



NATIONAL
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FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

REPORT

WOMEN IN POLITICS PROGRAM

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

1994-1995

National Democratic Institute For International Affairs

conducting nonpartisan international programs to help promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions



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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) was established in 1983. By working with political parties and other institutions, NDI seeks to promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions in new and emerging democracies. The Institute is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and has a staff of 120 with field offices in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and the former Soviet Union.

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Election Processes: NDI provides technical assistance for political parties, nonpartisan associations and election authorities to conduct voter and civic education campaigns and to organize election monitoring programs. The Institute has also organized more than 25 major international observer delegations.

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Final Report

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN IN POLITICS
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-0017-A-00-1064-00

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Final Report

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN IN POLITICS USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-0017-A-00-1064-00

I. INTRODUCTION

With the lifting of Soviet hegemony over the countries of Central and Eastern Europe came the right of all citizens, in principle, to participate freely and equally in new, democratic political systems. While the countries of the region have, to varying degrees, secured individual liberties since 1989, the false guarantees of equality under the Soviet system have been replaced by resurgent traditions of nationalism, religious intolerance, and other modes of thought and behavior which have retarded and, in some cases, prevented the full development of participatory democracy.

Another endemic tradition in Central and Eastern Europe which has impeded democratic development is the traditionally dominant role of men in public life. While paternalism was clearly evident during the Soviet period, it has been a more open factor in determining political power since 1989. According to Professor Sharon Wolchik of the George Washington University, "Although certain groups of women have benefitted [from the transition to democracy], many women have suffered increased hardship and new difficulties in carrying out both their economic and domestic roles since 1989. In addition to being at greater risk of unemployment in all countries but Hungary and more likely to live in poverty, women also face new competition from men, increased demands for better performance and higher skill levels, and more open discrimination in the workplace."¹ A high percentage of citizens in these countries -- men and women alike -- consider a woman's role to be that of wife and mother.

Women, furthermore, have little political and legal recourse to improve their lot. Gender equity is not present in many countries' legal nomenclature. The level of active political participation among women in Central and Eastern Europe since the dissolution of the Soviet bloc has been low. Women throughout the region have been largely shut out of the political process, and have therefore had an almost imperceptible role in creating the new political systems which will govern their societies. For the most part, women have been absent from the national political arena, and participate to a minimal degree in sub-national politics. With respect to elected office, women are significantly under-represented in parliaments, city halls, political party headquarters, ministries, and other important political institutions and organizations. Moreover, the articulation of issues particularly important to women, such as unemployment and childcare, has been muted as other issues regarding

¹ Sharon Wolchik, *Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe: Progress or Regression for Women*, The Atlantic Council of the United States, Washington, D.C., 1994, Executive Summary.

political and economic transition, as put forth by male politicians, are treated as top priority. The accomplishments of a handful of women political leaders, such as former Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka of Poland, belie the fact that women throughout the region have largely been removed from the decision-making process on issues critical to these countries' long-term democratic futures, and risk further marginalization in the face of popular affirmation of traditional gender roles.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) perceived two negative consequences to the region's democratic development stemming from the political marginalization of women. First, each country is creating a democratic system without benefit of substantial contributions from one-half of its population. Second, women risk becoming incapable of creating, defending, and promoting their own constituencies and related economic and social issues.

Accordingly, with the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), NDI organized two conferences to provide political skills training to politically active women throughout Central and Eastern Europe. The first conference was held in Bucharest in February 1994. The second conference was held in Skopje in January 1995.

II. PROGRAM PLAN AND OBJECTIVES

Initially, NDI received funding from USAID to organize, in cooperation with Hungary's Democracy After Communism (DAC) Foundation, three conferences aimed at empowering politically active women with skills needed for leadership in political and civic affairs. Two conferences were to be held in Warsaw (northern tier countries) and in Sofia (Balkan countries), with a final conference in Budapest uniting participants from the prior two.

After funding had been secured, it became apparent that the DAC Foundation would be unavailable to help organize these conferences, and NDI requested technical and financial amendments to the grant. NDI proposed to conduct an initial, region-wide conference in Bucharest, and to use remaining funds to hold one follow-on conference, also regional, elsewhere in the region. NDI was persuaded that participants would gain more from region-wide conferences in which women from the northern tier and Balkans worked together, rather than segregating participants along a north-south divide. USAID accepted this reformulation, and NDI was eventually successful in matching remaining USAID funds with monies from the NED to organize the second conference in Skopje.

The principal objective behind the conferences was to provide training in skills related to the practice of politics, including running for office; developing and representing constituencies; and developing, defining, and promoting policy responses to public issues. The skills training centered on four basic areas: decision-making, political organizing, leadership, and communications. Another objective was to provide politically active women

throughout Central and Eastern Europe with opportunities to exchange ideas and experiences with each other and with Western women politicians.

The specific objectives of the conferences were to:

- increase the participation of women in the political process as politicians, political party officials, government officials, and non-governmental activists by providing skills training and other forms of encouragement;
- help bridge several gaps: between women politicians in different political parties, between women politicians and women in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and between politically active women in different countries throughout the region; and
- stimulate dialogue on practicing the art of politics between women politicians in Central and Eastern Europe and their Western counterparts.

III. PROGRAM DESIGN AND ACTIVITIES

Relationship between the Two Conferences

The Bucharest conference was intended to introduce a variety of political skills to both women politicians and those who aspire to public office. Accordingly, the conference had two general focuses: running for and holding elected office.

NDI decided that the second conference in Skopje should be a direct follow-on of the Bucharest conference, and thus chose to concentrate more specifically on the challenges of holding public office.

Participants

NDI chose to target as conference participants women who are politically active either as officeholders or as political party officials, at both national and local levels. However, NDI did not invite women who had already amassed considerable political experience and were well on their way to leadership positions. Nor, conversely, did NDI want participants who merely expressed interest in pursuing a career in politics. NDI aimed at securing the participation of women who were committed to politics, who had gained some experience in the political arena, but who needed training to augment their skills. In particular, NDI sought out women who could serve as catalysts in drawing more women into active political participation.

NDI also included women working in politically active NGOs. While NDI took the decision to focus on political officeholders and political party officials, the Institute recognized the fact that most politically involved women in Central and Eastern Europe are currently found in non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In identifying participants, NDI's Washington staff and its representatives in the region contacted leading political parties and non-governmental organizations, and relied largely on their nominations. In this manner NDI was assured of participants whom parties and NGOs felt were most appropriate for this training. NDI established which parties and organizations to contact principally on the basis of creating politically balanced country delegations.

For the Bucharest conference, NDI circulated a pre-conference questionnaire among the participants to ascertain the level of experience, issues of interest and challenges the women face as politicians. The survey results helped NDI to familiarize with the participants as well as to design relevant workshop sessions and case studies.

Participants from the following countries participated in the Bucharest and/or Skopje conferences:

Albania	Estonia	Poland
Bosnia/Hercegovina	Hungary	Romania
Bulgaria	Latvia	Serbia/Montenegro
Croatia	Lithuania	Slovakia
Czech Republic	Macedonia	Slovenia

Advisors

NDI sought to assemble a group of politicians whose experience would be relevant to participants and whose commitment to advancing the presence of women in politics was strong. NDI identified a group of highly accomplished women politicians and political advisors from the United States and Europe (please see appended biographies):

- Maura Breuger - an American political campaign consultant and former NDI field representative in Romania (Bucharest conference);
- Cindy Chavez - an American grassroots and labor organizer (Skopje conference);
- Nuala Fennell - a former member of the Irish parliament (Fine Gael party) and currently a journalist and public relations consultant (Bucharest and Skopje conferences);
- Robin Freedman - an American political campaign consultant and former NDI field representative in Romania (Bucharest conference);

- Marijana Grandits - a former member of the Austrian parliament (Green Party) and currently a political consultant (Bucharest and Skopje conferences);
- Hege Hero - a former member of a district council in Oslo, Norway (Conservative Party), and currently an equal opportunities officer at the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (Bucharest and Skopje conferences);
- Christine Jahnke - an American public relations and campaign media consultant (Bucharest conference);
- Eleanor Lewis - an American political and campaign consultant (Bucharest and Skopje conferences); and
- Sonja Lokar - a former member of the Slovenian parliament (United List Party) and currently head of United List's women's caucus (Skopje conference).

Four of the above advisors participated in both conferences, which provided a strong link of continuity between the conferences. Equally beneficial was the mix of European and American advisors. The European advisors were able to create strong links between their experiences and those of the participants as a result of similar political systems. The American advisors were able to convey the importance of becoming an independent politician, in that, even in parliamentary systems where one's political affiliation determines a politician's positions on a variety of issues, one should not rely wholly on one's party leadership for instruction, but develop an individual political identity.

Bucharest Conference

The Bucharest conference was held over four days in February 1994. NDI organized the conference with Romania's Pro Democracy Association (PDA), a non-partisan civic organization working to improve Romania's democratic processes through such areas as legislative transparency, NGO development, grassroots organizing, and civic education. (See Appendix III.)

NDI brought approximately 45 women from 11 countries in Central and Eastern Europe to Bucharest. The countries represented were: Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Country delegations ranged from two to six women. Each woman represented a leading political party or politically involved NGO. Among the participants were several members of parliament, mayors, and city councilwomen; some were political campaigners, volunteers, or otherwise politically active.

The conference languages were English, French and German.

The conference was divided into four components: plenary discussions; workshop training; public speaking exercises; and strategy consultations.

The plenary discussions featured presentations by advisors and conference participants. The opening plenary centered on personal paths toward a career in politics and on a debate over whether or not women politicians should receive external support through such mechanisms as quotas, as opposed to competing with male politicians on an equal footing. Opinion was split among the participants, and reflected the different perspective women in Central and Eastern Europe take to the question of women's emancipation from traditional roles and, more specifically, to their presence in politics. Many participants felt that, while difficult, the division of time and responsibilities between politics and family was normal, and that they should not be treated differently from their male counterparts. These participants were less likely to recognize the existence of "women's issues" as such. Others shared the general sentiment of the Western advisors that women do require, and should demand, support from the political establishment and, more importantly, from each other, in advancing women's issues and the presence of women in politics.

There were three workshop sessions, each comprised of different subjects. In the first series on running for elected office, participants and advisors reviewed candidate nominating and election processes; discussed how to use political party structures to one's benefit; developed campaign messages; and analyzed campaign management. The second series of workshops dealt with holding elected office at national and local levels, focusing on leadership in policy making and constituent servicing. The third workshop series looked at how to develop links between women politicians, as well as institutional relationships between women politicians and women working in other disciplines, such as business, journalism, law, and academia.

Workshop Session #1: Achieving Political Office. This session contained four separate workshops: candidate nominating and election process (working with party lists and other election-related procedures); political party structure and organization (how political parties organize membership, finance activities, formulate policy, etc. during election and non-election periods); message development and communication (developing a platform and conveying it to voters); and managing a political campaign.

Workshop Session #2: Holding Political Office. This session was divided into two levels: parliamentary and regional/local. Each level had two workshops: constituency building/servicing and policymaking. Each workshop was repeated once, so participants chose two workshops. Constituency building/servicing focused on identifying constituent groups and developing and maintaining productive communication with them. The policymaking workshop focused on such skills as research and compromise and on obtaining a seat on desired committees and progressing to leadership positions in those committees.

Workshop Session #3: Creating and Expanding Women's Networks. This session was divided into two workshops: parliamentary and party caucuses; and political networks

that link women politicians with women in academia, journalism, and business. The advisors related their experiences in forming women's political coalitions in the last three decades, and participants related their problems, political and otherwise, in forging such coalitions. Using their collective hindsight, the advisors provided concrete suggestions as well as simple encouragement to press on.

Advisors relied on interactive training methods for the workshops. In one workshop on local level decisionmaking, for example, advisor Hege Hero introduced a simulation exercise around a hypothetical scenario in which a foreign business is seeking to buy an abandoned building for a new factory, but a neighborhood group wants to refurbish the same building as a school for disabled children. The majority of city councilmembers backs the factory proposal. Participants were divided into majority and minority councilmembers, and asked to devise political strategies to support their causes. Majority members planned to meet with the minority group; ask for concessions from the business community; and establish a panel to analyze the situation more carefully. Minority members suggested meeting with citizens and attempting to strike a deal with the majority. A third group of participants played the role of citizens. In the debriefing, Hero emphasized the salient points of the simulation: build alliances; research and document facts; define the issue precisely; and develop a willingness to use power.

In a workshop devoted to running for elected office on party lists, participants first reviewed impediments to women's high placement on party lists, such as a lack of political experience, competing family demands, male prejudices, etc. They then brainstormed on ways to overcome these obstacles. One important suggestion was to build one's own political capital, i.e., developing productive relationships with various membership- and issue-based groups, such as churches, trade unions, environmental groups. This suggestion underscored the importance of developing one's own political identity in a balanced way, i.e. one has independent connections to constituencies but not to the detriment of one's standing with the party leadership. It is a difficult balance to achieve, but one made easier by developing strong ties with the leadership. Participants and advisors alike offered their own experiences in this regard.

The third component, training in public speaking, centered on how to communicate when on television. Advisor Christine Jahnke outlined proper speech patterns, posture, gestures, and attire, and then filmed participants and critiqued their performances. For the sake of fluidity, participants spoke in their own languages. Participants generally saw this exercise as invaluable preparation for future television presentations before the public.

The Executive Director of PDA, Alina Inayeh, gave the conference keynote speech, in which she exhorted her audience to take advantage of the region's newfound freedom of expression, find their voices in the new order, and speak up for their interests and issues, and for those of their families, other women, and society overall. Not to do so would be tantamount to political self-abnegation unworthy of democracy.

Finally, individual participants or groups of two to three met separately with one of the advisors to discuss topics and strategies of personal interest. These topics ranged from career decisions to policy issues to organizing greater participation of women in politics. The idea behind these consultations was to tailor the skills training and ideas exchange in the plenaries and workshops to each participant's personal situation.

Several conference participants and advisors participated in a press conference organized by PDA. Romanian journalists asked questions pertaining to the difficulties women face in entering politics, what led them to political careers, and the impact of women politicians on the development of democratic societies throughout Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to the press conference, several other radio and print interviews were conducted by participants and advisors with Romanian press.

Skopje Conference

NDI held the second conference of in Skopje, Macedonia in January 1995. NDI's Macedonian civic organizing partner, the Association for Civic Initiative (ACI), co-hosted the conference. ACI is nonpartisan, multi-ethnic, pro-democracy organization that promotes citizen participation in politics and transparency and accountability in government processes. (See Appendix IV.)

The objective of this conference was to provide women already in elected office with training on decision-making, leadership, and communication skills. As a follow-on to the Bucharest conference, the Skopje conference was intended to provide more advanced training in skills related to holding political office.

The conference brought together approximately 40 women from 13 countries in the region. In addition to the countries represented in the first conference, NDI recruited participants from Bosnia/Hercegovina, Croatia, Estonia, and Serbia/Montenegro. Participants were selected using the following criteria: holding elected office at the national or local levels of government or in NGOs; a commitment to a career in politics; and strong leadership potential. Certain logistical considerations such as proficiency in English or German -- the conference's operating languages -- also figured in participant selection.

Most participants were either members of parliament or local government officeholders. A few were members of politically active NGOs. Unfortunately, NDI was only able to secure the participation of a small number of participants who attended the 1994 conference due, in many cases, to logistical and timing constraints. (See Appendix V.)

The program agenda was designed to impart practical skills and techniques on specific issues. Each workshop and group exercise was led by a team of two advisors. Each team met prior to the conference to devise role-playing scenarios which highlighted specific skills, such as handling confrontational situations, defining policy options clearly, and negotiating compromises.

In advance of the workshops, each participant took part in an orientation session with an advisor to discuss the workshops and the group exercises. The purpose of the orientation was to provide the advisors an opportunity to understand first-hand the challenges women politicians face in the region, and to allow the participants to understand the perspectives of the advisors and to select the workshops with the benefit of an advisor's input.

The conference opened with a plenary discussion centering on the idea of the "woman as politician; the politician as woman." Moderated by Eleanor Lewis, participants spoke about ways women reconcile their political careers with their traditional roles, and how their status as women influences their work as politicians. The discussion highlighted both the participants' shared experience of being a woman in a male-dominated arena as well as their different approaches to being a woman leader and representing other women.

Sonja Lokar gave the conference keynote speech, in which she offered her views on "woman as politician" theme. Referring to her own experience, she identified three types of women politicians: the woman who "plays with the men," i.e., plays a supporting role to her male colleagues; the woman who "becomes a man," i.e., adopts, in effect, a male persona to play politics as an equal; and the woman who "becomes herself," i.e., grows into her own identity as woman politician independent of any gender-based constraints. (See Appendix VI.)

Participants were given a choice of workshops to attend. Workshops were conducted in groups of approximately 15 individuals for two and one-half hours each to allow for in-depth discussion of the topics.

Workshop 1A: Determining policies and reviewing policy decisions (decision-making). This workshop focused on the factors involved in determining public policy and evaluating decisions that have been made. Participants were divided into groups of three or four and discussed policymaking strategies based on a scenario to change the penal code on domestic violence. Although the strategies developed by groups varied, the elements of policymaking were similar. These included: defining and researching issues, establishing policy options, building inter- and intra-party coalitions, reaching out to NGOs and interested community groups, using media, and encouraging public participation. This exercise also allowed groups to learn about alternative tactics of policymaking. (See Appendix VII.)

Workshop 1B: Chairing a committee or meeting (decision-making). This workshop centered on the working of committees, be they in government or non-governmental organizations. Subjects covered included: setting and achieving objectives, balancing individual or party agendas, building allies, working through interpersonal dynamics in meetings, and developing "ownership" of the committee's work. In subsequent roleplay exercises, participants practiced some of the techniques and skills they learned in the workshop.

Workshop 1C: Forming coalitions and the art of negotiation (decision-making).

This workshop focused on how politicians wage policy battles by forming coalitions and by practicing the art of negotiation. Following a discussion on the goals of a negotiation process, the participants discussed the phases of negotiation. The analysis phase is comprised of defining the problem, developing alternative solutions, assessing the different plans, understanding all stakeholders' interests, and working with the constituencies to insure their support. Second is the planning phase, in which the parties select negotiators and the negotiation procedure. The participants also discussed negotiation styles. Finally, the advisors addressed the necessity of coalitions and selecting coalition partners. In the role playing exercise, participants broke into "party" and "interest" groups, and negotiated with other parties to build coalitions around specific goals.

Workshop 2A: Reaching out to and representing women (leadership). This workshop addressed the concept of women as a distinct political constituency, and then explored methods to identify, develop and promote this constituency as a woman leader. Participants agreed that the challenge they face is forming a positive image of a woman politician and getting the support of other women. The discussions highlighted the importance of finding out what issues are important to women, and working with researchers and NGO's to find solutions to common problems.

Workshop 2B: Reaching out to and representing all constituents (leadership). This workshop discussed identification of constituent groups and developing and maintaining productive communication with them. Participants generated a broad range of techniques to reach out to constituents. Some creative methods suggested included coffee mornings with female constituents, meeting the constituents face-to-face, phoning into radio and television programs, and producing newsletters and flyers. Advisor Nuala Fennel emphasized the importance of follow-up and suggested using a constituency form to track the areas of interest to individual constituents. Participants left the workshop with concrete methods to make them more responsive politicians.

Workshop 2C: Attaining leadership position in one's party (leadership). This workshop discussed long-term strategy for career development, the cultivation of mentor relationships, and the personal examination that accompanies professional ambition.

"Town meeting" (group communication exercise). In this exercise, the participant was videotaped as she articulated her position on an issue of her choosing. While some women selected national issues such as health care, welfare, and foreign investment, others chose to speak on local issues including building hospitals, local unemployment, and funds for preservation of historic buildings. Advisors and other participants then commented on her performance. Lessons learned included: keeping the message simple and clear; speaking from personal experience; and the importance of good body language. (See Appendix VIII.)

"Press conference" (group communication exercise). Advisors and participants discussed approaches to organizing and participating in a press conference. Practical solutions were suggested to get the media, to develop a better message, and to improve the content of press releases. A mock press conference ensued in which participants represented government and opposition blocs in a matter of national policy such as women in the military. After the advisor presented the policy scenario and gave some background on the political situation, small groups of two to three women rotated through as either government or opposition spokeswomen, with the other participants posing questions as journalists. Participants were videotaped and their performance evaluated by advisors and fellow participants. (See Appendix IX.)

"Training the trainers" (group communication exercise). This exercise was designed to provide instruction to participants on training methods that they can use upon returning home to train women colleagues in the areas covered by the conference. After a brief explanation of training preparations (e.g., set your objective(s), know your audience, be ready to amend the agenda, etc.), each participant was afforded an opportunity to train others in one skill. For example, Romanian and Slovenian participants instructed others on how to produce a newsletter. The participants pledged to train colleagues upon their return on the skills they learned at this conference.

IV. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The conferences succeeded in accomplishing two essential objectives. First, they provided an opportunity for women politicians in Central and Eastern Europe to learn or improve upon a variety of political, organizing, policy-related, communications, and leadership skills. In emphasizing interactive workshop sessions and group exercises, the conferences gave each participant the opportunity to test her ability to practice the art of politics in a variety of settings and circumstances. The presence of advisors from different countries afforded the participants the chance to consider a variety of approaches to being a woman politician, separated by different cultures, histories, and political systems. While not all of the techniques and skills imparted are relevant to all countries in the region and to the personal circumstances of all participants, the participant evaluations collected at the end of the conferences suggest that most were very useful and could be readily adapted to specific country or personal situations. NDI anticipates that, as a result of these conferences, participants will be able to carry out their political activities more effectively, whether it means participating in a meeting, proposing legislation, delivering a speech, negotiating with colleagues, or responding to the concerns of average citizens.

Several participants at the Bucharest conference report that they have undertaken training sessions with female colleagues to impart the skills learned at the conference. NDI has also received letters from Skopje participants about similar training sessions. These training have thus far taken place in Albania, Bosnia/Hercegovina, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.

The second major accomplishment of the conferences was to give participants the opportunity to exchange information, ideas, and experiences with fellow participants and the advisors. In this respect, the conference's significance went beyond skills building to assume a more important role, i.e., providing women from diverse backgrounds to share (and compare) ideas and experiences, and to take strength and energy from each other. This exchange, between women from different countries and different parties, was invaluable in providing participants with momentum for moving on with their political careers and for encouraging other women to participate in the political process.

The skills and encouragement provided by the advisors gave participants inspiration to pursue their political careers. Although the political cultures, systems, and the particular functions of media, money, and constituencies differ between East and West, the amount of Western skills and techniques which can be adapted by women politicians in Central and Eastern Europe is abundant. Moreover, in their Western counterparts the participants saw future visions of themselves, and this contribution cannot be underestimated.

Of equal importance was the exchange among participants from different countries. Despite wide divergences in political customs and systems, women participants exchanged similar stories of victories and obstacles, and found that their longstanding perceptions of other countries in the region, often times negative as a result of past wars and forced friendship while under Soviet control, were invalid. There was, in fact, a sisterhood of sorts among the participants, in which each woman discovered strength, perseverance, and, most important, validation as a woman politician.

Perhaps most tangible and lasting, however, was the cooperation fostered between participants from the same country but representing different political parties or NGOs. The professional exchanges and friendships which have resulted from this conference will allow women politicians in the same country to work together on common political objectives, and to solicit the participation of women who are not yet politically engaged. This bridge-building, both among women politicians and between women politicians and women in other disciplines, will hopefully give rise to strong women-oriented constituent groups in these countries, which will take their places among other constituencies in the region's evolving democratic order.