely manner, there needs to be comparative analysis, which nobody does better than the network of friends and allies of the Centers for Pluralism.



During the April 1999 meeting of the Centers for Pluralism held in Minsk, Belarus, the Belarus Popular Front and other opposition organizations organized the annual march to commemorate the Chernobyl disaster. CfP participants, including Dilara Setvelyeva and Ayder Muzhdaba from Crimea (center, looking at camera) and Ivan Lozowy from Ukraine (immediately behind Ms. Setvelyeva), joined the demonstrators, in an act of solidarity.
Credit: IDEE

From Moscow to Cuba: The IDEE Difference

by Alexander Podrabinek

Alexander Podrabinek is editor-in-chief of the Prima Human Rights Agency, the successor of Express-Khronika, the long-time independent daily newspaper and later human rights weekly started first in 1988 still under the Soviet Union. As a dissident, he was several times arrested, imprisoned, and deported to Siberia. His study on the political uses of psychiatry is among the most well known works of dissident literature.



Alexander Podrabinek speaking at the Moscow Symposium on Postcommunism.
Credit: IDEE

Once one of our journalists who read the English-language press brought me an American journal and said, “Look at what sensible things they’re writing. You keep on saying that everyone in the West is fascinated with Gorbachev and *perestroika* and has all sorts of illusions about the USSR. Just read this article. You won’t be sorry.”

That was in the hot summer of 1989. It was stifling in the office and the work was unending. I didn’t have the will or the energy to torture myself with an English translation.

Several weeks later, our stubborn journalist brought in a Russian translation of an article from the same journal and suggested that we publish it in the paper. I was taken aback. We did not publish articles from other newspapers and magazines. And what could Americans have to say that was so special any way? But my duty as chief editor demanded that I read it.

I don’t remember what the article from *Uncaptive Minds* was about, but it was written with deep insight into the political situation in Eastern Europe and gave a sober analysis of events there. I was amazed. It was hard to find an article of that caliber in the Russian press. We bent our rule and reprinted the article in *Express-Khronika*. I looked to see who published the journal. It was Irena Lasota and Eric Chenoweth of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe.



Alexander Podrabinek showing an issue of his human rights newspaper Express-Khronika to a Tibetan democracy activist at the first meeting of the World Movement for Democracy in New Delhi, India in 1998.
Credit: IDEE

We soon began to work together. Irena Lasota and I exchanged information and opinions and sometimes wrote for each other’s publications. We almost always agreed on the main issues.

Then we met in person, in Warsaw, when Irena invited me to an IDEE seminar. After that our relationship became more than just professional. Journalism for me at that time was not so much a profession as a means of opposing communism and

its aftermath in our country. Few in the network that Irena set up throughout Eastern Europe were sympathetic to my point of view, but we found good journalists and just good people there. We could always count on support and understanding at IDEE.

I was confident that Irena would always lead me down the right corridors in Washington, introduce me to the right people and act as an advocate in the burdensome and confusing search for funding for our newspaper. Since I had no experience as a financial manager, I put my full trust in Irena’s experience. I knew that she could tell of our plight better than anyone else and explain the things that I naively did not even know needed explaining.

Express-Khronika newspaper and, after its closure, PRIMA Human Rights News Service received support from many outstanding people and organizations. We are grateful to them all, even those who suddenly abandoned us in hard times. But I have always been sure that hard times would never change our relationship with IDEE.

I think that the distant past is very meaningful here. Today, in the multifarious crowd of human rights activists and newly-minted democrats, you can meet benevolent people who know how to say all the right things and succeed in their affairs. But you can only really trust the ones who have been tempered by prison or who were part of the anticommunist resistance when that could mean the loss of liberty or sometimes life.

That is why I was delighted to accept Irena's invitation to travel to Cuba in support of the dissidents there. One of the ideas of IDEE, usually expressed in a joking tone, is that Eastern Europe is a political, not geographical, concept. Communism is not exclusively a trait of the USSR or Eastern Europe. It is universal, not national. And so Cuba is also the subject of IDEE's attention.

Thus Irena Lasota built an "IDEE empire" not by conquering provinces, but by supporting anticommunists wherever they are: offering solidarity to all those who strive to rid their countries of communism.



Alexander Podrabinek, who worked as a private taxi driver in Moscow to support his family and his human rights activities, drives a rickshaw in Havana in order not to travel with a police-reporting state taxi driver. In his first trip to Cuba in 1996 with IDEE's Irena Lasota, he met with independent journalists, editors, and human rights activists and on his return to Moscow prompted sympathetic Duma members to create a Cuban Human Rights Committee. Credit: IDEE

In 1996, when I went to Havana for the first time, I felt as though I had landed in Moscow in the mid-1970s. There were meetings with dissidents, searches, interrogations, listening to Radio Marti through the jamming, and it all tells us that communism has not been eradicated from Earth and that only a few out of its millions of prisoners are prepared to oppose it. Fancy seminars in free countries, grandiose meetings in fashionable hotels, wise discussions in quiet offices, safe arguments about the problems of the Third Sector – that's all child's play compared to the anti-Castro movement in Cuba.

Since then, I have been to Cuba several more times and become acquainted with the heroic people who are now in Castro's prisons. One of the times Irena and I went to Cuba, she was arrested right in Jose Marti Airport at the passport checkpoint. I was not arrested and did what we had planned. Irena was held for a couple of days and then expelled to Mexico and we met in the

Bahamas after I faced my own problems leaving the island.

Besides Eastern Europe and Russia, IDEE is interested in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia. Everywhere Irena Lasota and her colleagues find defenders of civil liberty and opponents of state tyranny. IDEE is a very successful organization in what it does and what it achieves.

Many people dislike Irena Lasota and IDEE for just that reason. Unfortunately, such people are not only those opposed to what IDEE stands for, but also those with the same goals as IDEE but fewer results. Most of the respected human rights organizations with multimillion-dollar budgets could not do what IDEE does with humble resources, a small staff, and a three-room office in Washington. The contrast is glaring to those organizations spending all their funds on administration and writing only optimistic reports for their sponsors.

Today IDEE is going through tough times. The National Endowment for Democracy, which supports hundreds of projects around the world, has decided to stop helping IDEE. This may seem strange, but it is part of a larger trend. Like many other philanthropic foundations, NED now prefers to support projects that have fewer real results, are less confrontational toward totalitarian regimes, and are more comfortable for those who write flowery reports from the safety of emigration.

There is nothing new under the sun, as Ecclesiastes rightly noted. There are thousands who take care of themselves and few who care for those who have no freedom. IDEE has done much for such people and, God willing, will do even more.

The Meetings of the Centers for Pluralism

The Meetings of the Centers for Pluralism are a forum for transborder cooperation, sharing of experiences, and assisting colleagues from different countries. There have been 18 full meetings of the Centers for Pluralism, the last in Baku, where 80 participants from 22 countries attended, as well as 9 regional meetings. The CfP Meetings inspired similar transborder events, such as the Women's Networking in the Caucasus and Women's Networking in Central Asia workshops, as well as thematic meetings, such as the Moscow and Sofia Symposia on Postcommunism and the Kyiv and Zagreb Symposia on the Rise of Nationalism. Below are scenes and portraits from these CfP Meetings.



Ronald Koven, European Representative of the World Press Freedom Committee, at the monument of Hasan Bey Zardabi, considered the father of Azeri journalism, who published the first newspaper in the Azeri language, Ekinchi, in 1875. Baku, 1997.



Transborder cooperation: Julia Kharashvili, Muborak Tashpulatova, Luminita Petrescu, and Irena Lasota: four trainers at the Women's Networking in the Caucasus meeting in Lekhani, Georgia.



Marek Nowicki, director of the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation in Warsaw, Poland, with Andrei Blinushev, director of Karta/Memorial-Ryazan.



Ivlian Haindrava, Ulvi Hakimov (Azerbaijan National Democratic Foundation), and Vahid Gazi.



Ales Bialacki, chairman of the working group of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs in Belarus, explains the independent monitoring campaign in Belarus to participants in Baku.



Undral Gombodorj



Ivlian Haindrava and Irena Lasota with Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian participants at the first CfP Caucasus Regional Meeting in December 2000, organized by the Center for Development and Cooperation in Tbilisi. Credit: IDEE



Narangeral Rinchin, Center for Citizenship Education (Mongolia), Irena Lasota, Novella Jafarava (Azerbaijan), and Ales Bialacki (Belarus) in a meeting with the newly created NGO election coalition SOS in Azerbaijan.

10 YEARS OF CENTERS FOR PLURALISM

Words That Come To Mind

by Miljenko Dereta

Miljenko Dereta, an award-winning film director, joined the anti-war opposition in Serbia in the early 1990s. He was president of the Executive Committee of the Civic Alliance from 1992 to 1996 and was a founding member of the Executive Board of the Social Democratic Party led by Zarko Korac. Since 1996, he has been Executive Director of Civic Initiatives, one of Serbia's most prominent NGOs.



Credit: IDEE

ACTION

The first time I met Irena Lasota was in Belgrade in December 1993 when she came as part of a group of independent election monitors. Wars were going on, Serbia was in chaos faced with nationalistic euphoria, an inexperienced and disunited opposition, disastrous inflation, sanctions, Milosevic at the peak of his power. A day before the elections, I took her to a public meeting of the Belgrade Circle, a prominent group of opposition intellectuals. Hundreds of people were gathered in the hall listening to speakers on the stage. Irena asked: "What are they talking about?" "Intellectuals and war," I replied. "What!?! They should be out sticking posters and distributing leaflets." And she left. I followed. Her experience in the successful fight against an oppressive communist regime in Poland was concentrated in one principle, one word, so dear to my moviemaker's ears: Action! This principle is the foundation for all of what Civic Initiatives has been doing in the last seven years. We educate, encourage, and prepare citizens to take action concerning their own destiny.

LISTENING

For me, the Centers for Pluralism is sharing and listening. The impression of informality at CFP meetings is in fact opening a space for personal contacts, for provocative discussions that help us learn about each other's work, and for talking about problems and solutions.

In our work, I view the listening process as a transfer of information from the grassroots to the donor. In this process, the donor-listener is all the time challenged not to use the initiative-killing sentence, "I know what you need and I am going to give it to you." In six years, we never went anywhere to sell "a universal miracle medicine." We talked to local people and organizations and together we helped define their priorities. Our partners participated in all steps of the process. This approach provided maximum results and taught them also to listen better to what was happening around them.

When we started our programs of democratic education, we turned for support to experienced individuals from the region. We found them in the Centers for Pluralism. They had some of the answers we needed. The late Jakub Karpiński was one of the first lecturers in our Democracy Seminar Program. We translated his books and he came personally to seminars in South Serbia to share his experiences from the Polish underground and the first years of post-communist transition. He succeeded to merge political theory and individual involvement into an inspirational call for action. Later we had guests from Romania, Belarus, Hungary, and Slovakia. We listened and learned a lot. But what we felt most was that we shared the same values with people throughout the region and that if need be we could rely on them. It is hard to express in words how much it helped and encouraged us – just to know that you are not alone with your problems and that changes are possible since they happened somewhere else.

Today, with the spreading of the network towards the Caucasus and further eastward, Civic Initiatives is trying to play the same role and to share experience of a victory over a dictatorship and to support those that still have to fight for the first steps towards democracy in their countries.

INNOVATION

"Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges" (BBBB) was the name we chose for the project that changed Serbia and its NGO scene in many ways. The project was created as a result of an assessment of the needs of Serbia under sanctions, a Serbia under the Milosevic dictatorship, a Serbia impoverished by wars,

traumatized by ethnic cleansing, personal tragedies, apathy, and the absence of hope. It was a multi-level project, combining different activities with different target groups with a common denominator: preparing and motivating citizens for action that will result in overthrowing the regime and building a base for democratic change. One must know that the project was developed in an almost empty social and political space avoided by funders and donors. The very few who were present in Serbia were concentrated in and on Belgrade. There was near-total blindness for anything outside of the capital city.

The approach of BBBB developed a completely different strategy based on trusting the capacity of people living in smaller towns throughout Serbia. We knew of their courage, competence, and – most of all – desire to live in a different society. The whole concept was simple: bring people together from different regions, from different ethnic groups, from different types of organizations all of which had absolutely no communication and thus no consciousness of having a common goal and sharing a complementary role in society. Activists from political parties, trade unions, student organizations, media, and NGOs got a chance to meet, learn about each other, talk and quarrel and most importantly to see that without cooperation and mutual support we will never achieve our goal.

We encouraged people to learn, to work together, to value solidarity, to create networks such as the Centers for Pluralism.

FLEXIBILITY

The situation in Serbia imposed a specific approach. The overall goal was clear, but the way to get there had to be redefined almost on a daily basis. The unpredictability of the regime's repression could be defeated only by improvisation and flexibility. Both imply a clear, well defined vision of the end result and serious preparations for "just in case. . ." situations.

Flexibility means not only changing the time schedules. It means reacting to emerging challenges imposed by oppressive regimes. When the law restricting municipal authority was passed as Milosevic's attempted means to take back towns controlled by the opposition, overnight we changed the theme of our democracy program to "Defend the Towns." A series of previously unplanned Town Hall Meetings were organized and citizens got an opportunity to express their readiness to support the opposition.

In Serbia, such flexibility worked perfectly, to a degree that it even influenced an institution such as USAID, which financed our joint program with IDEE. It took risks. It understood the specifics of Serbian situation and worked differently and it resulted in victory of those they supported. I think

they should do it more often, even in so called "normal" situations. Too often I see projects implemented according "to the last word written on paper" – and fail. With just a little flexibility to meet the needs existing in real life, the impact of such projects could be enormously bigger. But this is another story.

TRUST

Being a member of the Centers for Pluralism is now for us an obligation to open the doors of Serbia to the whole region. At the same time, it was an opportunity for IDEE to enter Serbia and find other partners. Eric Chenoweth talked to many people. He chose to work with Civic Initiatives (CI), Yugoslav Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM), and Students' Union of Serbia (SUS), organizations that were at the very beginnings. We met in private flats, worked on kitchen tables, and in cafes. We worked together. Today these three organizations are among the most important institutions of civil society in Serbia, recognized in the region and respected on the Euro-Atlantic level. How proud can one be when hearing young people from Azerbaijan talking about SUS or Belarusians talking about CI?

I have to add that most of the local organizations that received their first grants from the "BBBB" small-grant budget are today centers of local networks, local resource centers, and otherwise leading local organizations. This



The Centers for Pluralism returned to Budapest in October 2000 for the CFP's first regional meeting, hosted by the Democracy After Communism. Above, Civic Initiatives and Otpor representatives demonstrate the effectiveness of NGO election campaigns just after the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic. The poster at right, part of the Izlaz (Exit) 2000 coalition campaign of NGOs coordinated by Civic Initiatives, reads "The Sun Always Rises After Darkness."



Credit: IDEE

was again possible because IDEE used regional experience, combined different strategies, but above all because they were listening, not imposing, and had trust in local capacities.

This respect for local initiatives and trust in local capacities implemented through the “BBBB” small grants program became the basis for founding the Balkan Community Initiative Fund (BCIF) in 1999 during the bombing of Yugoslavia. Today, BCIF is in a process of transformation into the region’s first local endowment. This is called collateral gain.

VISION

A training workshop on NGO management organized by the Centers for Pluralism jointly with the Democracy After Communism Foundation in Budapest at the end of 1993 brought together the representatives of organizations from several countries. It obviously helped each of them to work better and more efficiently, but it was the event that was the turning point for the future development of the NGO sector in Serbia. One of the participants invited by the CfP, at the time representing the Center for Antiwar Action, was Dubravka Velat – known familiarly as Bube. She realized that the kind of knowledge being shared in the workshop would help speed up and sustain development of the NGO sector in Serbia. She shared her vision with Eric and got full support. She fundraised for a training seminar in Belgrade, held under sanctions, and after that for a training of trainers program. That is how Tim TRI was created. In the last 5 years, trainers of Tim TRI trained more than 5,000 people from 1,300 organizations in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Georgia, Macedonia, and Romania. It has done training of trainers programs in Macedonia and Croatia. They trained three additional groups of Tim TRI trainers in Serbia as well trainers for CI’s “Becoming a Citizen” program. I believe that this is the most successful NGO development project in the region. It started with the Centers for Pluralism. It was developed with support of IDEE, OXFAM, and BBBB. But the basis of the success was a vision of several people and support of others that understood and trusted their determination.

COURAGE

Working in Serbia in the period of Milosevic was dangerous for local activists and in a certain sense even more for foreign ones. Irena and Eric visited several times Belgrade, each time exposing themselves to police repression and serious difficulties. The fact that they met face to face not only with Civic Initiatives but also with local partners was not only respected but as well

it was a great support and encouragement for people involved in a difficult struggle. It showed that the media propaganda of the regime, which repeatedly spoke about the West hating Serbia, is a lie, that our democratic forces had friends and support.

FRIENDS

There are 20 countries in which today I have real friends. I met them all in the Centers for Pluralism meetings. They proved in difficult times that the CfP is more than working together, more than sharing the same value system, more than having a common vision of the future. I sincerely believe that one of the most valuable achievements of CfP are these friendships, which are a guarantee that relations between our countries will be maintained for a long time. I will not make a list of my friends. I will just say that when I mention their names to their countrymen, they nod with respect. It makes me proud.

MODESTY

It takes modest people to do what IDEE and Centers for Pluralism have done for ten years. Working in low profile was a pre-condition for success. If the CfP became a well advertised network, it would be much more difficult, even impossible for us to enter many countries and do all the precious work we did. My first analogy was to pioneers, but on reflection I think that foundation builders is more appropriate. Looking at wonderful buildings, no one ever asks “Who built the basement?” Well, we did. All of us in the CfP and IDEE. For 10 years, we were building the foundation of new democracies in Europe. And do not worry. We are still around to see that the building holds.

The Mission Is Not Yet Accomplished

by Vahid Gazi

Vahid Gazi is director of the Inam Center for Pluralism in Azerbaijan and the editor of its publication Third Sector. The following article was written just before the 18th Meeting of the Centers for Pluralism, held in Baku.



Vahid Gazi and Vehid Sehic, director of the Forum of Tuzla Citizens, at the 9th CFP Meeting, held in Baku in April 1997.

Credit: IDEE

Soon, we will celebrate ten years of our Network on the coast of the Caspian Sea. It is an historic event.

The Network's beginning coincides with the beginning of independence of my country. Today, I am the citizen of a state whose national struggle for independence, independence from Russia, raised at the end of the 1980s, was finally achieved in 1992. Today, I also count myself a member of the Centers for Pluralism Network, which provides support for the rehabilitation of societies that were materially and morally ruined by communism.

At this 18th Meeting of the Centers for Pluralism we will meet our friends again. We will speak about problems, news, successes, failures, joint activities, cooperation, conditions under authoritarianism and conditions under democracy. I will get to find out from Miljenko the meaning of Zoran Djindjic's assassination and from Vincuk about the new "reforms" of Lukashenka.¹ I will have to answer Petruška's question: "Will Aliyev once more be elected president this year?!"

For this meeting, we must be prepared very seriously. It is a meeting where we will have to report. We who celebrated our tenth anniversary of state

¹ Vincuk Viaëorka, Chairman of the Belarus Popular Front Party "Adradjenne," was unable to attend the CFP Meeting due to his arrest and ten-day sentencing on March 26 by a Belarusian judge for "organizing an unauthorized gathering."

independence must give a report at the Network's tenth anniversary and stress what we have done during these ten years, what successes we have achieved, what difficulties we have, and why.

At this Meeting, we must also ask two questions: What did the CFP Network achieve during the last ten years? And should it continue its activity?

For me, it is important to keep in mind the last ten years of Azerbaijan's history when responding to these two questions. If I compare the ten years of independence of Azerbaijan and the ten years of the Centers for Pluralism Network, they are not parallel at all. Of course, Azerbaijan is an independent country and Azerbaijan's independence has been strengthened during these years. Hundreds of thousands of people who went into the streets obtained one of their two aims, "freedom," but not their second aim, democracy, and the struggle for democracy is not yet accomplished.

One might ask what has all this to do with the CFP Network? My answer is short. The influence of the Centers for Pluralism on Azerbaijan's democratization process is directly related.

In 1995, when the Center for Pluralism Inam was founded, only a few persons in the whole country knew the essence of the words civil society, non-governmental organization, the third sector, or pluralism. At this time, the CFP Inam began its work among public activists and initiative groups, organizing schools for young political leaders, monitoring of elections, seminars, educational publications, and training. For Inam, the Center for Pluralism Network held incomparable opportunity for the spread of democratic ideas in our country. Under the framework of the Network, there were implemented numerous programs. Hundreds of politicians and public activists, young and old, from Baku and from the provinces, men and women, recognized scholars and local activists all made visits to democratic countries for the first time and gained invaluable experience. Hundreds of democrats came to Azerbaijan to lecture, provide training, exchange experiences, or observe the elections. Today, the establishment of dozens of active NGOs and the expansion of their activity is a result of the programs implemented by Inam through the Network. The Center for Pluralism Inam together with its numerous partner organizations is actively participating in the process of forming civil society in our country.

I remember in March 1997 when we publicized in the country's media that the 9th Meeting of the Centers for Pluralism Network would take place in Baku. The news reported that 50 known democrats from Eastern Europe and elsewhere would be attending, including Luminita Petrescu, adviser on NGO issues to the Romanian president, Emil Constantinescu. Five days after the publication of this news, I received a call from the presidential apparatus from someone introducing himself as the chief of the department on NGO issues. He

expressed his wish to meet with Ms. Petrescu. To my question, "Do we have such a department?" he responded, "Yes, it was founded two days ago." This was at a time when members of the parliament were calling NGOs anti-state organizations.

The Centers for Pluralism Network made real and unparalleled achievements and created great opportunities for the development of cooperative links between political parties and public organizations of Azerbaijan and other countries. The Musavat Party of Azerbaijan and its allies from the Democratic Congress established cooperation with the Rukh Movement of Ukraine, the Belarus Popular Front, the Republican Party of Georgia, and other pro-democratic parties.

It was odd that through the Centers for Pluralism Network, Azeri organizations, activists, and scholars renewed their long lost contacts first with the Crimean Tatars and then with democrats in Central Asia. At the beginning of the 20th Century, these were very natural contacts. Crimea and Azerbaijan were linked by the same current of liberal reformation and in the first years after the Bolshevik revolution, both had emerged with an alternative to communism in the form of liberal democracy. After seventy years, we started again to visit the Crimean Tatars and they visited us. We developed common programs and, together with our Romanian, Mongolian, Georgian, and other colleagues from the CfP Network, we started to do joint programs in Central Asia.

Wherein lies the strength of the Network? Its first strength is the people gathered within it. These are people with experience who know very well what they want and what they are fighting for. They are constantly learning and ready to pass on to others their experience. Members of the CfP Network and those working with them believe that joint activity and cooperation in building a democratic society in postcommunist countries can succeed. The CfP Network is a wide coalition of persons wishing to build a society with equal rights for all citizens, the supremacy of the rule of law, guaranteed freedoms, reliable leaders elected by the citizenry, social welfare, and lack of obstacles for development.

To enter the ranks of this coalition is very easy. The basic requirement is sincerity. If you are sincere, you will obtain what you are looking for and you will be provided every support. At CfP meetings, you can talk for hours and days with persons who struggled against communism, persons who were kept under arrest in prison camps, who participated in democracy's construction, who achieved democratic reforms, or who were preparing for holding democratic power. It could be said that all of these persons have contributed with their activities to the area of human rights protection. They could be called patriots, fanatics of democracy, and human rights extremists.

This is the eighth year of my and Inam's participation in the CfP Network. I have gained numerous new friends during this time. I also saw persons who voluntarily strayed from the Network for the simple reason that they could not follow its simplest requirement. People having no principles and convictions can not stay within the Network for very long because such persons can not find any favorable conditions here.

Should the network continue its activities? Has its activity already been completed?

I will try to respond to this question from the vantage point of Azerbaijan. As I noted at the outset, the Azeri people achieved its wish for an independent state. But I share the view that real national independence does not exist without individual freedom.

Today, Azerbaijan is on the list of countries needing help in the areas of democracy, human rights, and freedom. In most countries active in the Network, free elections have not yet been conducted, legitimate authority has not been formed yet, economic-social reforms have not been undertaken, and people's rights and freedoms are still being violated. In some countries, there prevails a half-democracy; in others, there is full dictatorship. In all these countries, there are democratic groups struggling with authoritarian regimes; the CfP Network or other networks are of great importance in coordination of their activities.

The Centers for Pluralism program is one of the most successful programs implemented by a U.S. institution in the former Soviet Union. Its characteristics are unique. The Network has developed a means to influence the social and political life of countries. The activities of the Network establish the basis for mutual cooperation not only of civic organizations and public associations, but also of political parties and unions. Members of the CfP Network treat its work seriously. It is enough to look at how they participate in election observation to see the difference between the CfP Network's principle of work and that of other international organizations. During the 2000 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, thirty-five members of the CfP Network reported over 500 cases of election falsification and fraud; these facts later were included into the unfortunately few reports of international organizations.

One of my colleagues closely acquainted with the Center for Pluralism program has called it a small variant of the famous Marshall Plan. I share this idea and say to those who may think it is no longer necessary: "Our mission is a democratic independent society: We are independent but the struggle for democracy is ongoing. Our mission is not yet completed!"

March 16, 2003

Why Centers for Pluralism?

by Julia Kharashvili

Julia Kharashvili is director of the Association of IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) Women, based in Tbilisi, Georgia, one of three coordinators of IDEE's Networking Women in the Caucasus program.



Trainers Julia Kharashvili, Muborak Tashpulatova, and Heba el Shazli, currently at the National Democratic Institute in Washington, D.C.

Credit: IDEE

In looking back, I try to identify how our NGO, the Association of IDP Women, developed and what conditions were necessary for its successful work.

Our organization was created in 1995, but before this our women already had been working as volunteers – helping children, trying to normalize their lives, and helping just to survive after a severe war had forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in Abkhazia. We started as a small voluntary organization, without structure, without a clear mission. We just wanted to help. Step by step, our group started to carry out more professional activities. The first was a program of psychological and social rehabilitation for IDP women and children in communal centers where persons displaced by armed conflict people found temporary shelter.

We tried to learn from different organizations to increase our capacity to help others. Many professional psychologists and psychiatrists assisted us to understand better what should be done and how.

What became our signature program were peace camps for children from conflict zones. In talking with women, we learned that their main interests were programs for building peace and programs for children's development. We concluded that children are the best messengers of peace and that through children's dialogue we can achieve a dialogue for adults. For this program, we needed international contacts, since organizing a meeting of children from conflict zones was possible only in a third country. Through the network of peace activists in Eastern Europe (facilitated by the Berghof Center for Constructive Conflict Management) we found very good partners in the Center for Open Education in Bulgaria, with whom we have continued to work now for eight years. Our programs have become known not only in Georgia but elsewhere.



The Networking Women in the Caucasus program, modeled on the CfP program, helped women NGO leaders from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to work together across borders and meet with colleagues from Eastern Europe and the U.S. Above, participants at one of three networking meetings in Lekhani, Georgia.

Credit: IDEE

I heard about the Centers for Pluralism for the first time after meeting Beth Ciesielski from Bridges for Education, who visited Tbilisi after participating in the CfP meeting in Baku in 1997. She organized summer camps for teaching conversational English and was interested in our youth camps. She had heard about our initiative from several participants that attended the CfP meeting, including Rusiko Kalichava, an activist from Zugdidi, and a representative of the NGO "Atinati." Nothing came of our meeting, unfortunately.

Several months passed. The situation in the conflict zone worsened; each day was bringing bad news. Very soon military actions started, and in the end of May 1998 a new wave of internally displaced Georgians appeared in Western Georgia on the border with Abkhazia, in the Zugdidi district. Our Association had already enough experience to understand that the sooner psychological assistance could be provided to displaced children and women, the more chances they would have to cope with the trauma without permanent or dramatic consequences. Under the U.N. umbrella, we established a coalition of three NGOs that had experience in emergency assistance. But for successful work we needed a local partner in the area of the displacement itself. I remembered hearing about Rusiko Kalichava,

Armenian, Azeri, and Georgian participants in the seminar demonstrate different forms of national and ethnic dancing, joined by (center row, from left) Muborak Tashpulatova of Uzbekistan, Dilara Setveliyeva of Crimea and Lecha Ilyasov of the Latta Center for Pluralism in Grozny.

Credit: IDEE



the participant from that Baku CfP meeting, and decided to talk with her. She immediately agreed to support our program. With the local NGO Atinati we started a training program for volunteers, “helpers,” who received intensive training how to help traumatized people and how to provide direct assistance to victims. More than 10,000 internally displaced people were assisted through this program and a group of trained “helpers” continues to work with IDPs in different programs of psycho-social assistance and income generation.

Atinati became one of our closest partners in Western Georgia. This joint program not only helped IDPs but also both of our organizations’ development and, later on, that of many others. All this emerged as a result of one CfP meeting which we did not even attend!

In 1999, I was invited for the first time to attend a CfP Meeting, this time in Brasov, Romania. I had participated in many different meetings and networks before this, but what was new and very interesting for me at the CfP meeting was its open exchange of opinions, sometimes very different, and that organizers brought together people with very different views. Some of the participants definitely had different and even confrontational views than the organizers. In the past, I had seen how people in charge of a network always tried to make sure its members had the same views and there was no real debate. In Brasov, I witnessed really pluralistic discussions and everybody had the same right to talk. Another thing which surprised me was the presence of representatives from different parties to conflicts, especially from the Balkans. We already had some experience of working with NGOs from conflict zones in the South Caucasus countries and knew how much effort is needed to bring people from opposite sides of a conflict together and to involve them in civilized discussion without accusations and references to the painful past. Here, at the CfP meeting, people were talking constructively, trying to identify problems and ways which could help build democracy in Eastern Europe and identify civil society’s role in it.

Through the Centers for Pluralism, we found many new friends in Romania, Poland, Serbia, Croatia. The CfP network gave us a chance to work with our friends from Armenia and Azerbaijan. We became more familiar with problems in Belarus and found new friends there. Especially I would like to write about our Crimean Tatar friends, because they became our partners in what for us is a very important peace camp project.

The importance of the *Centers for Pluralism Newsletter* must be emphasized. It includes many useful addresses, basic information, and possibilities to share experiences. Once, when meeting with a very important donor from the UK for the first time, I was told “Oh, I know you, I read your article in the *Centers for Pluralism Newsletter*. Both versions, English and Russian, have been very helpful and assisted in the creation of a new network.

The Centers for Pluralism gave us also an opportunity to enlarge our work. As I wrote above, for a number of years, the Association of IDP Women has organized peace camps in Bulgaria for children from the conflict zones. In these camps Georgian, Abkhazian, and Ossetian children had a chance to live together, to participate in training and entertainment activities, and to learn more about each other and become friends. Our partners for this project were trainers from the Open Education Center in Bulgaria. But our children were growing up and needed a different level of dialogue. So, we designed another step in the program – youth dialogue for peace in the Crimea. The program was initiated by U.N. volunteers in Georgia, but involved also individuals from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine.

Our colleagues from the Crimean Teachers Council brought a deep compassion to these youth, who from childhood had been suffering from the consequences of war. At the same time, a lot of knowledge, wisdom, and humor became part of everyday life in the camp. Dilara Setveliyeva, president of the Council, had participated many times as a trainer in workshops for Georgian women leaders as past members of the Women in the Caucasus network that had been built under the IDEE umbrella over the previous three years. Another friend, a trainer from Uzbekistan, Muborak Tashpulatova, came this year to Tbilisi to assist us to prepare a training team comprised of both IDP women and men. Luminita Petrescu, our colleague from the Romanian Foundation for Pluralism, has consulted us for several years on how to design programs in civic education and how to become a better leader. There have been many others who all contributed to the development of our organization.

A major initiative begun under IDEE's sponsorship involving the Centers for Pluralism Network, "Working Together – Networking Women in Caucasus" had many other significant achievements. After three years of activity, more than twenty-five organizations from the South Caucasus are continuing successful cooperation in a manner similar to the Centers for Pluralism itself.

Our common work began with a women's leadership program involving eight women's organizations from each South Caucasus country, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. When needed, Georgia's women were able to play the role of mediators and helpers to their friends from countries in conflict to start cooperation. From year to year, the program was broadened to include more and more components. From participation in training seminars to cooperation in small cross border projects, to consolidation of efforts and achieving a common understanding of peace and reconciliation issues. It was a long and difficult path these women made together during those years.

The Women's Networking in the Caucasus program made significant changes as it developed. First, the entire network became gender inclusive, thus involving men as well as women. If during the first years the main accent of activities was on NGO and leadership skills, later the focus was on political leadership was added and many women and men political and civic leaders

joined the network. During the last year, the Network included publication of the newsletter *Working Together in the Caucasus* (in four languages: Georgian, Armenian, Azeri, and Russian). It also included organizing citizens' forums (town hall meetings) in three countries on topical issues facing the community, such as youth and unemployment, women in politics, local authorities and NGOs, etc. With the facilitation of IDEE, we also held a training workshop in negotiations with the participation of trainers from the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). Ray Caldwell and Anne Henderson, organized for thirty leaders from the South Caucasus.

At the same time, members of the network activated their own work in the community and helped create a lot of branch and regional organizations, both in registering them with the authorities and in helping initiate their work. This cooperation of South Caucasus NGOs, which became obvious and clear for the members of the network, is still very unique in our region. These are initiatives that need to be supported. Each year, the network's activities allowed us to include new members from different regions, political and civic movements, parties and people with different views and backgrounds who agreed on the idea of cooperating for peace and democracy. It is no coincidence that a majority of leaders of organizations of this network are also members of the Centers for Pluralism network.

Last year, when the South Caucasus Women's Network started a new program of citizens' forums, the Centers for Pluralism assisted us once more. With the help of small grants, we succeeded in organizing a transborder forum in Batumi, a seaside town located near the border with Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, bringing together NGO leaders, experts, government representatives, members of parliament, and youth from all three South Caucasus countries. Together they discussed the consequences of migration flows, how to prevent them, what to do with trafficking, and illegal migrants. The forum elaborated recommendations that were then published and sent to everyone who had concern for migration problems.

The Centers for Pluralism has fostered the ability to think creatively and independently. It has given the possibility to listen to highly qualified experts, after which you better understand the politics and challenges of contemporary times. From our CfP colleagues we also have learned how to cope with fears and how to become more free. During the first meeting I was only a listener. During the second, I started to discuss with people during the breaks. At the third meeting, in Lviv, I already took the liberty to facilitate a session on education for tolerance and to disagree in some points with people with whom I had very high respect. We were learning each time, what is real democracy, and what is leadership. And behind all of this process was standing one person, Irena Lasota, a woman whom many of us consider our symbol of independence and freedom. And we know that Centers for Pluralism will continue to exist simply because they are so necessary for those who devoted their lives to serve society and because, simply, it is a real network, built by responsible people.

Zones of Cooperation: Women Networking in Central Asia

by Muborak
Tashpulatova

Muborak Tashpulatova is director of the Tashkent Public Education Center and was coordinator of the Women Networking in Central Asia program.



Muborak Tashpulatova, accepting the 2002 Democracy Award of the National Endowment for Democracy, as (from right) First Lady Laura Bush, Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky, and Senator Joseph Biden listen. Credit: IDEE

IDEE's directors and I were at work in Washington, D.C. planning the Civic Partners-Women Networking in Central Asia program and I unfortunately had little time for my son. He planned his own visits to museums, parks, and the sites of the city. I will always remember when he returned from the zoo. Irena Lasota asked him if he saw the famous panda and the exotic animals from Africa, but he answered without enthusiasm. When we asked if there was something he liked better, he perked up and his eyes shone.

"The squirrels!" he said.

Why squirrels?

"Because they are free. They go wherever they want and have a good time," he answered.

Today, in Central Asia, we are separated by borders, and it is hard to be free, to go wherever we want, or to meet and talk to our neighbors, despite having many similar traditions, customs, and problems. Through this program, we had a chance to learn together, to share our experience, and undertake projects together.

The Civic Partners project lasted for one year (August 2001-September 2002), sponsored by the Bureau for Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State. Its main goal was to establish a network of connections between women leaders of NGOs in three of the five Central Asian countries:



Participants at the third workshop of the Women's Networking in Central Asia in program, held in Tashkent in May 2002. Credit: IDEE

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Through the support of IDEE's Centers for Pluralism program, we also included women leaders from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and trainers from throughout the region.

Four main activities were carried out: (1) a training program for women leaders; (2) a study tour to the United States; (3) a small grants program; and (4) guidebooks for NGOs. An open competition was held among the NGOs of Central Asia to participate in the program. Altogether, forty-two participants were selected from the five Central Asian countries. As the project progressed, the list of participants changed both quantitatively and qualitatively. After the first seminar, the participants from Turkmenistan were replaced practically in total, since the people first recommended to us turned out to be representatives of pro-government organizations or of organizations founded by business interests. Also, it was decided after the first seminar to bring in representatives of groups from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, since those countries are also interested in interregional collaboration and have made great strides in that direction.

The first stage of the program consisted of four seminars on the following topics: "NGOs and Civic Society," "Interregional Collaboration," "Methods for Effectively Involving Citizens in Problem-Solving" and "Teamwork and the Ethics of NGOs." Trainers from Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, Tajikistan, and Ukraine were invited for these seminars. They were all active in various aspects of interregional cooperation or worked in similar Centers for Pluralism projects.

At the first seminar, the women learned how to involve others in their efforts

and how to raise money for various needs. Participants from Tajikistan recounted their experience with women's clubs and their mutual-support programs for women in business. Our partners from the Association for Scientific and Technical Expertise have implemented a program to reduce poverty in agricultural regions of Tajikistan. At the beginning, it was hard to imagine how NGOs could solve such problems. But they gathered, held discussions, and had arguments. Little by little, these meetings became more formal and turned into clubs for rural women with specific functions. Club support funds were set up in the familiar way of public organizations and used by some to purchase seed, by others for saltpeter, and to celebrate holidays together. Then the idea arose to support these funds themselves, without depending on money from sponsors. For example, they purchased cows collectively, and then rented them out for a year to club members.

It was interesting watching how the women themselves changed with every seminar. At first, everyone sat with people from their own countries. But by the second seminar, the women had found partners from other countries, and they sat together and discussed how they would teach and help each other and share their experiences.

During the second seminar, the women found partners across borders. Ten groups based on common interests were formed with membership from different countries. They planned small, but very important, projects. Ideas for joint projects had been in the works since the first seminar. It was a natural process, since the participants lived either in regions bordering on other states or work in some sphere connected with conflict resolution.

Staying in contact between face-to-face meetings, the partners had the basics of their projects laid out by the time of the third seminar in May-June 2002, and ten of them were submitted to IDEE for consideration as small grants. They were all approved and successfully implemented, which, of course, inspired everyone to further cooperation beyond the activities supported by the grants. New partners were found for additional grants.

Already by the third seminar, the projects were beginning to take off. Women from Tajikistan came to Uzbekistan and learned cultural handicrafts, became acquainted with what women's organizations do, and met women from different places to talk about their common problems. Uzbek women traveled to Tajikistan to learn from their colleagues about organizing women's clubs, developing family businesses, and how to weave carpets.

Cultural figures, handicraftsmen, artists, and performers from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan gathered to find ways to reduce tension and conflict in society through their professional activities. They formed a regional cultural association for the Fergana Valley and decided to work together. Sasha Gamirov,

head of the 21st Century Uzbekistan Cultural and Educational Center and one of the male participants of the program, produced a play based on Carlo Goldoni. Participants made plans to stage the play in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in a bi-lingual adaptation. In the play, the absurd is used to let the viewer see and contemplate the nature of conflict between two families that had arisen so long ago that no one remembered how it started, but no one would end it.

The ten projects funded through the small grants program – all developed as a result of the training – not only turned out to be successful, but also contributed to the creation of the “partnerships” anticipated in the name of the project. This is what seminar participant Nadezhda Sokolova, from the Fawn Children's Ecology Club in Seidi, Turkmenistan, wrote: “We, women from a little town in Turkmenistan, spent five unforgettable days in the wonderful city of Bukhara. . . . Nine women from Lebap Velayat and an experienced trainer from Tashkent carefully worked out ways to make our thoughts and ideas understood to audiences large and small. After the seminar, we visited local public organizations and learned much of personal and professional interest, shared our experience and exchanged informational materials. We parted with the warm feeling of leaving behind many new friends in Bukhara. The “Civic Partnerships” built between the public organizations of different countries gave rise to the construction of still more bridges. Only together can we solve the problems that are so similar to us all.”

In July 2002, six women from the program from Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan traveled to the United States for a two-week study tour organized by IDEE. They visited NGOs, the U.S. State Department, and many other institutions. The main aim was to acquaint the women with international organizations that might help them address problems of those living in Central Asia. The interns made new contacts and gained assurance that the experience of NGOs in the United



Novella Jafarova-Applebaum, chairman of the Association for the Protection of Women's Rights in Azerbaijan, shares her experiences with colleagues in Central Asia at a Tashkent seminar of the Women's Networking program in June 2002.

Credit: IDEE

States was applicable in their local organizations.

Another part of the project was the publication in Uzbek, Russian, Tajik and Turkmen of four brochures for Central Asian NGOs. The editorial board decided to highlight the work of the Tajikistan Association for Scientific and Technical Expertise in a brochure entitled *Microcredit*. The unique women's clubs of Tajikistan were the subject of the brochure *A Woman's Lot*. The brochure *How and Where to Get Money* covered grant writing, with practical tips and a list of donor organizations active in Central Asia. *Using Civic Forums as a Means for Problem Solving* described how to conduct a civic forum as a platform to discuss and solve social problems. The editorial board worked by electronic mail. We circulated, reviewed, and edited the material in that manner. The results of our efforts, as intended, were interesting and useful mini-textbooks.

The contacts made through the Civic Partners program have proven to be so strong that members of various groups from different countries continue to work together after the formal end of the grant. For example, Askana, a group that defends the rights of the handicapped in Kyrgyzstan, and 21st Century Uzbekistan launched four more joint projects in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to revive the ancient school of ceramics and handiwork found there, to organize a festival of folk costumes, and to establish theaters there. The Peacemakers Group of Kyrgyzstan and Oila in Tajikistan held a joint seminar on women's rights in the border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and establish women's clubs in the border areas. The Peacemakers Group also established a joint project for teachers in the border areas of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan with Tarakkiet Fergana Informational and Educational Center of Uzbekistan on a program focused on tolerance, human rights and interactive teaching methods.

Many members of the Network of Civic Partners met already twice at workshops of the United States Institute of Peace organized in Tashkent, and also at the 18th Meeting of the Centers for Pluralism in Baku in April of this year.

We take enormous pride in observing that the Civic Bridges project will have a lasting effect. Damira Tukhtasinova, head of the Tarakkiet Center put it well: "The project gave great impetus to the founding of zones of cooperation. It helped women in the border areas become acquainted and improve connections between villages in those areas and to find out about organizations that can help them become active in society."

H E L P ! ! !

by Ivlian Haindrava

Ivlian Haindrava is director of the Center for Development and Cooperation in Georgia and a prominent independent journalist. As a member of parliament in the early 1990s, he helped draft Georgia's Constitution.

"Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities."

President George W. Bush, West Point, New York, June 1, 2002



The author, Ivlian Haindrava. Credit: IDEE

First of all, thank you!

Heartfelt thanks to the West as a whole and to the United States in particular for the truly invaluable help that has been provided to Georgia and other post-communist countries – political, economic, humanitarian, diplomatic, technical, advisory, and all other aid. I will not speak for anyone else, but I believe that without this aid Georgia could hardly have reached the attainments that it has today as a battered but nonetheless independent, state. The West not only finished off the Evil Empire, it secured the physical survival of the peoples caught beneath its ruins.

The fall of the communist system happened faster than even the most optimistic forecasts, internal or external. It was not carefully dismantled, but crumbled and collapsed. Though some countries were better prepared than others to face such changes, the general level of preparedness was quite low. How well can you prepare for the unknown? The situation at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s was unprecedented. There were no tried and true formulae to turn to for guidance in the completely new global political reality (for the fall of communism was indeed felt throughout the world). Intuition and improvisation were the call of the day, with corrections only following upon new developments. Naturally under such circumstances, there were tactical and strategic mistakes. Those mistakes were made both by the nations that had just gained independence and freedom as well as by the West as it tried to strengthen their independence and promote democracy.

One would think, thirteen years after the Berlin Wall was torn down, that we could sum up the progress of this transition stage. This is not to say that the transition from totalitarianism to democracy, civil society, and a market economy

A step forward?



In Azerbaijan, Western monitors ignored the use of force against political rallies, as shown top, when assessing the conduct of parliamentary elections in September 2000. The elections were called a "step forward." In June 2002, prior to the presidential elections, police again move to attack demonstrators in Baku demanding free and fair elections (above). Credit: IDEE

has been an undiluted triumph in all countries, but rather that the speed and success of this process in various regions and countries has become steady and, therefore, reasonably predictable.¹ In other words, a reality that was for a while quite new became usual, and in turn was replaced by a newer reality and new priorities after September 11, 2001.

New priorities do not always lead to the abandonment of old ones. More often, it is the other way around: the necessity of methodically limiting real and potential bases for international terrorism almost automatically means widening and strengthening the bases of democracy. With this in mind, the utilization of Western aid to the countries that have gotten stuck in the transitional process and that have fallen behind or fallen away from the development of democracy (or maybe even headed back in the opposite direction), is a question of primary significance. The experience of recent years must be carefully reviewed if this issue is to be successfully resolved.

The Aid

By observing that the West's efforts have been less efficient than might be desired, I do not attempt to shift the blame. We, in our misfortune, are the first to bear that responsibility. If Western humanitarian and economic aid has become a powerful source of corruption, our greedy bureaucrats are the ones to be questioned about it, not their nameless, indifferent Western colleagues. If reforms have come to a halt and budget spending going astray has become the norm, the cause should first be sought in the flaws in our state administrative system and only then in the shortcomings of Western advisors who may not always be fully informed of our situation. If the Georgian (and not just the Georgian) parliament is a shelter for shady businessmen and characters looking for legal immunity, international observers sanctioning our elections are not to blame, but rather the voters who fell for the patently improbable promises of such candidates and did not think to vote carefully or wisely.

We, the citizens of this country, are to blame, and no one else.

But where Western money has been spent and will likely continue to be spent in considerable sums it is natural to hope that it be spent in a way that maximizes its use for achieving desired goals. If Westerners considered it their duty to see to it that the food, medical equipment and money reached their intended recipients instead of thinking their role fulfilled at the moment money tranches are deposited in some bank account or humanitarian aid shipments are sent from their embarkation points, there would be much less opportunity for our bureaucrats to misuse such aid. If foreign experts and investors stopped handing out advances based on the good intentions of those in power here, but instead spoke out about the incompetence and venality of our government ministers, then our reforms might not have degenerated into empty phrases and frightening processes. If international observers at our elections would not call a step backward a step forward, and Western leaders not congratulate our presidents for their success after

totally rigged elections, our political prospects might be a little brighter. Such approaches might be cheaper and more productive for the West as well.

Thomas Weiss, professor of political science at the City University of New York, writes that there is a “dark side to aid.” Foreign aid can lead to a sharp rise in corruption, political conflict, and even military conflict (when governmental and criminal groups both grasp for the same aid). As a result, the country’s problems are not solved, but deepened, while living conditions and the economy remain perilous. Foreign aid becomes nothing but a source of enrichment for the local elite and often a means by which incompetent and illegitimate governments hold onto power. Foreign aid used unwisely draws a state into a vicious circle: the country receives no real support; nor does it try to raise itself from the crisis on its own. Rather, it comes to depend on foreign handouts and to require them endlessly. There are indications that a significant part of the foreign aid sent to the former Soviet Union (\$14 billion in ten years from the United States alone) was used by corrupt officials and their cronies in business and criminal enterprises. World Bank economists David Dollar and Lant Pritchett analyzed international aid to 113 countries and came to the sad conclusion that aid is given more often to countries with bad governments and comparatively few poor people than to countries with good governments and many needy.²

People

I have never understood or accepted the Western penchant for former (or not former) KGB agents, (Communist) party leaders, and Komsomol activists. It is beyond my comprehension what moral or professional advantages these ex-guardians of totalitarianism possess for building a civil society as compared to those who devoted their lives to totalitarianism’s destruction. Why should someone be received with open arms after betraying, imprisoning, and exterminating those who fought for freedom and democratic values just because he now says that the system he devoutly defended for decades turned out to be so vicious? Is it based on a calculation that those who were honest and steadfast in the fight to promote Western values and who were willing to risk their own skins will remain allies no matter what, so each communist turncoat represents a bargain purchase and even more convincing evidence of the advantages of the Western lifestyle over the Soviet one? Believe me, there is no need to worry about communist turncoats, who will not suffer in any case. There is still Party money behind them. And Komsomol money. And the Soviet security services’ old boys’ club. It is better to take care of those who never beg for welfare in spite of their real contribution and abilities.

On no account have I forgotten that Western aid to the emerging Third Sector in post-Soviet countries enabled many intellectuals who were no longer needed in their own countries to survive physically and professionally. But what happens to public morality when what people see are Soviet big shots prospering on Western aid and not honorable dissidents?

Well, enough about “our” people. Let’s turn to the Westerners, whom we have seen quite a bit of since the lifting of the Iron Curtain. Frequently they are specialists trying to do what they can (or can’t) to help us. Some specialists, however, come without the slightest knowledge of the countries they are advising. The latter generously share the American experience in organizing election campaigns and fundraising for candidates for state legislatures, or perhaps the Indian experience of community-building in traditionally caste-bound villages. I do not deny that all that information may be of some theoretical interest to some local specialists, but I will say that in Georgia the practical use of all those lectures, seminars, and training sessions was pretty much nonexistent. Expert knowledge of India, combined with complete ignorance of Georgia (such as not knowing that Georgians have their own spoken and written language that is more distant from Russian than Hindi is to English) was both insulting and humorous, neither facilitating the learning process nor contributing to the reputation of the international experts.

Elections

It is with regret that I must say that Western elections observers in the South Caucasus have, knowingly or not, contributed only to the legitimization of shamelessly falsified elections. In 1997, Thomas Carothers commented,

In elections in countries with little history of democracy, particularly in Africa and the former Soviet Union, foreign observers sometimes take the attitude, ‘Well, what can you expect?’ The notion that it is important to offer at least some encouragement to societies that are struggling with the basics leads them to downplay serious problems.³

Two years later, Irena Lasota, President of IDEE, put it more succinctly: “One of the worst ideas was sending unprepared Western electoral “observer brigades” to unfamiliar countries. These untrained observers would spend the night before the election dining at the Sheraton, proceed the following day to a polling booth where a local notable would often be stuffing the boxes with phony ballots before their very eyes, and then return to the Sheraton to declare: “I wish such well-run elections took place in my country.”⁴

Surprisingly, such observations and warnings were ignored. Things continued the same way, as Petruška Šustrová attested to when she served as an independent international observer for IDEE in the fall 1999 parliamentary elections in Georgia. Here is a part of what she wrote about the experience:

So, why do OSCE observers claim that the elections in Georgia were a step forward? Something is explained also by Mr. Michael Ochs who had monitored many elections as an observer for the OSCE. He told us even before the event that there would be cheating in the elections but that in Georgia the situation was better than, for example, in Kazakhstan.

He is surely right, but I believe that the honesty and regularity of the Georgian elections can be judged solely by Georgian laws. The United States welcomed Shevardnadze's victory. This is understandable; his drive towards Europe is definitely closer to the advanced world than Aslan Abashidze's orientation towards Russia which could bring even further problems to the region which is already full of turbulence. But what about the citizens of Georgia? What about the voters who saw the rigging of the elections with their own eyes, and are now told that the world regards this as "occasional excesses" which are beside the point? After all, democracy in the country is created neither by Shevardnadze nor by some other prominent politician but by the participation of people in public events: and many Georgian citizens feel deceived and sold out to "higher political interests."⁵

As a result of all this, we got the excesses of the April 2000 Georgian presidential election and the August 2002 referendum in Azerbaijan. It is even embarrassing to call them an "election" or a "referendum." It seems that just using these words for such events in the countries of the former Soviet Union can stir such wild enthusiasm in the West that flagrant distortions of the people's will are simply ignored. This attitude, besides distorting the very idea of elections, is deeply insulting. We are looked upon as uncivilized savages, for whom the conduct of just an election-like process is reason for exultation among our more civilized brethren. However, Irena Lasota points out that, "In the Republic of Georgia, the elections of October 1990 were free and pluralistic and attracted a turnout of over 70 percent, despite Soviet laws, Soviet pressure, and a lack of money, both local and foreign. Thus the first round of elections in countries emerging from communism required neither substantial foreign investment nor extensive voter-education initiatives. Voters in the region knew what real elections were all about. They knew that they had to vote to change their lives, and in most cases they even knew exactly whom they wanted to vote for or against."⁶

Fareed Zakaria writes that "If a country holds elections, Washington and the world will tolerate a great deal from the resulting government, as they have with Yeltsin, Akaev, and Menem. In an age of images and symbols, elections are easy to capture on film. (How do you televise the rule of law?) But there is life after elections, especially for the people who live there."⁷

Occasionally we are told that free and fair elections, while being quite important, hardly represent the single defining element in a democracy. Naturally they don't. A nearly mathematical equation has been formulated in this regard: free and fair elections are a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. Necessary! Meaning that if the necessary condition is not met, what we have is something other than democracy. Just what this something represents is not our concern here. What must be said is that the permissiveness of some Western institutions in aiding democracy is cultivating something other than democracy in several post-Soviet states. One of the principal jobs of Western institutions is

to observe elections and give strict, impartial assessments of their conduct. Such assessments should be followed by appropriate reactions of international organizations and governments of democratic states. But when such aid results in Georgia moving from the ranks of "electoral democracies" (in 1997-99) to that of "parasitical authoritarian states" (in 2000-02), a question arises about its usefulness: Was this really the West's strategic aim?

Strategic Aims

The proper question is: What is the West's strategy? The goal has been clearly stated as assistance in building and developing democracy and civil society. The issue of strategy is more complex, however.

Any strategy requires long-term programs, clearly defined priorities, and intermediate goals. In the South Caucasus, all genuine NGOs are wholly and fully dependent on Western sponsors; there is simply no local money for civil society. How can an NGO plan educational and other long-term programs with specific groups if only short-term projects are funded? Otherwise, these are just one-time events, the most expensive of which turn into NGO tourism and a good time for all. Western organizations do have long-term projects, but the local implementers of those projects, as a rule, are not given long-term projects of their own to run. In addition, there is a lack of coordination among Western organizations that allows strange overlaps to occur. Several NGOs have been known to do the same thing. However, they have done it not only independently, but without knowledge of each other's achievements and failures. In other words, they are all reinventing the wheel. Various sponsors offer seminars and training sessions that are identical to each other not only in content (which is not surprising), but also participants (which is surprising). For example, the U.S.-based International Republican Institute began operating in Georgia in the second half of the 1990s with the same type of program that the National Democratic Institute had begun several years earlier.

Regulars on the seminar circuit raise other questions too. Chekhov said that if you beat it enough you can teach a rabbit to light matches. That may be true, but what is the use of a match-lighting rabbit? It would probably just burn something down. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems, with remarkable obstinacy, holds annual training sessions for members of the Azerbaijani Central Elections Committee. The effectiveness of this training became apparent in the referendum of August 24, 2002, when the CEC declared completely falsely that a majority of voters had turned out and a communist-era 80 percent had voted in favor of amendments enhancing the president's powers. Furthermore, it is not clear why years of training are necessary for even the most complex details of (lawful) elections – it's not quantum physics after all.

Finally, Western donors and sponsors have literally scared to death some NGOs in the South Caucasus by saying that if they are discovered to be connected with political parties, they will be deprived of their grants. Now, no two

parties are alike. An NGO that collaborates with communists, Nazis, and similar fundamentalists is one thing, but isolating NGOs from democratic parties is a senseless and harmful strategy. The real democratic forces in post-Soviet countries are limited to democratic political groups, genuine non-governmental organizations, the truly independent media, and individual, unorganized intellectuals. These democrats have practically no funds of their own and they vie with the Soviet nomenklatura and Komsomol activists, who have the resources of the Communist Party, the Komsomol, and manifold antidemocratic, backward-looking forces, including some abroad who have no qualms about offering assistance. So why should a Georgian think tank *not* provide intellectual support to a like-minded political group? Doesn't the prohibition against such collaboration go against the stated strategic goal?

From a strategic point of view, Western aid should be rational, stable, and bold. Yes, bold, as it was in Croatia, Slovakia, and Serbia, where broad civil-democratic coalitions played decisive roles in the transition to democracy. Hesitation is shortsighted. If Milosevic could be bombed and then hauled before a tribunal, Shevardnadze and Aliyev at least can be made to hold fair elections.

Everything Else⁹

It is curious that there exists such a thing as fashion in the broad sweep that is called the building and development of democracy in the post-Soviet Union. I do not know who the trendsetter is, but suddenly, and without any obvious cause, funders have made demands for very specific projects. Local partners are quickly chosen who are clearly incapable, competent only in making a mess of even the best of ideas. It is hard to see why gender-studies programs were more needed in Georgia in 2000 than in 1998 or 2002. Who decided that that was a vital priority for Georgia in 2000?

At other times, we have seen donors' haste and lack of preparedness in critical situations. For instance, desperately needed humanitarian aid delivered for Chechen refugees in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge resulted in the rise of tension in the area. Living conditions for many residents of that mountain district were, and still are, difficult, and the convoys of trucks that passed them by did nothing to strengthen ties of trust, respect, and sympathy for the refugees from the neighboring country.

Disdain and tactlessness toward the local residents appears in other forms, too. A skilled worker in an international mission or delegation, say a driver, if he has a Western passport, will receive a salary ten times greater than his colleague with a post-Soviet passport and five times more than that of a local specialist working in the same place. A Western chauffeur hardly drives ten times better on Georgian roads than a local chauffeur, while the local specialists are much more expert in the topics of specialized delegations than any Western driver. I do not reject that a driver or a specialist in human rights from safe, calm Norway should receive more for working in Georgia ("risk pay") than he or she would

for working in Norway. But payment should be handled more tactfully, so as not to belittle the people who are their reason for being there.

Continuing on the same topic, I have some additional questions. Has even one project financed by the West been openly declared a failure? In what donor organization's annual report is it written that a project was unsuccessful because it was poorly conceived and carried out? Is all the activity of every national and international foundation, institute, mission, delegation and so on a brilliant achievement and success and that the only thing needed is a continuation of such brilliant achievement and success? Is that how everything looks from Washington (Strasbourg, Brussels, Vienna)? Things look somewhat different from Tbilisi (Baku, Yerevan, Kyiv, Chisinau, Minsk).

Let me restate: we are the ones who must solve our many problems. But Western aid (or, God forbid, the lack of it) can significantly determine the success or failure of democratic development in the post-Soviet countries. Strengthening democracy and broadening its impact are the cornerstones of Western policy. In those parts of the world where people's fates are uncertain, those who wish them well should hold to clear, sensible, conscientious and transparent plans of action to achieve their stated goals.

• • •

In conclusion, I present a few brief observations of the Center for Development and Cooperation-CfP from its six years working with the Centers for Pluralism network.

Participants: In the last few years, a steady, cooperative network has been maintained among NGOs and individuals *who have a clear awareness of common problems and regional differences, who share experiences and information, and who maintain clear channels of communication.* Naturally, there were people just passing through who quickly disappeared. But their places were taken by those who were better able to appreciate the atmosphere, principles and methods of the Centers for Pluralism.

Organization: One remarkable distinction of the CfP network is its absence of structured organization. It is the situation of no "leaders" and no "subordinates." The IDEE office in Washington does not command, but facilitates activities within the network. It suggests rather than assigns and supports rather than demands. Hence every national CfP has its own identity and defines and prioritizes its own activities. As a result, the Centers for Pluralism never fail to be useful and interesting to each other.

Meetings. Recently, we have struck upon a means to maintain regular communication: one general meeting and three regional meetings (Southwestern, Southeastern and Eastern regions) per year. This provides a forum where regional problems can be tied to more general problems. There is a natural eastward drift as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and other countries are integrated into European and Euro-Atlantic organizations and civil society in those coun-

tries takes on new priorities. New NGOs are appearing on the CfP map in Central Asia and Mongolia at the same time.

Finances: IDEE's support of NGOs in post-Soviet countries is a model for obtaining big results from relatively small outlays. Events sponsored by IDEE attract their audiences not by the promise of luxury, but by their timeliness and interest. Modest IDEE "institutional" grants have gotten NGOs in many regions up and moving. The regrettable affair concerning the IDEE Warsaw office, in which a long-standing member of the Centers for Pluralism was discovered to have descended into a morass of impropriety and debt, confirms that there are no rules without exceptions. Any organization can fall into the trap. But the broad number of truly effective organizations supported by the IDEE and the wide range of work performed by the small number of staff at its Washington office can only call forth amazement and gratitude.

Potential reserves: Limited finances prevent IDEE from undertaking a number of interesting projects with the CfPs either on the national or regional levels. I will mention just one: if elections observation in post-Soviet countries were made a priority for IDEE and the CfPs, we would be able to mobilize a significant number of experienced observers who are thoroughly familiar with the post-Soviet countries and election legislation, as well as methods of election falsification and pressuring voters. Such a potential use of the Centers for Pluralism is just one of many to consider when reviewing the other uses of Western aid.

¹ See, for example, Thomas Carothers. "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2002, pps. 5-21.

² Washington ProFile, October 10, 2002, no. 70 (204). www.washprofile.org

³ Thomas Carothers. "The Observers Observed," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1997, pps. 17-31.

⁴ Irena Lasota. "Sometimes Less Is More," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1999, pp. 125-128.

⁵ Network of Independent Journalists *Weekly Service* no. 149, published by STINA News Agency.

⁶ Lasota, *ibid.*

⁷ Fareed Zakaria. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, no. 6, Nov.-Dec. 1997.

⁸ *Nations in Transition*, 2001, A. Karatnycky, A. Motyl, and A. Schnitzer, eds., Freedom House.

⁹ The author is grateful to Dubravka Velat for articulating a number of ideas on this topic during her presentation at a meeting of the Centers for Pluralism in Belgrade in November 2002.

Remembering Jakub

by Eric Chenoweth

Eric Chenoweth is co-Director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

I met Jakub Karpiński for the first time in August 1980, in the middle of the strikes that would give birth to Solidarity in Poland. He and his partner and, later, wife, Irena Lasota, had come to meet with the director of the League for Industrial Democracy, an organization begun by Upton Sinclair and Jack London that had for 75 years provided an intellectual defense for the American labor movement. Just as importantly, the LID and its sister organization Social Democrats USA, had gained a reputation as fierce opponents of communism and proponents of democratic change in the Soviet Bloc. It was a natural place to come, then, for two Poles in the West seeking support for the pro-democratic workers movement in communist Poland. They had earlier gotten support from the LID for the Workers Defense Committee (KOR). I, a student activist at the time, told them of my youth group's plans to organize support for the Polish workers on college campuses. It began my relationship with Jakub that would last 23 years, until his untimely death March 22 of this year at the age of 62.

At our first meeting, Jakub and Irena told me that they would be happy to speak on campuses about Poland. I quickly took advantage of the offer, seeing an opportunity to bring two dynamic individuals to the campuses to teach a new generation of students about the struggle against communism from the new standpoint of the Polish workers movement. They spoke for me dozens of times, without ever receiving a cent in honoraria but knowing they were doing something extraordinarily valuable. Each conveyed a different charisma. Irena's was vital, to-the-point, and emotional, Jakub's was measured, deliberate, and quietly powerful.



Jakub Karpiński

Jakub's voice was so distinctive it could never be mistaken for another and I think I will never forget it no matter how distant his physical presence. He modulated his pitch from the highest decibel to a low-mid-range octave, providing emphasis to exactly the right word and syllable. The style of his speech was complemented by a slight speech impediment, which he had clearly fought through in order to take a place in a profession requiring public speaking. One could not help but admire his total self-assuredness. He made his impediment a

Credit: Witold Jaroslaw Szulecki, Courtesy of Arma-Multi-Agency

strength, rather than a weakness. (It was a strength I remember vividly from an evening recital of Stanislaw Baranczak's poetry at the Public Theater, where Jakub's performance next to well-known actors was nothing short of spectacular.)

Mostly though, I remember Jakub's mixture of deliberately styled speech with his precisely formulated ideas and thought. Jakub always delivered his speeches in an academic way: he was always teaching. But he never spoke from above: everyone was brought to his level simply by his organization of his ideas. Whatever the topic, he spoke about its most complex elements in an elemental and understandable way. For Jakub, every speech or lecture was an opportunity to make clear a new idea or formulation, not to create an opaque theory or to constantly repeat some long-ago digested epiphany. No matter how many times he had spoken on a topic, he prepared for the presentation as if it were completely new. Or, in turn, he would use it as an opportunity to hone even further an already precise line of thought. Regardless, whoever listened to Jakub give a presentation knew he was listening to an extraordinary intellect – and at least for a moment you could be on his level.

His specialties were sociology and history, a combination he used especially to examine modern Polish history, both under communism and after 1989. In his writings for *Uncaptive Minds*, the journal of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe, *Transitions*, and other publications, he extended his examination to both the period of late communism and the transition from it. He developed in the early 1990s an *ABCs of Democracy*, a primer that was translated into nearly a dozen languages, along with many of his other texts, such as "Democracy and Conflict" and "Postcommunism."

Jakub was both one of the most personable of men and one of the most remote. He eagerly engaged in conversation with friends and colleagues about anything, but once he was no longer needed in a conversation, he would take out one of the projects he was working on from his pack, which he could restart at any moment. On such occasions, he might be interrupted, yet always return to the task at hand. But when fully absorbed, such as in his nocturnal working hours, he could not be interrupted at all. That is when he was fully in his world.



Jakub Karpiński's texts were widely translated into other languages, including the pamphlets above, in Serbian, "Communism and Postcommunism" and "The Democratic Political System."

Jakub was a founder and member of the Board of Directors of the Committee in Support of Solidarity, begun on December 13, 1981, and of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe, begun in May 1985, both of which I directed. Most of his Polish colleagues knew him as an associate professor at Warsaw University, a key leader of the Warsaw University protest in 1968, a former political prisoner whose defense oration at the trial sentencing him to 3 years became a source of inspiration for future generations, as the author in the early 1970s of the petition against constitutional amendments that further enslaved Poland to the Soviet Union, and as the authors Marek Tarniewski and Jan Nowicki (two of the pseudonyms he used for the underground and for the émigré Kultura publishing house, among other places).



Jakub Karpiński's peroration at his 1968 trial was among the most well known texts in Poland's opposition movement. It was recently republished in Poland.

For myself, who never knew Polish but for a spare few words, I knew Jakub differently. He was an exile from his homeland, a child of World War II who grew up under Nazism and Communism, who nevertheless felt completely at ease in New York, or London, or Paris. He was always at home in an atmosphere of freedom without ever losing his knowledge and intimate understanding of communist dictatorship. Jakub was also an important guide through the complexities of Polish and East European history, which admittedly I was learning for the first time. While many people wondered what I, a non-Pole, was doing directing a Committee in Support of Solidarity, Jakub welcomed my interest and commitment and never tired of answering my questions and recommending to me what to read. He (along with Irena, Jerzy Warman, and others involved in those early days) took part in helping me edit texts translated from Polish into English. I learned from Jakub never to use the shorthand "martial law" to describe the crackdown on Solidarity in December 1981. Only "stan wojenny," or state of war, the constitutional provision used by Polish General Jaruzelski to destroy Solidarity, could possibly describe accurately the actions of the Jaruzelski regime — its war against the nation. As Jakub always taught, one should be precise in all descriptions.

Jakub was a constant source of support whose important projects could always be interrupted to take on some new task — including stuffing envelopes if that was necessary. He remained over 23 years a partner with me and Irena in all of our endeavors. (Although they divorced in 1997, Jakub and Irena maintained a close personal and organizational relationship and Irena was a constant source of support for Jakub throughout his illness and until his death.)

In the last ten years, he was a guiding spirit and intellectual force for the Centers for Pluralism program of IDEE, which gathers democrats from more than twenty postcommunist countries in a democratic and civic alliance. This was a natural alliance and partnership for Jakub, who believed that the struggle for democracy and against communism was not national or even regional but international. As an analyst, he understood also that democracy was not a natural emanation out of communism but a system that needed to be instituted and, more importantly, a set of ideas that needed to be understood and taught in society. His analysis of postcommunism – as a new political system resulting from communism that could lead to various political outcomes – was elaborated at CfP Meetings, in articles for *Uncaptive Minds* and for the Network of Independent Journalists, for which he was a frequent contributor, and briefly as an analyst for OMRI.

In addition to his texts being translated into more than a dozen languages, he lectured in nearly all of the 20 countries represented in the Centers for Pluralism, always responding to requests from new members in the network with great pleasure as an opportunity to visit a new country, region, or city – or to visit again, since places, things, history, and ideas always carried with them interest and meanings. Mostly though, Jakub enjoyed helping colleagues in promoting the cause of democracy, whether it was Miljenko Dereta and Dubravka Velat in Serbia, Smaranda Enache and Luminita Petrescu in Romania, or Vahid Gazi and Novella Jafarova-Applebaum in Azerbaijan.

For me, Jakub was a friend, a teacher, and a model of a true intellectual in the highest sense of the term. Devoted to his joint disciplines, he was also a man of worldly interests and wide knowledge who had an abiding commitment to use his intellectual skills in the rational pursuit of freedom and democracy. Until I met Jakub and Irena, my world had been rather closed. It always struck me how excited Jakub was about many disparate things and ideas, having a coherency of interests without being constrained (like many of my friends on the left) by an ideological straightjacket. I will always be grateful for having been introduced to Jakub's encyclopedia of knowledge and his clarity of mind.

I, and all of us associated with the Committee in Support of Solidarity, IDEE, and the Centers for Pluralism, will miss him dearly.



Jakub Karpiński speaking with Estonian MP Mart Nutt and Smaranda Enache of Romania at the Kyiv conference on "The Rise of Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union," organized in November 1996 by IDEE and the Institute of Statehood and Democracy.

Credit: IDEE

Centers for Pluralism

Armenia National Committee of the Helsinki Citizens (Assembly – Armenia)
 Center for Civic Initiatives (CCI) – Macedonia
 Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) – Montenegro
 Center for Development and Cooperation (CDC) – Georgia
 Center for Pluralism Bulgaria (formerly Free and Democratic Bulgaria Foundation) – Bulgaria
 Civic Development International Center (CDIC) – Georgia
 Civic Initiatives – Serbia
 Civil Society Against Corruption – Kyrgyzstan
 Crimean Teachers Council – Ukraine
 D. Aliyeva Society for the Protection of Women(s) Rights – Azerbaijan
 Democracy After Communism Foundation – Hungary
 Forum for Tuzla Citizens – Bosnia and Hercegovina
 Foundation for Pluralism (formerly Humanitas Foundation) – Romania
 IDP Association of Women – Georgia
 Inam Center for Pluralism – Azerbaijan
 Jaan Tonisson Institute – Estonia
 Karta-Memorial (Ryazan) Russia
 Kosova Action for Civic Initiatives (formerly Koha Foundation) – Kosova
 Latta Center for Pluralism – Chechnya
 Liga Pro Europa – Romania
 Milan Simecka Foundation – Slovakia
 Rebirth of Crimea Foundation – Ukraine
 STINA Press Agency – Croatia
 Supolnasc Civil Society Center – Belarus

Centers for Pluralism Partners

APADOR-CH (Association for Defense of Human Rights in Romania-Helsinki Committee) – Romania
 “Aydin” Center of Public Initiatives – Ukraine
 Azerbaijan National Democracy Foundation (ANDF) – Azerbaijan
 Center for Civic Education – Mongolia
 Center for Information and Documentation of Crimean Tatars – Ukraine
 Center for Political Research “Democrat” (CPRD) – Azerbaijan
 Citizens United to Monitor Elections (GONG) – Croatia
 Democracy Education Center – Mongolia

Directorio-Cuban Democratic Revolutionary Directorate – USA
 Foundation for Defence of Human Rights – Poland
 Free and Democratic Bulgaria Foundation – France
 Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights – Poland
 Institute for Regional Studies – Kyrgyzstan
 Institute of Statehood and Democracy – Ukraine
 Lam Center at Andrei Sakharov Museum – Chechnya
 Lion Society – Ukraine
 Prima Human Rights News Agency – Russia
 SOS '03 Election League – Azerbaijan
 Students' Union of Serbia (SUS) – Yugoslavia
 Support Center for Democratic Elections – Azerbaijan
 Tashkent Public Education Center – Uzbekistan
 Viasna Human Rights Center – Belarus

Centers for Pluralism Newsletters

The Centers for Pluralism Newsletter emerged out of the first CfP meeting in Warsaw in 1993. Its articles, information on NGOs, and address listing of the CfP Network became a widely used resource throughout the region and a model for other language versions, including a Russian version published by the Karta/Ryazan Memorial Center for Pluralism, a Ukrainian version put out by Institute for Statehood and Democracy, and the Azeri and Belarusan versions published by Inam and Supolnasc, respectively. Most recently, a Mongolian CfP Newsletter was published. Others used the CfP Newsletter as a model. Altogether these publications have benefited thousands of NGOs throughout the region.



Centers for Pluralism Profiles

Armenian National Committee of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Yerevan, Armenia

Anahit Bayandour, Director

Founded in 1992, the ANC-HCA has about 400 members in regional branches across Armenia. It works to promote democracy, civil society and human rights in Armenia, and promotes conflict resolution in the region. Its Trans-Caucasian Dialogue program organizes roundtable discussions with Armenian and Azeri participants and promotes the release of prisoners of war and efforts to find those missing in the war. It conducts civic education programs for young people and for refugees. ANC-HCA is the Armenian partner organization for IDEE's Networking Women in the Caucasus program.

Center for Civic Initiatives – Prilep, Macedonia

Goce Todoroski, Director

The Center for Civic Initiatives facilitates the development of democracy and civil society in Macedonia and involves young people in education and action to promote positive changes in their communities and country. CCI runs an NGO support center that builds cooperation among 80 NGOs in Prilep and the surrounding area and gives them access to equipment and training. Its education for human rights and tolerance program brings together children and teenagers for computer, theater and debate programs aimed at removing stereotypes about minorities. Its open mayor's office program promotes communication between local government and citizens.

Center for Democracy and Human Rights – Podgorica, Montenegro

Srdjan Darmanovic, Director

The Center for Democracy and Human Rights was founded in 1997 to promote democracy, human rights, economic reform, and the development of civil society. It works as both an activist organization and a think tank. In addition to providing direct and technical assistance to the NGO community, it publishes highly regarded and widely quoted semi-annual public opinion surveys while its quarterly *Transitions* publishes articles on foreign policy, the independence question, human rights, and economic reform. It has also organized a number of conferences on European human rights norms.

Center for Development and Cooperation – Tbilisi, Georgia

Ivlian Haindrava, Program Director

The Center for Development and Cooperation was established in 1996 to strengthen grassroots NGO activity in Georgia and promote cooperation among democratically oriented NGOs within the Caucasus. It educates the

public on political, economic, and social issues, providing weekly analyses to radio stations and independent newspapers; it makes legislative proposals, develops draft legislation, and analyzes proposed legislation on such topics as election laws, lustration, anticorruption, and self-governance. CDC members are widely regarded experts who are drawn upon for both national and international meetings and conferences on civic education, human and minorities' rights, and conflict resolution. CDC hosts all regional meetings of the Caucasus Centers for Pluralism.

Center for Pluralism – Sofia, Bulgaria

Mihail Berov, Director

The Center for Pluralism, originally part of the Free and Democratic Bulgaria Foundation, was established as a separate civic organization in 1995 and carries out a number of civic education programs. In 2002, it organized an international conference on the 1096 PACE Resolution concerning the opening of secret police files from the communist period; for the next elections, it plans to repeat its successful 1998 voter mobilization and education program.

Civic Development International Center – Tbilisi, Georgia

Levan Berdzenishvili, Chairman

Civic Development International Center (CDIC) works to strengthen, build, and develop civil society and civic participation in Georgia. The CDIC strives to promote an open society and economic freedom. It organizes roundtable discussions in the capital and the regions and debates on topics such as democracy, elections, and ethnic conflict.

Civic Initiatives – Belgrade, Yugoslavia

Miljenko Dereta, Director

Civic Initiatives works to foster development of civil society, build democratic institutions, and promote liberal democratic values. Its ongoing Democracy School Program includes topics such as tolerance, professional development for parliamentarians, community problem solving, and the decentralization of education. Its "Becoming a Citizen" program educates high school students in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and its NGO center is an important resource and meeting point for NGOs as well as the host for the highly successful Tim TRI training program.

Crimean Teachers' Council – Bakhchisaray, Ukraine

Dilara Setvelyeva, Chairperson

Founded in 1994, the Council supports teachers and schools and promotes education in indigenous languages. It works with teachers and educators to enhance active teaching techniques through workshops and seminars. The

Council also works with community members to support and promote active civic participation on local issues. It is conducting training of trainer workshops to teach local activists how to organize and lead civic forums to address and resolve issues important to the community. Ms. Setveliyeva has worked as a trainer with various IDEE projects such as the women's leadership programs in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Democracy After Communism Foundation – Budapest, Hungary

Peter Bozzay, Secretary General

The Democracy After Communism Foundation (DAC) promotes the development of democracy, a free market, and a tolerant, pluralist society in post-communist Hungary and other Central and East European countries. DAC acts as a clearinghouse for information on internships and conferences abroad, sponsors trips of young politicians to Western countries, and serves as a public policy center.

D. Aliyeva Association for the Protection of Women's Rights Baku, Azerbaijan

Novella Jafar oglu Applebaum, Director

Founded in 1988, the Society works to defend women's rights, increase women's social and political participation, and promote democracy and civil society in Azerbaijan. It monitors conditions in prisons and offers legal assistance to those whose rights have been violated; conducts civic and election education training programs especially for non-urban populations and for refugees; carries out training programs on women's rights; and assists new NGOs. The Association is the Azeri partner organization for IDEE's Networking Women in the Caucasus program.

Forum of Tuzla Citizens – Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Vehid Sehic, President

The Forum of Tuzla Citizens was founded in 1993 with the onset of the war in Bosnia and it became one of the leading civic organizations defending a unitary and multiethnic state. It carries out programs promoting multi-ethnic tolerance, fighting corruption, and encouraging local civic initiatives.

Foundation for Pluralism – Bucharest, Romania

Luminita Petrescu, President

The Foundation for Pluralism seeks to promote civil society, civic participation, and information sharing. Its long-standing School for Young Political Leaders has been a model program for teaching democratic values to emerging young leaders and it has conducted joint programs with DAC and Civic Initiatives. Last year, FfP implemented a new program entitled "Making

Political Agendas into a Citizens' Agenda." Also geared toward young political leaders, it focuses on ethics and morals in politics and ways to pursue political agendas based on constituent needs. The Foundation also organized an internship program for four CfP leaders from the Caucasus and Central Asia to learn more about how citizens can influence the political agenda.

IDP Womens' Association -Tbilisi, Georgia

Julia Kharashvili, Director

Founded in 1995, the primary mission of the association is to offer internally displaced women the opportunity to participate fully in Georgia's social and political life. It offers medical and psychological assistance to displaced women and children, conducts civic education programs, and co-organizes summer peace camps in Eastern Europe for children from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, including from the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and Ossetia. It serves as the Georgian partner for IDEE's Networking Women in the Caucasus program.

Inam (Trust) Center for Pluralism – Baku, Azerbaijan

Vahid Gazi, Director

Inam Center for Pluralism, established in 1995, is an information, resource, and coordinating center for NGOs, journalists, and students. Since its inception, it has served as a window for Azerbaijan to Eastern Europe, facilitating over 100 exchanges and internships through different CFP and IDEE programs. Inam organizes training programs for NGO and civic activists on human rights, the transition to democracy, and social activism. It also publishes and distributes pamphlets on related subjects as well as the Azeri-language Centers for Pluralism newsletter, *Third Sector*.

Jaan Tõnisson Institute – Tallinn, Estonia

Agu Laius, Director

The Jaan Tõnisson Institute (JTI) is a non-governmental educational and research center that organizes a broad range of activities promoting democratic development, regional cooperation, and European integration. JTI helped initiate and run the Roundtable of Estonian Non-Profit Organizations which is a public and open form of cooperation for Estonian non-profit organizations. JTI's director is also heading the newly formed national forum aimed at improving ethnic relations in Estonia.

Karta/Memorial – Ryazan, Russia

Andrei Blinushov, Director

Karta/Memorial-Ryazan, a regional branch of the Memorial Society established in 1989, supports the development of human rights, civil society, and

the independent press. It published the Russian language edition of the *Centers for Pluralism Newsletter* and carries out a number of human rights campaigns, including promotion of a law on alternative civil service, and protests against espionage accusations against scholars and journalists. It is working to develop a human rights network to encourage NGO and human rights activists to defend colleagues facing persecution. Its quarterly journal *Karta* includes information on human rights and democratization issues throughout the former Soviet Union.

Kosovo Action for Civic Initiatives – Pristina, Kosovo

Ylber Hysa, Chairman

KACI was founded in 1998 as an action council and think tank on civil society. It played a leading role in promoting NGOs in the immediate aftermath of the war in 1999 and led a multiethnic NGO monitoring coalition for the November 2000 and 2002 local elections and November 2001 parliamentary elections, carrying out a highly accurate parallel vote count. It organizes roundtable discussions bringing together representatives of the Serbian and Albanian ethnic communities, and holds public fora with prominent speakers.

LATTA – Grozny, Chechnya

Lecha Ilyasov, Director

LATTA was founded in 2002 and works to disseminate information about the crisis in Chechnya, to find a peaceful solution to the war, and to rebuild the civil society in war-torn Chechnya. LATTA members gather information and produce and distribute *Dispatches from Chechnya*, an information bulletin begun in September 2000 that provides first-hand reports on the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Chechnya and the refugee camps. *Dispatches* is posted in English on the website of IDEE (www.idee.org) and is distributed directly by email and faxed to leading policymakers, human rights and humanitarian organizations, journalists, and members of the Centers for Pluralism Network.

Liga Pro Europa – Tirgu Mures, Romania

Smaranda Enache and Istvan Haller, Co-Directors

Liga Pro Europa, founded in 1989, is a membership organization that works to promote democracy and inter-ethnic tolerance, cooperation and dialogue. Its Intercultural Center carries out seminars, round-table discussions, summer camps, cultural, and sporting events, and publishes theoretical research on the problems of multi-ethnic cooperation. Its College of Democracy Program involves young civic and political leaders in community development projects. The Human Rights Office monitors the observance of human and minority rights and the Documentation Center maintains a database on minorities. Liga publishes the quarterly journal *Altera* and a monthly newsletter on its activities.

Rebirth of Crimea Foundation – Bakhchisaray, Ukraine

Lutfi Osman, Program Director

The Rebirth of Crimea Foundation (RCF) is dedicated to improving the condition of the Crimean Tatar community, educating it in the fundamentals of democracy, and improving conditions for Crimean NGOs. It serves as a clearinghouse for NGO development in the region, assisting new NGOs in establishing themselves and existing NGOs in finding funding. It publishes *Gunsel*, a Crimean Tatar language, Latin-script journal focusing on current developments in Crimea as well as cultural and literary topics.

STINA Press Agency – Split, Croatia

Stojan Obradović, Director

STINA coordinates the Network of Independent Journalists, a Centers for Pluralism initiative to facilitate cross-border reporting and cooperation among independent journalists and publications throughout the region. The NIJ gathers together a network of over 30 journalists from 20 countries and regions, who contribute original articles to the *Weekly Service*, which is distributed to over 250 media outlets across the region. STINA also produces its own regional news service and carries out media and educational programs to promote an independent media free of bias.

Supolnasc (Civic Society Center) – Minsk, Belarus

Siarhiej Mackievič, Chairman

Supolnasc was established in November 1995 with the aim of stimulating democratic initiatives and promoting cooperation among NGOs in Belarus. It helped to form and coordinate the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, which now brings together over 650 organizations to promote NGO cooperation, pluralism, and human rights. Supolnasc was a key center in the mobilization campaign for the 2001 presidential elections and carries out a variety of civic education and training programs, and its NGO consultation center and regional centers offer advice to other NGOs.