

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.