

# POLICY BRIEF



## Local Government Gender Mechanisms in the GPKT micro-region: an Assessment

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The areas constituting the GPKT micro-region (fYR Macedonia,<sup>1</sup> Serbia and Kosovo) belong to some of the least developed countries in Europe. Transition to market economies has been delayed because of armed conflicts, exclusion from the international community during periods of conflict, as well as the slow process of privatization (in the case of fYR Macedonia and Serbia). Despite the fact they once used to be a part of a single country, the current connection between these areas is unfortunately their characterization of political instability and weak institutions, problems compounded by the common struggle to transform their respective economies.

Of course, all these changes are not gender-neutral. Women have absorbed the shock of the adjustment by retreating to the sphere of the home and taking upon themselves the roles of family bearers and carers. Many have also intensified their unpaid work because of budget cuts in basic public services such as education, social services, and health care. In terms of gender equality in the economic sector, two other issues emerge: the extent to which a gender bias exists in the shift to the informal market; and the increased pressure on women's time, with its negative effect on their health and welfare.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The areas constituting the GPKT micro-region (FYR Macedonia,<sup>1</sup> Serbia and Kosovo) belong to some of the least developed countries in Europe. Transition to market economies has been delayed because of armed conflicts, exclusion from the international community during periods of conflict, as well as the slow process of privatization (in the case of FYR Macedonia and Serbia). Despite the fact they once used to be a part of a single country, the current connection between these areas is unfortunately their characterization of political instability and weak institutions, problems compounded by the common struggle to transform their respective economies.

Of course, all these changes are not gender-neutral. Women have absorbed the shock of the adjustment by retreating to the sphere of the home and taking upon themselves the roles of family bearers and carers. Many have also intensified their unpaid work because of budget cuts in basic public services such as education, social services, and health care. In terms of gender equality in the economic sector, two other issues emerge: the extent to which a gender bias exists in the shift to the informal market; and the increased pressure on women's time, with its negative effect on their health and welfare.

Assuming that there are commonalities among women across the GPKT micro-region, and bearing in mind that cross-border co-operation between women existed before the conflict, it is important to restore social and political links between women in the region, through identifying common issues and interests among them.

It is clear that women's difficulties and needs fall within the framework of three main areas:

- women's political representation
- economic opportunities for women
- women's activism

*Women's political participation and decision-making roles:* women are still under-represented in politics at both national and local level. The situation is steadily improving due to legislation adopted that impacts on all communities of the GPKT region. However, despite the adoption of many of the international commitments to secure equal opportunities for women these are not respected de facto. The principles of gender mainstreaming are widely acknowledged but implementation lags behind. The regulations in Kosovo are a sign of hope and good practice to be followed.

One of the major issues is the almost non-existent *economic opportunities for women* throughout the region. The majority of women in the GPKT micro-region are unemployed.<sup>2</sup> In Kosovo the overall percentage of women belonging to the unemployed category is around 60%.<sup>3</sup> About half of the workable population are women and within the group of unemployed they participate with about 50%.<sup>4</sup> This dynamic is tied to the feminization of poverty observed in the region. Those most vulnerable to poverty such as self-supporting mothers, rural women, minority women, the elderly, Roma, housewives, are the least visible. It should also be noted that economic discrimination extends beyond job application to the workplace, and that women applying for small business start-up grants or loans have little or no chances of success. Important economic institutions operating in the business sector place far more trust in men than in women. Women's social status and resources/amenities is a multidimensional sphere, and has been identified as an area which incorporates many aspects, such as health, education, social insurance, housing etc. The social sphere has a strong link to the economic one. This has always been a very challenging dynamic, and needs serious engagement by women in politics and government. The future rights of women and

1) The use of this country name in this format is in accordance with EWI editorial policies, and does not reflect the author's perspective.

2) Statistical institutes of FYR Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro ([www.stat.gov.mk](http://www.stat.gov.mk), [www.szs.sv.gov.yu](http://www.szs.sv.gov.yu)).

3) 'Women and Men in Kosovo', UNMIK, Office of Gender Affairs, 2003.

4) Combined data from the statistical institutes of FYR Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro ([www.stat.gov.mk](http://www.stat.gov.mk), [www.szs.sv.gov.yu](http://www.szs.sv.gov.yu)), 'Women and Men in Kosovo', UNMIK, Office of Gender Affairs, 2003 and "The status of women in Macedonia", UNDP, 1999.

accompanying problems, such as poverty for example, will depend greatly on the progress that the women decision-makers are able to make.

In order to contend with these issues women need to increase their level of activism to create partnerships and to lobby local and national governments for both new and improved legislation, as well as for concrete and sound action by governments. Women's NGOs need to have strong membership that voices the real needs of women in the communities and to have a clear cut list of priorities and actions they want to undertake in order to address issues and resolve problems. Such spokespeople also need to make use of what mechanisms and tools are available (gender equality committees, neighbourhood self-government units (NUs), gender equality offices, consumer councils, finance committees, referenda etc.) in order to achieve their goals. Both local and national governments need to consolidate and integrate into their daily practice recent legislation concerning gender equality and to take concrete action by creating conditions and corrective mechanisms in that respect.

### ***Summary of recommendations***

#### ***Local government***

- 1.** Include gender mainstreaming and gender equality issues in all municipal practices and regulations.
- 2.** Establish gender committees, gender officers or any other tool that could represent women's issues at the local government level.
- 3.** Use the municipal budget as a resource for funding gender-focussed activities.
- 4.** Develop and implement an action plan for gender issues.
- 5.** Involve women in planning for local economic development.
- 6.** Sensibilise the associations of local government existing in the micro-region and their good relations with central governments in order to use them as lobbyists and advocates for gender issues.

#### ***National government***

- 1.** Include gender mainstreaming and gender equality issues in all domestic legislation, including the adoption and implementation of effective equal opportunity legislation.
- 2.** Integrate gender issues into all national strategies (economic development, employment, poverty reduction, access to training, education, health, etc.), with special attention to the most vulnerable groups of women.
- 3.** Adopt and implement effective equal opportunity legislation: sufficient financial support should be provided to support the implementation of this legislation.
- 4.** Develop a National Strategy for Advancement of Women based on commitments to the CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, ILO conventions and the relevant EU directives and recommendations.
- 5.** Secure adequate representation of women in the parliament and other decision-making positions.
- 6.** Introduce and implement sex-disaggregated data in the analysis of the impact of economic, trade, social, pension, health, education etc. policies.
- 7.** Create an environment for improving the economic prospects for women by introducing and implementing appropriate legislation and alleviating obstacles to women's access to the market.

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## *International donors*

- 1.** Promote a human rights/women's rights based approach to development.
- 2.** Take appropriate measures and develop a long-term policy aimed at promoting rule of law, gender equality, social justice and human rights in all the areas of the micro-region.
- 3.** Include gender perspectives and gender assessments of the EU policies in all agreements and negotiations with the EU accession countries.
- 4.** Develop corporate responsibility mechanisms that would oblige enterprises and corporations to protect human rights/women's rights and provide safe working environments.
- 5.** Urge governments in the countries of the GPKT micro-region to interact with and support women's NGOs, and create sustainable national structures/mechanisms for the advancement of women.
- 6.** Support national governments to implement and regularly assess gender mainstreaming policies, including gender budgeting as a tool for monitoring and assessing the differentiated impacts of policies on women and men, and for supporting gender equality objectives.
- 7.** Take measures to ensure macroeconomic and trade policy decision-making takes into account gender-related problems and issues.
- 8.** Encourage both a bottom-up and top-down approach. This is especially necessary for the municipalities of Trgoviste and Presevo where there is a lack of both policy measures as well as NGO initiatives. In Kumanovo, the pressure should be more on the policy side in order to give the municipalities a legal basis to act on gender equality issues (not that they are prohibited at the moment, but still, they are not legally bound). In Gjilan/Gnjilane the pressure should be more on the municipality to start implementing all the provisions to which they are legally bound.

## *Local NGOs*

- 1.** Organise lobbying activities for the adoption of gender budgets at national and local government levels.
- 2.** Continue cross-border co-operation, exchange of information and enhance collaboration between women's NGOs in the region.
- 3.** Gather gender-related statistical information.
- 4.** Work with municipalities and advise them on devising gender budgets in order to address the needs that women face.
- 5.** Work with municipalities to develop local policies that enable women's equal access to education, health and the work force.
- 6.** Create women parliamentarians/councilors clubs with the aim of raising the problems women face in their positions and professions, and to lobby for support on specific issues.
- 8.** Investigate and consider solutions for problems that do not necessarily require financial aid.
- 9.** Undertake an assessment in order to choose suitable methods for co-operation with local governments.
- 10.** Build partnerships and coalitions both across borders and with national NGOs working on similar issues.
- 11.** Make a clear list of priorities of women's needs in their communities, go step-by-step and be realistic in demands.
- 12.** Use the media to get their message across; this will help to educate the public, and thereby both gain public support for issues raised and raise awareness of their proposals.
- 13.** Increase and become more familiar with their membership; the most successful NGO are usually those that have broad support from the people they represent.

## **I. NATIONAL GENDER POLICY IN FYR MACEDONIA, SERBIA AND KOSOVO**

### ***Constitutional rights***

The fundamental principle underlying the concept of gender equality is the equitable treatment of individual human beings. A state can be said to recognise the rule of law only when a number of conditions are being met. Firstly, individual citizens should be aware of their rights, meaning that laws have to be made public. Secondly, everyone must be equal under the law. This means that all citizens should be treated fairly and that they should know what standard of treatment to expect. It also means that no one should be given preferential treatment based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion etc.

Within this context, the major legislation changes of the three entities constituting the micro-region have taken place within the last 10-15 years following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. To date, in both FYR Macedonia and Serbia, the national constitutions represent the most important legislative effort made to create a legal framework for the protection and respect of citizens democratic rights. The Macedonian Constitution lays out the general provisions that all citizens are equal before the law, regardless of sex, race, and skin colour, national and social origin as well as political and religious beliefs, and social and financial positions. In Serbia, in addition to the Constitution that lays out general provisions granting citizens their basic human rights, the general rights of citizens are proclaimed in the Charter for Human and Minority Rights and Citizens Freedoms adopted both by the Parliaments of the State and the Federation. This Charter proclaims equality before the law of all citizens and prohibits discrimination of any kind, widening the scope to language, culture, age and mental or physical (dis)ability. It also includes prohibition of slavery, human trafficking and forced labour. Additional laws (in both Serbia and FYR Macedonia) complement the Constitution[s] and lay out citizens rights in specific areas. The

same rights are declared by Regulation no. 1999/24 on the law applicable in Kosovo, in which there is direct reference to internationally recognised human rights standards and appropriate documents such as: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, etc. The Kosovo standards implementation plan complements these efforts by propagating the rule of law.

In terms of the regulations/laws governing women's political participation, the situation in reality, in general across the micro-region the trend is of a low level of women's participation in political life. Yet the situation is steadily improving as a result of the activity of a number of civil society organizations. In this regard coalition building among the civil society sector, political parties and other relevant organizations has proved worthwhile. For example, such groups were the major force that initiated and lobbied for changes in the Laws on Local and Parliamentary Elections in FYR Macedonia. According to the Laws on Parliamentary and Local Elections in FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo, the proposed list of candidates has to include representation of each of the sexes of at least 30%. Realizing that in spite of the 30% provision, the outcome of the elections could still be devastating for women if they were not adequately distributed on the lists, civil society groups lobbied, and succeeded in getting amendments of some of these Laws to ensure that on the proposed lists of candidates each sex needs to be represented with at least 30% in the upper and lower parts of the list of candidates. As a result of this, in the current local government elections the number of women in city councils in the micro-region has been significantly increased, making it possible for them to voice the needs of the female members of the community.

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## **Legislation and mechanisms on gender-specific political participation**

The advocacy efforts of civil society groups has also proved useful in Kosovo, and as a result, Kosovo is the only entity boasting accurate institutionalised mechanisms for gender equality, through the adoption of a Law on Gender equality on February 19th, 2004. The aim of the Law is to preserve, treat and establish gender equality as a fundamental value for the democratic development of Kosovar society, providing equal opportunities for both female and male participation in the political, economic, social, cultural and other fields of social life. As a result of this Law, local government bodies have been obliged to establish an Office for Gender Affairs and to appoint Gender Affairs Officers in municipalities. The Law is supported by the UNMIK Gender Office and the Office for Good Governance within the Prime Minister's Office, as well as the Equal Opportunities Commission within the Kosovo Assembly, which appoints a Gender Equality Attorney.

In FYR Macedonia, a positive step forward recently was the Government's decision to establish a Department for promotion of gender equality within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as part of activities within the Gender Task Force framework, however, no similar offices exist at the local level.

In Serbia, as part of the EU membership process, the Government is starting to develop and set up national machineries for the advancement of women and the adoption of laws on equal opportunities for both sexes.<sup>5</sup> Examples of this are the Secretariat for Labour and Gender Equality at the Executive Council of Vojvodina, where the Vojvodina provincial parliament has also recently adopted a Declaration on Gender Equality, the Counselling Body within the Government of Serbia and the Office for Gender Equality in Montenegro.

The Serbian Government has also formed a Council for Gender Equality Rights Between the Sexes, with the aim of creating conditions for equal

gender opportunities. In addition, as the Serbian Government has also established a Working Group for monitoring the realization of Millennium Development Goals and plans defined by the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations: two of these goals deal directly with gender equality; one goal addresses the regular, systematic monitoring of corresponding statistical indicators, which will hopefully provide relevant gender statistics.

## **The impact of de-centralisation**

One of the major processes taking place in the area of the micro-region at present is the process of devolution of competencies from the central government to the local level. In FYR Macedonia, the Ministry of Local Government was established in 1998, with the mandate to design, implement and co-ordinate the reform of the local government system. Based on a real need for a local self-government reform, in November 1999 the Macedonian Government adopted the Strategy for Local Self-government Reform, however, until 2001 there was no significant step forward towards its implementation. In January 2002, the Macedonian Parliament adopted the Law on Local Self-government, which provides a solid legal framework for establishing a new system of local self-government in the country. Following this, and in order to drive the process of de-centralization forward, in February 2003, an Operational Programme for Decentralisation of Power was approved, which focuses on the creation of normative preconditions for the transfer of competencies from central to local level.

In Serbia, the Law on Local Self-government adopted in 2002 lays out the pre-conditions for a process of decentralisation similar to that in FYR Macedonia. In Kosovo, the UNMIK administration in 1999, immediately after its formation, adopted a Regulation referring to the establishment of local government units with the aim of organizing and overseeing the development of provisional institutions for democratic and autonomous self-government in Kosovo pending

5) PhD, Djuric Kuzmanovic, Tatjana and Dokmanovic, Mirjana, "The enlarged EU and its agenda for a wider Europe: What considerations for gender equality?", infosheet presented at WIDE Public Hearing on the topic 'The enlarged EU and its agenda for a wider Europe: What consideration for gender equality' on December, 2004.

a political determination of the future status of Kosovo. This Regulation links to the European Charter on Local Self-Government, and in particular to Article 3 which denotes the right and ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.

Despite the fact that the Laws on Local Self-government in FYR Macedonia and Serbia do not specify any gender-specific issues, they at least formalise direct participation of citizens in decision-making at the local level. The provisions of these Laws oblige the municipalities to inform the citizens on the decisions they take and institutionalise citizens' right to input on matters that are decided by the municipality. Citizens' opinions can be provided individually and collectively, as well as directly or via the representatives for which they vote during local elections.

These laws stipulate that the municipalities have to determine mechanisms for informing citizens of the ways and procedures for filing appeals and proposals regarding the operation of the municipal bodies, ways of organizing public hearings, carrying out of surveys and collecting citizens' proposals. Not only is the Mayor obliged to create the conditions for citizens' input, but s/he must also reply to their appeals and proposals within a certain period of time (60 days at latest in Serbia and 90 in FYR Macedonia). In addition, the municipal council may set up standing or temporary committees, for the purpose of reviewing issues and defining proposals, such as the inter-community relations committee for ethnically mixed communities (in Serbia under the name of Council for Inter-ethnic Relations), and the establishment of a consumers protection council (required under the Macedonian Law on Local Self-government). Yet despite all this detail, the gender aspect of local government has been neglected and no specific tools have been elaborated or indicated as to how women as a group can articulate their needs.

In Kosovo, the Local Government Regulation also stipulates that the Municipal Assembly should

appoint various committees (e.g. a Policy and Finance Committee, a Communities Committee and a Mediation Committee, etc.) and should decide on their competency and activities. There is again however, no mention in the Regulation of any gender-specific committee or body at the municipal level, only the provision that the Municipal Assembly should attempt to ensure equitable gender balance on all committees.

It should be noted that essential for the process of decentralization in FYR Macedonia is the process of fiscal decentralization, which will be implemented in practice as of July 1st, 2005. This will involve shifting some responsibilities for expenditure and revenue to the local government level. Consequently, for the first time in many years, the municipality will not only have the traditional competencies devolved but will also have the right to independently dispose of its own sources of revenues. While this process will very likely be slow and difficult due to inherited debts in many of the units of local self-government, it does provide a basis for introducing gender budgeting at the local level. This is also the case with Serbia and Kosovo, where now the municipalities are also responsible for allocation of the municipal budgets.

An unresolved issue in both in both Serbia and FYR Macedonia are the processes of transfer of state property in the municipality to the units of local government. These properties could be an additional source of income for the municipal budgets. Discussion about money always raises the issue of employment. In this area, in all of the micro-region, the municipalities are obliged to ensure appropriate and equitable representation of citizens from all communities represented in the municipal area in all the levels of municipal employment, as well as to respect the criteria of professionalism and competence. Beyond this, more important is the fact that the Local Economic Development is now a municipal competence: in this respect, the municipality also takes on the new responsibility for creating favourable conditions and a positive climate for improving the local economy.



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## ***Additional municipal mechanisms – Neighbourhood Government Units***

Co-operation between the Associations of Municipalities in the micro-region and the central governments have been either envisaged in the Laws on Local Self-Government or established in other formal ways, which provide the possibility to consider them as a possible tool for lobbying on particular (gender) issues.

As outlined above, the regulations in the micro-region provide basic mechanisms for voicing citizens concerns, but little in the way of gender specific mechanisms. Further options for tools to voice the concerns of women in the region could be the promotion and use of neighbourhood units. The current Laws on Local Self-Government allow for the establishment of neighbourhood self-government units (NU). In Kosovo these are not specifically termed as such, but rather with the approval of the municipality, villages, settlements and urban quarters in the municipal territory, singly or in combination, may carry out activities that are within the responsibilities and powers of the municipality. In this event, the villages, settlements and urban quarters can receive commensu-

rate resources from the municipality. Such neighbourhood units existed in the previous system of government before 1990 and were much utilised: in the process of transition, they lost their role and became more meeting places for pensioners or extended arms of the political parties in attempts to increase membership. At present, the mayor can delegate to these units the performance of certain activities of direct interest and daily importance to the life and work of citizens.

According to OSCE research on NUs, conducted over the period May-June 2004, there is a high correlation between active neighbourhood government units and higher levels of participation, higher trust in local government (both local and municipal), and greater willingness to pay fees for local improvements. In addition, citizens want their neighbourhood government units to solve problems, and are also willing in some areas to see some activities devolved to the neighbourhood level. This is what citizens are willing to do (be involved), and want (their problems solved). The reviving of the NU would provide a mechanism for increasing civic participation, correlating with higher levels of trust and confidence in local government.

## II. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION WITH REGARDS TO GENDER POLICY AND PRACTICE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN GPKT

Women face difficulties in economic and political life throughout the GPKT micro-region. These communities once used to belong to one country and shared similar conditions. What links these communities together now is the unusual economic, political and socio-cultural environment they share, which also impacts on co-operation among them. Among the key issues affecting the GPKT communities, are the common problems women in the region face. Assuming that there are commonalities among women, and bearing in mind that cross-border co-operation between women existed before the conflict, it is important to restore social and political links between women in the region, through identifying common issues and interests among them.

### ***Political participation***

The general trend across the GPKT micro-region is of a low level of women's participation in political life. Women usually become politically active when their direct concerns are not adequately addressed. In terms of political participation, under the pressure of the recent election laws, women's voting has increased many-fold. Yet, this seems to be more of a tendency among the more educated and among women from the municipal centres. Women residing in the villages by the border(s) still need to be educated on the need for political participation. Another important issue related to these somewhat marginalised women is the fact that they often do not possess citizenship documents, making it practically impossible for them to participate in election processes.

Women from urban, but especially from rural areas, in the micro-region also face the problem of bad infrastructure and poor organization of local transport. Local governments across the micro-region have at least some, if not significant, competency for this issue and should look into the possibility of improving transport links. This is an issue that requires review throughout the micro-

region since it creates difficulties both within the territories of the respective communities and for the cross-border communication (for example, there is only one bus travelling twice a day between Presevo and Kumanovo).

Another key dynamic affecting political participation is literacy. As in many regions, rural areas in GPKT have been identified as places with higher illiteracy rates than usual. Overall, women are more affected by this problem more than men, with rates of 10.2% female illiteracy as compared to 2.3% male illiteracy in Kosovo for example.

Unfortunately, women from the GPKT communities do not seem to see engaging in politics as a useful or productive channel for their efforts to ensure that their basic needs are met or that living conditions for their families are improved: they rather see potential solutions in practical activities that address individual needs. Yet this is what politics is about, especially at the local level.

Women are needed at all political levels, and work on the local level should also be complemented by that at higher levels. At present women are still under-represented in decision-making positions at local and central government across the region. The situation is however steadily improving as a result of the activity of a number of civil society organizations.

In addition, a very positive impact and impetus has come from the recently-amended Laws on election provisioning, which require women to be represented by at least 30% on the proposed list of candidates in all of the micro-region. As many government structures fall short of being effective in protecting the rights of women and eliminating gender imbalance it is vital that women are, and become, able to protect and promote their rights and interests in the GPKT area during the ongoing political and economic transition. Participation in local governance is a key step to securing women candidates in national elections and to securing the leading roles in state decision-making as well.

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The inequality and discrimination women face is, among other factors, influenced by the prevalence of traditional attitudes and limited, stereotyped expectations of women. In all of the communities of the GPKT region, women are particularly affected by such prejudice, and this prevents them from finding economic and professional opportunities, as they remain generally unaware of their rights under international and domestic law. It is therefore necessary that all women become aware of their rights and be given the opportunity to participate equally in the labour market, politics, and the general development of their society.

## **Local government gender mechanisms and obligations**

The central governments in the societies of the GPKT region do not maintain specific obligations requesting the local government to address gender issues and women's rights. Regulation on gender participation is limited only to the abovementioned Laws on Local and General/Parliamentary elections in which the presence of 30% female candidates is required in all GPKT municipal territories. In general, there are no other laws which demand any specific kind of programme or action plan to be developed by the municipality aimed at improving women's position in society.

An exception to this general condition is the Law on Gender Equality for Kosovo, which lays out specific recommendations and actions to be undertaken by local government (and was drafted with the involvement of the Kosovo Women's Forum). As a direct result of the adoption of this Law, within the municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane, an office for gender equality has been established and a gender equality officer has been appointed. This office has yet to develop its action plan and start operating according to the provisions of the Law, so it is too early to make an assessment of how this will impact on women's status in the Gjilan/Gnjilane municipal area. In FYR Macedonia the process of drafting an equal opportunities law, which would cover such

issues, is ongoing. Similarly in Serbia, one of the key elements in achieving equality between women and men would be the adoption of a Law on Gender Equality. The Task Force responsible for the preparation of the Resolution on Gender Equality of the Vojvodina Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality is currently finalising the wording of the Resolution. This document should ensure the observation and affirmation of gender equality and outlaw gender-based discrimination in all areas of social life. When the Assembly of Vojvodina adopts the Resolution on Gender Equality, as the highest legal act Vojvodina may adopt, the Resolution will, in the form of a Law on Gender Equality, be submitted to the Assembly of Serbia to be adopted. If the Assembly of Serbia adopts it, then it would be a law applicable across the entire Serbian territory. As far as mechanisms for gender policies and programs at the local level are concerned the legal provisions in both Serbia and FYR Macedonia do not oblige the forming of a gender equality committee or any kind of advisory board referring to these issues. Yet, the Laws do not prohibit such actions and it is left to the individual local government administrations to determine the establishment of such bodies within their statutes and by-laws.

In the local government unit of Kumanovo there was an initiative to set up a Committee for Gender Equality in 2002. It was envisaged to consist of three members of the municipal council, one municipal employee and three NGO members. The item had been placed on the agenda of the council session but due to the reactions caused it was withdrawn. One of the arguments against the establishment of the Committee was that the municipality is not obliged by law to take such a step.<sup>6</sup>

An important element in the fight for gender equality could be the use of neighbourhood units (NU). NUs are the closest a local government can get to its citizens, and as the mayors of the municipalities are allowed to transfer some of the competencies and responsibilities to the NUs, they could prove a valuable tool for women to use in resolving some of the local problems they face.

6) Data obtained by author's interviews.

In terms of local government support for local women's NGOs, some mechanisms are in place. Some of the GPKT municipalities (Kumanovo, Gjilan/Gnjilane) have an item in their budget lines reserved for financial assistance to local NGOs. In FYR Macedonia, these funds are usually limited, as is the budget of the municipalities in general, which was mainly due to the previously centralised governance and budgeting system. As of July 1st, 2005 the Macedonian Law on Local Government Finance will be in place, although the municipalities still do not know how the budget will need to be allocated according to this new Law. Also, in Kumanovo, the municipal approach until now has been one based on the principle 'a little for everybody' instead of supporting the implementation of complete and sustainable initiatives. In Kumanovo for example, the budget for NGO support has been a little less than about 10,000 Euro (600,000 MKD), given in two parts. The approach of the municipality had been to distribute it among as many NGOs as possible, including sports and pensioners associations, etc., with the result that local women's NGOs were obliged to compete against each other for meagre resources.

In Gjilan/Gnjilane municipality there are about 100 local NGOs registered.<sup>7</sup> However, a majority of these are not active, partly due to lack of funding. Of the more prominent local NGOs, most deal with youth and gender issues and they too are competing for funds. Coalition-building among several women's NGOs in order to jointly access local funds can help improve the situation. Local governments in the micro-region could be lobbied parallel for initiatives of importance to all women and could be financed transversally by several local budgets from the municipalities (however, this approach would require the creation of women's NGOs that could start lobbying the local government administrations for support in Trgoviste and Presevo).

Generally, where there is no legislation adopted by the national government to impose and request gender equality mechanisms, there are no gender mechanisms in place at the local level. Proof of this is that only in Gjilan/Gnjilane is there a gender equality

officer as a result of the adopted Gender equality law in Kosovo that provisions the establishment of municipal gender equality officers. In all other parts of the micro-region, despite the fact that such initiatives (committees, gender budgets etc.) and mechanisms for gender equality are not prohibited, the municipalities are under no obligation to implement them and hence resist them. Some of the municipalities (Kumanovo for example) have called upon women's NGOs for consultation when implementing certain activities, but these collaborative initiatives depend more on the personality of the Mayor than expressing a sound, or continuous, municipal policy.

### ***Possibilities to influence municipal decision-making and the role of NGOs***

One of the difficulties in lobbying for gender issues, whether this is for the establishment of gender committees, gender-sensitive funding or employment, is the general lack of any empirical information or gender segregated data within the municipalities or on the national level. Properly gender segregated data would provide information about gender distribution and women's representation within all state and business institutions and other work places, and could serve as a basis for formulating certain requests and actions.

Efforts and lobbying to establish gender mechanisms on the local level in GPKT have so far been left largely to the local women's NGOs active in the area. One example is the Club of Women Councillors (delegates on the Kumanovo Local Council), which was established by a local NGO with the sole aim of discussing women's issues with the members of the club and using the Club as a lobbying and advocacy tool. The Club could be used as a possible tool for women's NGOs to achieve interest for their issues and to lobby the political parties in the local municipal council and could be expanded to a women parliamentarians club if any are elected from the municipality(ies) involved.

An additional channel for requests on specific issues is the delivery of proposals to the relevant

7) Municipal profile, OSCE, February 2005.

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local government bodies from a group of NGOs. However, an obstacle to the use of this mechanism could be the fact that there is a very long legally determined deadline for receiving response from the local government or none at all (in FYR Macedonia and Serbia the deadline is 60 days after receiving the proposal, while in Kosovo the time-frame is determined according to the Statute and Rules of Procedure of the relevant Municipal Assembly). That notwithstanding, local NGOs could work to establish and agree jointly with the relevant municipality a procedure for filing requests to the and a deadline for receiving responses to their suggestions, ideas and complaints. In localities such as Gjilan/Gnjilane, requests and proposals can be initiated via the municipal office for gender equality.

The chances for impacting on municipal funding decision-making also increase if the local NGOs of the municipal area collaborate, and appear before the municipalities proposing a joint agenda, and this tactic is especially recommended in the case of communities where there is small number of women's NGOs. Women's NGOs can support initiatives on important issues such as gender-sensitive spending of the municipal budget (and spending of the gender budget if one exists), and can co-ordinate with all key bodies included in the preparation, approval and implementation of the municipal budget in order to ensure the budget's gender sensitivity.

In this respect, an important issue is of course that of the existence of a viable civil sector that could take upon itself the responsibility of promoting women's participation and women's issues. This could be a particularly challenging task in the municipalities of Trgoviste and Presevo, which have a far less developed civil society than the large municipalities of Gjilan/Gnjilane and Kumanovo. In both Presevo and Trgoviste similar challenges exist in this regard, with a complete lack of civil society in the sense of functioning NGOs in Trgoviste, and a rather weak level of activity in Presevo, where only a few recently-established and inexperienced NGOs deal with women's issues.

Women from both these municipalities need to

work on establishing and strengthening their civil society. This could be achieved by increasing the number of women activists in their respective municipalities, and by establishing more NGOs. However, beyond the fact of NGO establishment, genuine participation is imperative, and increasing the number of active members could help these organisations gain recognition and also become real tools for voicing the needs of the women in the community (rather than becoming donor-created and grant-driven entities). Once consolidated, women's NGOs in Trgoviste and Presevo would need to go through a process of strategic planning and project cycle management in order to be able to set out their priorities clearly, as well as develop action and sustainability plans. Kumanovo and Gjilan/Gnjilane can be a model in this sense, or at least provide useful insights and support in the process of developing civil society in their partner municipalities.

Research indicates that local governments are not genuinely aware of the requests and needs of the women in the micro-region. Not all of the blame should be attributed to municipal administrations however, as NGOs are not always clear in the way they express their requests. This problem is one of the emerging as well as the already developed civil sector in the GPKT region. One of the advantages of the existing NGO sector is its readiness for joint action, and this advantage has the potential to support the development of joint lists of priority issues and proposals to submit to the relevant units of local government.

Furthermore, the issue of gender equality should be actualised on the level of the municipality as a whole, and not only the municipal council. NGOs will improve their chances of success if they develop clear strategies for approaching local government bodies, and other key stakeholder such as local businesses, and if they develop lists of priority issues relating to the women in their communities that they want addressed, and provide realistic actions or solutions for addressing these issues. Local media is also a powerful tool, which can be used to achieve advocacy goals and help raise awareness of women's problems and issues.

## **Key problems for women in the GPKT micro-region and possible responses**

### **Employment**

A key problem identified that affects the majority of the women in the GPKT region is the high rate of unemployment and their economic dependence on other family members. In all the GPKT communities women are the ones that are mostly left without employment in comparison to men. This is due to the difficult economic situation that affects both men and women in the communities, and the specific results of the closure and bankruptcy of the big factories (e.g. textile, furniture, shoes, etc.), which used to employ the majority of women in these communities. Furthermore, the women that do have the opportunity to work are very often doing so under sub-standard conditions and face exploitation – they are often paid very poorly for long hours of strenuous work without any benefits, mostly in local factories.

Complementing and supporting this serious under-employment are the still very strongly held traditional values in these communities, which see women more as mothers, carers and nurturers rather than as workers. In both Trgoviste and Presevo, and even Gjilan/Gnjilane according to traditional belief, priority in employment is given to the men in the family. These traditional values are the ones impeding the full emancipation of women in all of the GPKT communities, and help to keep women linked to work in the home despite the existence of possible employment opportunities.

It is also important to note that the lack of female employment has an additional impact on women's status in general: by being largely restricted to domestic roles, women's financial status and consequent social status in terms of respect as important actors within the family and community is also reduced.

Overall, it can be concluded that the economic, and consequently social, status of women is declining due to a number of factors:

- The re-patriarchalization of society, pushing women from the public sphere and labour market (paid work) to the private sphere (family and child care);
- High levels of bankruptcy leading to the dismissal of workers;
- Cuts in social services and public spending;
- The reduction of workers' rights and protection laws plus weakened trade unions as a result of transition;
- The horizontal and vertical segregation of women in the labour market;
- The increasing shift of the labour force, particularly of women, from a formal economy to informal economy;
- The exclusions of women from the privatisation process: very few women are owners of enterprises; women tend more often to be employees rather than employers.
- Women own less land, and other assets.

### **Access to Health Care**

Another important issue affecting all women in the region is health care. In the past decade there has been a trend at the international level of monitoring the health status of women and the access of women to health services. The signatory countries to the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing assumed the obligation to monitor and improve health status for women.<sup>8</sup> The platform points to five strategic objectives that refer to the improvement of health protection and to the health situation of women in general. The recommendations are concentrated on three essential elements: prevention, improved access to health services, and research.

The issue of access to health services is particularly severe in the municipality of Trgoviste, where there is no hospital and where specialist checks are provided by a once-a-week doctor's visit. For childbirth women are forced to travel to 50km to the city of Vranje or even to Gjilan/Gnjilane. This also refers to healthcare for infants and small children, for whose regular vac-

<sup>8</sup>) The status of women in Macedonia, UNDP, July 1999.

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ination or emergency problems women have to travel outside their municipality. The necessity for establishing a maternity ward is obvious and is a pressing issue to lobby for at the municipal level.

Also, in the interviews conducted in the field, children with disabilities and special needs were identified as a very under-resourced group in the micro-region, particularly in Presevo. Primarily the difficulty pertains to the language barrier between patients (and their families) and the majority of medical specialists, and which makes it difficult for ethnic Albanian children and parents to travel to the specialist centres and doctors available in Vranje or Nis. Possibilities could be, therefore, to investigate whether the specialists working in Gjilan/Gnjilane could also be available for patients from Presevo. A possibility for facing this challenge could be to organise and lobby for sharing specialists between different schools across GPKT to try and get more children assessed and monitored by specialists on a more regular basis.

A related need has arisen in Gjilan/Gnjilane in terms of regular and continuous health-checks for school children in their schools, as it is necessary to have regular visits by doctors especially in rural settlements. This provision could also be extended to lobby for free (state-funded) health checks for women in both urban and rural areas across the micro-region.

## ***Possible Responses to Key Problems***

The issue of unemployment for women could be addressed by encouraging women-led SMEs. NGOs could be made part of an/the advisory board for economic issues within local government, and the NGOs alongside the board could promote credit lines for SME establishment as well as assisting in the alleviation of administrative obstacles for setting-up and licensing women-led businesses. Free-of-charge services for developing business plans, strategies and securing funding could also be provided, and these services could also be designed to encourage (micro) regional co-operation and links in this field.

In both Trgoviste and Presevo the proximity of the border is seen as a possibility for improving the local economy. The feeling of women in Trgoviste is the same as of the men: that there is a need to open a new border crossing closer to Kriva Palanka with the hope that this will increase access and provide the community with greater economic prospects. In Presevo the widely felt request is that at least 1% of the taxes for import/export levied at the Tabanovce border crossing should be allocated to the local municipal budget, and women would support this idea (if viable) under the condition that some of the funds be used to support women's concerns.

In addition, both Trgoviste and especially Presevo are considered underdeveloped regions, and as such are eligible for additional economic support from the state. Women's NGO should lobby for part of this money, however meagre it might be, with the aim of investing this in promotion of employment for women or setting up credit lines for women-led businesses.

One way of dealing with the poor conditions experienced by the women who are employed in the workforce, could be to raise these problems in front of the relevant local government bodies via the women councillors who sit on them: these women councillors could insist that an investigation be made into the working conditions in these businesses. Simultaneously, women's NGOs and women local government groups should lobby central government for improving legislation on women's employment.

In terms of healthcare, the general needs for improving the overall poor quality of services, which should be lobbied for by NGOs and through, and by, local government. In addition, the central governments should be taking over the responsibility for providing free screening for women in these areas especially the remote ones – this is especially critical in the region due to the still under-researched problems with cervical cancer. Improving health care facilities in the centres of all GPKT communities would also benefit the access of women from the villages.

### III. NOTES ON BEST PRACTICES IN GENDER POLICY

Overall, the approach to gender issues work at the local government level taken by the women in the GPKT micro-region appears not to be based on a specific model they are conscious of, and to be rather a set of responses chosen according to specific actions or situations. It seems that faced with the difficulties of traditional patriarchal values in both the family and society, the women activists of the GPKT area tend to opt for a subtle and phased approach. Compared to the radical movement that made its mark on feminism in countries like the US, this resembles more the socialist feminist movement in the Scandinavian countries, and in this context Sweden could provide a good comparative model.

#### ***The Swedish model***

When examining the number of political positions occupied by women in Sweden, it becomes quite obvious that the country has already achieved substantial progress with regard to equal opportunities. In April 2000, Sweden became the world's first country with women holding a majority of its government seats (11 of 20 cabinet posts); women also make up 44% of the members of its national parliament, and about 45% of regional and local government bodies, city and community councils without any quota prescribed by law.

In the course of the late 1980s, the principle that gender-equity policy cannot be pursued separate from other fields of political activity, but has to be intertwined and connected with all parts of society and has to permeate throughout all political levels and structures, became broadly accepted as the position of the political majority in Sweden. In particular, the top level of political decision-makers and administrators supported this concept, and consequently since 1994 the Swedish Prime Minister included gender-mainstreaming and equal opportunities issues into his/her yearly statement on the policy of the government. Decision-makers of all level were, and are, involved into gender-equity policy, taking responsibility for car-

rying out and implementing the political guidelines established on gender equity. This had the added benefit that results were officially documented, and that monitoring and evaluation instruments were, and continue to be applied to record the success of the different measures for gender-equity in government.

#### ***Assessing and monitoring the situation***

For example, a tool called the 3R-Method (representation, resources, realization) was developed in order to enhance the control and analysis of society. With regards to representation, data is compiled in order to answer the question of what is the respective (absolute and relative) proportion of women and men participating in decision-making and other processes on all societal levels. Secondly, there is monitoring of how resources (financial means, time, and space) are distributed among men and women. Finally, there is monitoring of realization: whether the distribution of representation and resources among women and men corresponds with the principles and goals of gender-equity policy (and if not, what needs to be changed, and how can it be changed).

#### ***Methods for encouraging equity***

76% of all Swedish women are gainfully employed, while Europe-wide this figure was only 59% in the year 1999. This, however, does not imply that all of those women in fact have the same income and career opportunities than their male colleagues have. How is Sweden dealing with this challenge? The country has conventional gender-equity policies such as measures to support women in the IT sector, setting up loan and mentoring programs especially for women working in enterprise initiatives, and programmes designed to attract women to occupations dominated by men.

On the one hand, Sweden supports gender mainstreaming through legal obligations; on the other



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hand, a variety of measures are also taken with the aim of raising the general public's information level and awareness of gender-equity. For instance, employers with ten or more employees are obliged to submit a report every year on the structure and distribution of the wages they are paying. By publishing figures differentiated by gender, field of occupation, and function / type of professional activity, it is possible to make clear comparisons of women and men working in the same profession or in equivalent or similar functions. The goal behind this activity is the detection of wage discrimination against women, and the prevention and elimination of this, where necessary. The results of the comparison have to be summarised and presented by the employer in a yearly plan of action, which also has to include a calculation of the necessary costs for elimination of discrimination cases and a time-table estimating how long it will take to reach the goal of men and women being paid equally for equal work. If an employer does not meet this obligation, the office of the Gender-Equity Ombudsman can ask the Gender-Equity Committee (comprised of lawyers, industry representatives, and labour-market and gender-equity experts) to dictate specific active measures accompanied by a threat of punishment. In addition to this government control, an employer violating the rules prohibiting discriminative practices can be sued through the civil courts by the female employee and eventually be forced to pay damages.

Further to the obligations to produce records and analysis of wage statistics by gender and the Swedish Gender-Equity Ombudsman, an additional programme targeting wage discrimination has also been established ( Wage determination and Workplace rating ), and a draft proposed law, containing tougher regulations on wage discrimination, is under discussion. Another innovative step in this area is the creation of a Gender-Equity Label for enterprises and institutions complying with certain gender-equity standards.

To conclude, in Sweden women are now in a relatively strong position politically in terms of election to decision-making positions. However, they are still

under-represented in most other sectors that have a particular influence on political matters such as big business and key institutions in the economic sector. Women in Sweden remain significantly less represented than men in leading / executive positions within employers and employees organisations, political and other associations, and in the private sector. This has led the government and a number of private institutions and enterprises to initiate the foundation of an Academy for Economic Leadership in order to pursue the goal of stimulating an equal distribution of power and responsibility in the private sector between men and women, through preparing and encouraging management executives, particularly female ones, to fill and develop their roles. Furthermore, the government set up a commission with the responsibility to investigate the distribution of financial resources between women and men as well as the relationship between gender and economic power: the commission's final report was submitted recently.

## ***Best practice models and EU standards***

What do the Swedish experiences give us in terms of transferable experience or best practice models in practice? While Sweden does provide an excellent example of substantial progress in gender equity in politics and employment, it is not likely to be beneficial to attempt to apply the exact experiences gained in Sweden to developing or transition countries. Instead, each country should be encouraged to identify the best programme of tools and actions to address these problems within its own specific context in accordance with its cultural, social, and political situation to achieve changes in the short, medium and long term.

Very often, reform imposed by some external partner or institution results in resistance from those pressured to adopt it, and thus does not stand a good chance of success. To achieve sustainable results, the most difficult challenge is to pick up and build on reform processes that are already under way, and to carefully develop and modify them towards adjusted solutions appropriate to

specific contexts. Tailored reforms with domestic support are those with the best changes of bringing about structural change.

However, the fact that there are multiple possible paths that gender-equity reform and policy can follow does not imply that anything goes.

The European Union has a gender policy originating from both internal and external commitments to gender equality. Hence, the EU gender policy has drawn upon the commitments made at the UN Conferences on Women and Development held in 1975, 1985, and 1995. At the same time, EU gender policy evolved from internal commitments to gender equality, starting with a directive on equal pay in 1975, as well as from cases brought before the European Court of Justice.

In 1995, the European Commission accepted a resolution on gender issues in development cooperation, which was turned into a Council Regulation in 1998. This regulation notes policies including Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), which should take women's and men's roles into account. The legal basis of this regulation are Articles 2 and 3 of the EC Treaty (The promotion of equality between men and women is a task of the European Community, and In all its activities the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women), as well as Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay).

In 1996, the European Commission initiated a gender mainstreaming approach, to address the persistent disparities between women and men within the European Union. This mainstreaming approach should lead to the incorporation of equal opportunities for women and men into all EU policies and activities, and mainstreaming efforts were developed in a Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2001-2005. This strategy explicitly seeks to mainstream gender equality in internal EU policies as well as in

external relations of the EU with third countries.

Gender mainstreaming represents the latest stage in the broadening of EU gender policies. In contrast to earlier equal treatment and positive action EU equality strategies, which, respectively, treated women the same as men and helped women adjust to the (gender blind) male norm, mainstreaming is based upon the recognition of gender differences between men and women. Thus, for EU policy makers, mainstreaming involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilizing all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effect on the respective situations of men and women.<sup>9</sup> In a broad sense, mainstreaming is a transversal and long-term political strategy for achieving gender equality by engendering the policy-making process. More narrowly conceived, it is a method of policy-making that requires the adoption of particular policy-making instruments and procedures. In particular, gender mainstreaming has necessitated the introduction at the EU level of soft (i.e. legally non-binding) policy instruments, such as the collection of sex disaggregated data, gender impact assessments, benchmarking, national league tables, and gender auditing of EU programmes.

It is important to stress that within the EU, mainstreaming is intended to complement, and not to replace, positive action measures for women and equal treatment legislation. Thus, the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005) brings together all the different EU initiatives and programmes designed to promote gender equality with an across-the-board mainstreaming approach. The positive action program associated with the Framework Strategy focuses upon five objectives, which provide the frame of reference for policy development, and to which all EU gender equality initiatives are now linked: i. equality in economic life (labour market policies); ii. equal

9) Commission of the European Communities, 2000:5.

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representation and participation in decision-making (parity democracy); iii. equality in social life (social protection, health); iv. equality in civil life (human rights, gender-related violence, trafficking); and, v. changing gender roles and overcoming stereotypes (in education, culture, media, etc.).

International standards can provide good frameworks and guidance for countries wishing to develop their own gender policies. In addition, the international community can also provide incentives through funding policies: donors can support reform efforts by formulating minimum requirements for gender-equity policy and reform programmes that they are willing to support financially.

Whatever range of incentives and facilitation for reform, the sustainability of any reform initiative is

crucial. To achieving lasting results, it is vital that reform strategies must be built on a broad basis. The example of Sweden shows that reform has to be aimed at decision-makers on all societal levels (including local governments, administrations, and also community leaders), ensuring that they are fully involved in the policy-making process. It is necessary that all key stakeholders participate in the conceptualization of gender-equity policy, and that they also take responsibility for the results that are achieved or not, as only a combination of gender empowerment and culturally adjusted reforms can help transition countries achieve the goal of a fully equitable society, in which women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities and bear the same burdens.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it appears that in the GPKT micro-region women's problems and needs fall into three main areas:

### ***Women's political participation and decision-making roles***

Women are still under-represented in politics at both national and local levels. The situation is steadily improving due to the legislation adopted in all communities of the GPKT region, requiring at least 30% presence of women candidates on the election lists. Despite the adoption of many of the international commitments to secure equal opportunities for women by FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo, these are not respected de facto, and while the principles of gender mainstreaming are widely acknowledged but implementation lags behind. The regulations in Kosovo are a sign of hope and good practice to be followed: these have established gender equality as a crucial and constituent part of government strategy and actions, and the creation of the Commission of Equal Opportunities and Gender Issues within the Kosovo Assembly, as well as the Inter-ministerial Group for Gender Equality are proof of that. However, participation does not always mean that the women will gain positions in which they can make important decisions: there are still few women working in higher levels of government and there is a lack of women in high managerial positions in business. These issues need to be addressed and appropriate action taken.

### ***Women's economic situation***

One of the major issues in the micro-region is the almost non-existent economic opportunities for women. The majority of women in the GPKT micro-region are unemployed, and in Kosovo the

overall percentage of women unemployed is around 60%: this dynamic is tied to the feminization of poverty observed in the region. Those most vulnerable to poverty such as self-supporting mothers, rural women, minority women, the elderly, Roma, housewives, are the least visible.

It is also noted that economic discrimination extends beyond job application to the workplace, and that women applying for small business start-up grants or loans have little or no chances of being awarded. Important economic institutions operating in the business sector place far more trust in men than in women.

### ***Women's social status and resources/amenities***

This multidimensional sphere has been identified as an area which incorporates many aspects, such as health, education, social insurance, housing etc. The social sphere has a strong link to the economic one, and requires serious engagement by women in politics and government. Much will depend on women leaders of this kind to raise awareness of serious gender-related problems and promote and help establish the future rights of women.

In order to contend with these issues women need to create partnerships and to lobby local and national governments for both new and improved legislation, as well as for concrete and sound actions by governments. Women's NGOs need to have a strong membership that voices the real needs of women in the communities and to have a clear-cut list of the priorities and actions that they want to undertake in order to address issues and resolve problems. Campaigners also need to make use of the mechanisms and tools available (gender equality committees, NUs, gender equality offices consumers councils, finance committees, referenda etc.) in order to achieve their goals.

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## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Local governments**

1. Include gender mainstreaming and gender equality issues in all standard practices of the municipalities and their regulations in those areas where gender equality laws have not been adopted, or where there is no legal obligation to create gender support mechanisms. These mechanisms would help involve women in decision-making, problem-solving and would also allow municipalities to gain a clearer picture of the needs of women and difficulties in meeting these needs in the community. This clearer picture of needs and increased availability of information will also be an advantage for local and central government in the future preparation of national legislation on gender equality and other legislation affecting this area, such as employment legislation, electoral regulations, etc.
2. In the communities where municipal gender committees, gender officers or any other body representing women's issues does not exist, these should be established. While legislation can oblige municipalities to create such bodies or officers, the lack of directive legislation does not mean that such bodies or officers are forbidden.
3. The municipal budget can be used both as a resource for funding women's activities, and should also be seen as a resource which should have gender-sensitive decision-making. Municipalities should apply a gender filter when making decisions on spending, as if only men are making budget decisions they might not have the same information or understanding of needs as women decision-makers.
4. Develop and implement an action plan for gender issues in consultation with local women's NGOs and women community representatives.
5. Involve women in planning for local economic development. LED is a competence and responsibility of the units of local government across the GPKT micro-region, and it will be crucial to ensure there is a female perspective on economic development planning.

6. Sensitise the associations and bodies of local government existing in the micro-region to gender issues, and use their good relations with central governments to support lobbying and advocacy on gender issues. This could be done by initiating a women's caucus within local government administration that would participate or recommend women to be part of the working groups for drafting national laws in which the associations are involved.

### **Central governments**

1. Incorporate gender mainstreaming and gender equity in all domestic legislation including the adoption and implementation of effective equal opportunity legislation.
2. Integrate gender issues into all national strategies (economic development, employment, poverty reduction, access to training, education, health, etc.), with special attention to the most vulnerable groups of women.
3. Adopt and implement effective equal opportunity legislation. Sufficient financial support should be provided to support the implementation of this legislation.
4. Develop a National Strategy for Advancement of Women based on commitments to the CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, ILO conventions and the EU directives and recommendations.
5. Secure adequate representation of women in the parliament and political decision-making positions.
6. Introduce and implement sex-disaggregated data in the analysis of the impact of economic, trade, social, pension, health, education etc. policies, and formulate indicators to measure gendered impact for reporting, monitoring and policy change.
7. To create an appropriate and supportive environment for improving the women's economic prospects by creating appropriate legislation and alleviating obstacles to women's access to markets.

### **International donors**

- 1.** Promote a human rights/women's rights based approach to development.
- 2.** Take appropriate measures to develop and support a long-term policy aimed at promoting the rule of law, gender equality, social justice and human rights in all the areas of the micro-region.
- 3.** Include gender perspectives and gender assessments of the relevant EU policies in all agreements and negotiations with the EU accession countries.
- 4.** Develop corporate responsibility mechanisms that would oblige enterprises and corporations to protect human rights and provide safe working environments.
- 5.** Urge governments in the countries of the GPKT micro-region to interact with and support women's NGOs and create sustainable national structures/mechanisms for the advancement of women.
- 6.** Support national governments' implementation and regularly assessment of gender mainstreaming policies, including gender budgeting as a tool for monitoring and assessing the differentiated impacts of policies on women and men, and progress on gender equality objectives.
- 7.** Take measures to ensure macroeconomic and trade policy decision-making takes into account gender-related problems and issues. This should include identifying the impacts of current policies and programs on different groups of women and men, addressing gender power relations, and recognizing the care economy as a component of the formal economy.
- 8.** Encourage both a bottom-up and top-down approach. This is especially necessary for the municipalities of Trgoviste and Presevo, where there is a lack of both policy measures as well as NGO initiatives. In Kumanovo, the pressure should be more on the policy side in order to give the municipalities a legal basis to act on gender equality issues (not that they are prohibited at the moment, but still, they are not legally bound). In Gjilan/Gnjilane the pressure should be more on the municipality to start implementing all the provisions to which they are legally bound.

### **Local NGOs**

- 1.** Organise lobbying activities for the adoption of gender budgets at the national level.
- 2.** Continue cross-border co-operation, exchange of information and enhance collaboration between women's NGOs in the GPKT micro-region.
- 3.** Gather gender-related statistical information. To make decisions government officials want reliable information, not just complaints, so it will be important to conduct research, gather data and analyse the information received to provide the necessary justification for advocacy proposals.
- 4.** Work with municipalities and advise them to devise gender budgets, and gender-sensitive decision-making on financial spending, in order to address the needs that women face.
- 5.** Work with municipalities to develop policies that enable women's equal access in education, health and work force. This could be done by working with gender equality officers in the municipalities where they exist or with other municipal officials with the relevant responsibilities for employment and education.
- 6.** Create women parliamentarians/councilors clubs with the aim of raising the problems women face in their positions and professions, and to support lobbying on specific issues.
- 7.** Investigate and consider solutions for problems that do not necessarily require financial aid. Certain problems do not need money, just the will for solutions to be discussed and negotiated.
- 8.** Undertake an assessment in order to choose suitable methods for co-operation with local governments. Consider the type of approach that would work best in a particular municipality. Engage with municipal officials and work co-operatively on an approach when lobbying for a proposal.
- 9.** Build partnerships and coalitions- both across borders and with national NGOs working on similar issues. This is a good way to increase numbers and learn to overcome mistrust and competition between NGOs while advocating for common goals. It also provides additional information and exchange of ideas. In the process of women's empowerment, partnership with men is also an essential factor.

# POLICY BRIEF

- 10.** Make a clear list of priorities of women's needs in the community, go step-by-step and be realistic in demands. In a market economy a bank is a business and cannot create special loans for women: they will have to evaluate the risk, collateral and loans just as for any other person or business. In such situations, investigate alternatives that might be realistic, such as locally run small savings and micro-credit units and ensure all applications are treated equally.
- 11.** Use the media to get the message across; this will help to educate the public, and thereby both gain public support for issues raised and raise awareness of advocacy proposals.
- 12.** Increase and become more familiar with NGO membership; the most successful NGOs are usually those that have broad support from the people they represent. NGOs will be more successful in their advocacy if they can demonstrate to local officials that they have the support of large number of people – but to do so, NGOs will need to reach out to their communities, and ensure they accurately represent communities' views and win their trust.

## Centre for Border Co-operation (CBC)

### CBC MISSION

The Centre promotes optimal cross-border co-operation across Eurasia, where severed relations or dysfunctional border practices hamper development and security. We engage local communities and their governments throughout Eurasia to bridge dangerous ethnic, political and economic divides, address cross-border threats through functional co-operation, and help strengthen border policies and practices to equally address the requisites of security and freedom of movement.

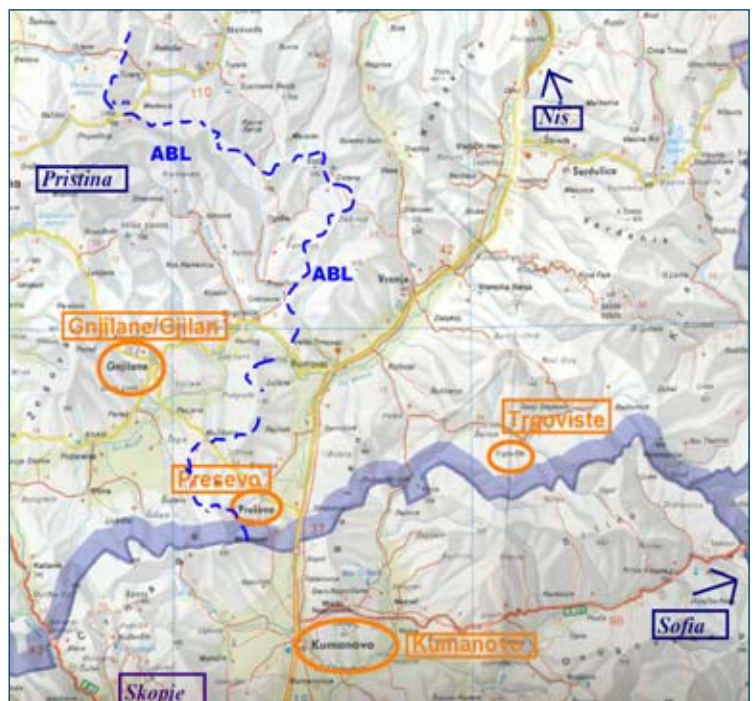
### STRATEGIC GOALS

CBC projects are based on the assumption that if ethnic, religious and politico-economic fault lines are to be bridged, there is a need to work not only at the policy level with central governments, but also across borders with local border communities where such fault lines are most acutely felt. Addressing this need to work both 'bottom-up' and 'topdown', CBC's mutually re-enforcing strategic objectives are:

1. At the grass roots level (responding to local demand), to support functional, interest-based co-operation between border regions suffering dysfunctional or severed links;
2. At the policy level, to support the establishment of the necessary national and regional legislative/political frameworks facilitating cross-border co-operation, addressing the need to balance security and freedom in border policy and reduce the socio-economic gap on the borders of the EU.

### WHY CBC?

Threats of international terrorism and cross-border criminality, the conflict-ridden fragmentation of ex-Yugoslavia and the process of European Union Enlargement have brought border issues to center-stage. Border regions internationally continue to represent zones of significant tension and instability if not outright conflict; they are at the same time among the least developed areas in the region. Functional trans-frontier co-operation of local actors and institutions (business, civic and government) in such areas serves as an important tool of conflict prevention/post-conflict reconciliation as well as regional development and socio-economic convergence, promoting local democracy and open civil societies. As such it is a prerequisite of development and security in border regions, providing a concrete underpinning to regional co-operation and normalised inter-state relations.



### GJILAN/GNJILANE-KUMANOVO-PRESEVO-TRGOVISTE (GPKT)

The work in the GPKT micro-region is predicated on the view that instability and cross-border crime in the micro-region is more a result of the harsh border regimes imposed in the recent past and resultant socio-economic isolation of the three parts of this once vibrant market region, than of the often-cited ethnic conflict in the area. EWI's GPKT Project seeks to foster political consensus at both local and national levels on positive solutions to the challenges facing communities in the GPKT micro-region, and is working with civil society in a number of areas to enhance capacity and support cross-border multi-ethnic partnership and confidence-building. The Initiative contributes to stimulating a much-needed debate about the nature of border regime reform in the Balkans in order to assist in the battle against organised crime and to promote regional stability and co-operation. This research was funded by the C. S. Mott Foundation and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency as part of their support for the GPKT Project.