

**SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING
GRANTMAKERS EAST GROUP
25 – 26 OCTOBER 2001**

REPORT

Professionalism, intellectual competence and experience are the key words that summarise the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Grantmakers East Group (GEG) held in Bucharest, Romania on 25 – 26 October 2001. It was organised by the European Foundation Centre (EFC) and the Steering Committee of the Grantmakers East Group and was supported by nine grantmaking institutions. The GEG Annual Meeting brought together over 160 government, corporate, and private grantmakers from more than twenty countries to exchange information and practical experience on several topics of common concern. The participants comprised both directors and programme officers. The invited speakers included prominent researchers and practitioners including Ivan Krastev, Director of the Centre for Liberal Strategies, Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Timothy Clarke, Head of Unit at the European Commission – EuropeAid.

The meeting provided a forum for in-depth discussion and exploration of opportunities for cooperation in the areas important to the development of civil society in the region. The goal of the meeting was to take stock of civil society support; to identify key lessons learned, as well as emerging issues and geographic priority areas to address; and to strategize for the future.

The panels and workshops focused on specific issues and strategies relevant to grantmakers working in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), South Eastern Europe (SEE) and the Newly Independent States (NIS). The highlights included:

- Development of partnerships between foundations and public donors to promote European Union Enlargement
- Implementation of successful poverty alleviation projects
- collaboration with trade unions and employers organisations

The session on European Union informed participants about the latest developments related to the European Union's policy vis-à-vis human rights and democracy in third countries, following the recent adoption of a European Commission (EC) communication. Timothy Clarke confirmed that there have been major changes occurring in the EC – the world's biggest donor – the way it handles the funds and that there is room for cooperation with foundations on that matter.

This session on poverty alleviation explored effective donor strategies for addressing poverty and social exclusion in the region. It was confirmed that although some bilateral donors have been active in this area, these topics are generally not high on the agenda of grantmakers in the region and poverty and social exclusion are real and growing problems in many countries of CEE, SEE and NIS. The participants agreed that the topic should be discussed further.

The participants of the session exploring prospects for collaboration with trade unions and employers organisation noticed that although professional interest groups work at the heart of civil society development – where governments', businesses' and societies' interests collide – donors often consider these groups too political and fail to provide support. There was a

consensus that the grantmakers should look into various approaches and impact in supporting the development of labour unions and business associations.

John Richardson, EFC Chief Executive in his closing remarks confirmed the commitment of the European Foundation Centre to bring European foundations together and working closely with colleagues in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and the United States. He confirmed that the Centre defined Europe in a spirit of openness where those prepared to subscribe to a set of values to cooperate with one another are welcomed to EFC membership. The Centre's commitment to broaden Europe is affirmed by the work of the EU Enlargement Task Force headed by the Open Estonia Foundation.

In the perspective of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Grantmakers East Group to be held on 7-8 October 2002 in Moscow, the participants made several suggestions regarding the content of the forthcoming meeting. The comments included the need of:

- Increasing the legitimacy of elected politicians as well as civil society organisations;
- Sharing of the lessons of transformations, which the more developed CEE countries are well suited to do for the newer democracies,
- Encouraging to learn about the new developments in the Caucasus and Central Asia which offer fresh opportunities for development of civil society.
- Increasing the focus of grantmakers on institution building.