

2009 SESSION REPORT

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“New Philanthropy comes from the East”

Moderator: Pavlina Kalousová, Czech Donors Forum
Speakers: Ansis Berzins, Valmiera Community Foundation and Latvia
Community Foundations Movement;
Maria Chertok, Charities Aid Foundation Russia
Thomas Eymond-Laritz, Victor Pinchuk Foundation
Viera Klementová, Slovak-Czech Women’s Fund
Zoran Puljic, Mozaik – Community Development Foundation

Session proposed by: Grantmakers East Forum

Pavlina Kalousová of Czech Donors Forum guided participants through a lively debate about trends in Eastern European Philanthropy by addressing the following issues: “who are we? – does East-West distinction still apply?”; “how has philanthropy changed since early 90’s – did we develop a new type of philanthropy?”; “how are we affected by the crisis?” and “what are future challenges?” The overall aim of the session was to raise awareness about philanthropy development in the region.

Does the traditional East-West distinction still make sense? While all participants were sceptical about this distinction and felt it was artificial and one should stop to distinguish between “we” and “them”, they acknowledged that there are common issues and history that unite Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Russia. Clearly, the old overall picture of Central and Eastern European countries as “recipients of western aid with a philanthropic sector that lags behind” no longer is true.

The region has developed a wide range of philanthropic practices ranging from community foundations, some big private foundations and innovative corporate philanthropy. Where does the money come from today? While US funding is to some extent withdrawn, western foundations and also EU funding still plays a significant role but as was stressed by several panellists, more funding is local. Most Eastern countries have developed a culture of giving in particular also from the “middle class”. In addition, new local foundations have emerged in the CEE region, which are run by young creative leaders with an innovative approach to fundraising activities (fundraising is sometimes done locally and in western regions). One challenge was seen in how distant western donors sometimes wish to have a say in the ground level work. Now that more local foundations have emerged it was seen an opportunity to strengthen good and open co-operation between grant givers and their beneficiaries.

Must philanthropy become more effective in times of economic crisis? Clearly if foreign donors and some corporate donors withdraw new innovative ideas have to be developed to secure funding. Several panellists experienced a new type of energy and self confidence and a “stand up and do it ourselves mentality” in times of crisis. In Bosnia, where the crisis dates back 20 years ago, CSR campaigns and involvement of local municipalities were new ideas that were developed. Also in Russia the crisis of 98 was an opportunity to strengthen corporate philanthropy. Other panellists stated that the current crises could have a similar effect in their countries. It was argued that this current crisis will lead to more efficiency and accountability of receiving NGOs.