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ICNL's Educational Initiative for Central and Eastern Europe: One Year Later

By Radost Toftisova¹

I. Introduction

The title of this report is a little imprecise. As has been pointed out in previous papers on this subject, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) started working on various educational projects in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) more than three years ago. Even the "official launch" of the Educational Initiative – when all activities in the area of NGO legal education were grouped and coordinated and given a common project name – took place more than a year and a half ago. The seminal event of the Initiative to date, however, took place one year ago: the NGO Law Teaching Workshop held in September 2000 in Budapest. We therefore believe that it is useful to review and evaluate the accomplishments of the past year.

The purposes of this paper include:

describing the main achievements of the Educational Initiative (EI) in CEE,

marking the most common problems and difficulties encountered in the process of implementing the Initiative,

drawing some general conclusions from the work ICNL and its partners have done in the area of legal education, and

placing the Initiative within a broader context of NGO legal university education in the region.

II. Scope of the EI

In an earlier article^[1], we described the various types of activities making up the EI. During the past year, we have intensified these activities and have developed new approaches to enrich the content and broaden the impact of the project.

In the first place, the EI continues to maintain a healthy balance between making a regional impact and affecting change on a country-specific basis. Each of the individual country projects was of great domestic importance while also being intertwined with ICNL's other activities in a given country. At the same time, each country project was subject to regional coordination and thus closely interlinked with similar projects in the area of education in other countries.

Throughout CEE, the EI has consistently followed its primary objective: to contribute to the establishment of a stable network of lawyers with sufficient knowledge and expertise on NGO legal issues.

The EI consists of the following activities and can claim the following achievements:

maintaining a web site (www.ngolaw.org) containing useful information (charts with a short description) about existing NGO law courses in CEE, syllabi and teaching materials, contact information for professors or persons in charge of such courses, articles, reports

for initiatives, and other relevant and useful data. The web site is run from ICNL's head office in Washington but contributions from academicians and law students are welcome.

identifying universities (law and other faculties) and academicians interested in launching a course on NGO Law, and working with them to assist in course development;

working with academicians and faculty management to identify the most appropriate teaching methodology for the particular academic institution and to develop a curriculum;

providing teaching materials, including comparative syllabi from other universities, research papers, charts, legislative texts, discussion examples, court decisions, international documents, and other relevant materials;

organizing seminars to launch the individual courses;

preparing or assisting in the preparation of textbooks, chapters of textbooks, brochures, and other teaching materials;

organizing exchange academic visits for law professors and lawyers engaged in teaching NGO law courses to other universities, including lectures to students and meetings with local academicians;

providing small financial or in-kind support to faculties aimed at helping the initial development of NGO Law courses;

organizing regional academic seminars;

promoting the development of a regional network of academicians engaged in or interested in teaching NGO Law, and facilitating the exchange of relevant teaching and research materials, experience, and ideas; and

conducting and commissioning legal research in the area of NGO Law, and publishing and distributing the materials.

III. The NGO Law Teaching Workshop, September 2000.

The workshop was organized about six months after the EI was officially launched. It took place in Budapest and brought together 28 law professors, practicing lawyers, NGO legal experts, and students from 14 countries. The workshop provided a forum at which the EI was presented and discussed. All participants received part of the workshop materials in advance, which enabled them to become familiar with the level of NGO Law teaching at CEE universities, the methodologies used, and the most frequent problems faced in the efforts to launch such a course. In plenary sessions, working groups, and during informal meetings, participants had the opportunity to exchange their knowledge, experience, concerns, and solutions with their colleagues. The presentations made by leading experts in the area were very comprehensive and accurately depicted the situation of this segment of university education. ²

The workshop focused on the methodologies used in the teaching of this specific law subject -- NGO Law -- and on the advantages and disadvantages of each of these methodologies for the various legal, economic, academic, and social traditions in the different countries. Another focus of the discussions was the common difficulties faced by almost all of the participants in the process of introducing a new course into the curriculum, and the specific obstacles accompanying a new NGO Law course. Special attention was given to the resources for teaching such a course, including materials, qualified staff, funding, and networking. Academicians discussed and suggested useful and promising follow-up activities before drawing conclusions.

Participants unanimously agreed that the workshop was a significant event in the field of NGO sector studies and of legal education as a whole. It successfully established the ICNL academic network and laid the grounds for future undertakings in this area. More specifically, the workshop contributed to:

International and national networking

Exchange of teaching materials

Support and assistance in launching NGO Law courses

More accurate indications of the scale of the interest in NGO Law courses in the region

Greater confidence and capacity-building

Greater familiarity with the Internet services ICNL offers.

During the past year, since the workshop, the ICNL academic network has been successfully operating. Its members remain in touch either through ICNL, or directly among themselves. New members have joined the network, and an affiliation has been formed with the Third Sector Studies Network lead by Miklos Kralik, which focuses on all studies of the NGO sector, including general, financial, management, and high school studies. Currently, ICNL is working with the Third Sector Network to put together a workshop, which will provide an overview of the existing structure of university courses on civil society, and will discuss the various approaches toward expanding this structure. The workshop will be held in late October 2001 in Budapest and will bring together professors and academicians from 7 countries.

In addition, several academic exchange visits have resulted. Hungarian and Romanian lawyers lectured at Sofia University where a new NGO Law clinic was launched, and spoke with fellow professors and students. A Croatian law professor, Ms. Sanja Baric, who had founded the first NGO Law course in Croatia, participated in a seminar in Bulgaria and made a presentation to students from the Legal Clinic in Sofia. ICNL's President Leon Irish met with the students from the NGO Law Clinic at ELTE University in Hungary and spoke about international documents and landmark court decisions pertaining to the freedom of assembly and the freedom of association. And Dr. Vesna Pendovska, Professor and Vice Dean at Cyrill and Methodius University in Skopje, Macedonia, visited at the Catholic University of America with ICNL's Senior Legal Consultant Prof. Karla Simon (Professor of Law at CUA) to discuss the development of a new NGO Law course at her university.

IV. Existing NGO Law Courses in CEE (See Appendix A for a list of existing courses)

According to ICNL's best information, NGO law courses are currently being taught at universities in 7 CEE countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Lithuania, and Poland. An NGO Law component has also been introduced as a part of other subjects at the Cyrill and Methodius University in Skopje, Macedonia.

The teaching in each of these universities is based on different methodologies, including clinical courses, comparative law courses, general theory courses, and interdisciplinary courses. The University of Veliko Tarnovo in Bulgaria, for example, combines two different methodologies. The course there was launched as an optional theory course focusing on Bulgarian law. But it also incorporates a strong comparative component, with information about NGO legislation in other countries as well as relevant decisions by the European Court of Human Rights and the basic international principles regarding the nonprofit sector.

Not all courses are taught to law students: for example, a course on NGO Economics and Management is offered to students in Public Administration at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. This approach increases the impact of NGO legal education by helping educate non-lawyers on NGO legal issues and thus preparing skilled NGO leaders, experts, and members.

Prior to the September 2000 Workshop, professors of NGO courses lacked awareness of other NGO courses in the region and lacked strong contacts with other NGO course professors. Nearly all the academicians involved in NGO law teaching or research have admitted that their knowledge of other courses and contacts with fellow professors have deepened and intensified only after ICNL began its educational initiative.

V. NGO Law courses launched with ICNL's support or upon ICNL's Initiative

Several universities have included NGO law courses in their curricula thanks to ICNL's work. The regional planning and coordination of the Initiative supports the detailed and careful country-specific project implementation, taking into consideration national characteristics and the uniqueness of each individual academic institution. ICNL has worked with faculty management members and with potential teachers to develop a specific program appropriate for the given institution. As a result, the courses launched with ICNL's assistance vary greatly in their methodology, structure, content, audience, and staffing.

Hungary.

The Central European University in Budapest offers two separate courses as part of the Legal Studies Department curriculum. The introductory theory course on NGO Law has been taught for three years by ICNL's senior staff members. The course provides a general background on international best practices of NGO legislation, basic human rights documents, and landmark court decisions in the field. It enjoys a remarkable interest among students; last year's course was attended by 50 students. The materials are presently being revised to "globalize" them for the fall 2001 iteration of the course.^[3]

With ICNL's assistance and active participation, CEU also added a simulation clinical component to its curriculum. Designed as a continuation of the introductory course, the clinic will soon begin its fourth year in 2002. Classes are open to about 12-15 students and include lectures, interactive discussions, written assignments, and presentations. Students have contributed comments on draft laws, which have proved very useful in providing technical assistance to drafters and politicians in several CEE countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Bosnia, Croatia). Some of the most outstanding students have been offered internships with ICNL in Washington, DC and in Budapest, and a few of them have already put into practice the knowledge and skills acquired by establishing and operating their own NGOs or by establishing NGO Law courses in their own countries.

In 2000, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, Hungary added an NGO component to its legal clinical program. The program is run by the Foundation on Legal Clinics and Street Law working in close affiliation with the University. The launch of the new clinic sprang from discussions between the Foundation's management, the law faculty of ELTE, and ICNL, and was introduced largely due to ICNL's initiative and encouragement. Although unable to provide direct financial support to the clinic, ICNL assisted with translations of teaching materials, visiting lecturers, technical assistance in the development of a syllabus, and training of the supervising attorney. In addition, students from the NGO law clinic visited ICNL's Budapest office for

discussions with the legal staff and visiting experts on various issues, such as NGO taxation, CEE NGO legislation, and NGO/Government partnerships.

Bulgaria.

Plovdiv University: In the spring of 2000, the Foundation “Center for Legal Aid”, which runs the law clinics at Plovdiv University, added an NGO Law course to its program. The new clinic was launched with ICNL’s support and upon ICNL’s initiative. Thanks to ICNL’s good personal contacts with the Foundation’s management, the clinic was set up and became operational within a very short period of time, opening in April 2000.

This was the first NGO law clinic in CEE. Its launch was facilitated by the existing clinical structure at the law faculty, including supervising attorneys, computer rooms and other facilities, established relations with external experts (in psychology, mediation, legal ethics), and general methodology. ICNL provided direct financial support, training for the professor, technical assistance in developing the syllabus, teaching materials in English and Bulgarian, and a kick-off seminar. The presentations made at the launching seminar by ICNL lawyers and a member of Parliament to all the students who had applied to join the clinic outlined the content of the course and provided additional information about NGO legislation in Bulgaria and in an international context.

The clinic needs to further develop its “working with live clients” component.

Sofia University: The Sofia Law Faculty can now also boast of a legal clinic offered to fourth and fifth year students. In January 2001, the new NGO Law clinic opened with a launching seminar organized by ICNL in cooperation with the Law Faculty. The seminar was attended by professors, students, media representatives, NGO experts, lawyers, and funders. Presentation topics included NGO taxation, NGO public policy activities, public benefit status, the problems of running an NGO law clinic, and a comparative analysis between the Bulgarian law on NGOs and the Romanian Ordinance on Associations and Foundations made by a visiting Romanian lawyer. The students for the clinic were selected with ICNL’s assistance, and were later involved in ICNL’s work on the ground, in close cooperation with and under the supervision of ICNL’s Sofia staff.^[4]

In addition, ICNL made available teaching materials to the professors in charge of the theory classes. Professors and students from the clinic were invited to other similar events organized by ICNL, and were encouraged to present research papers on NGO legal issues for publication in the International Journal for Not-for-Profit Law (IJNL).

Veliko Tarnovo University: The second biggest university in Bulgaria launched an optional course on Comparative NGO Law this year. The academic staff of the Faculty of Law and Economics accepted the idea of broadening their students’ background on NGO legal issues with enthusiasm and in June 2001 voted to include the new subject into the Faculty curriculum.

The course will provide an extensive overview of the new legal framework for NGOs in Bulgaria following the enactment of the recent Law on Legal Persons with Nonprofit Purposes (in force as of January 1, 2001). In addition, it will present for discussion numerous examples of legislative solutions in neighbouring and other European countries as well as in the US, Latin America, and Africa. The teaching methodology will include an increased practical component, with assignments for students, interactive discussions, and visits to local NGOs.

To support the course, ICNL provided training for the professor, assistance in developing the syllabus, the compilation and translation of materials, and a kick-off seminar attended by local and visiting academicians, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, students, and the media. The local

community expressed an impressive interest in clinical legal education, and the course has good chances of growing into a simulation clinic over the next couple years.

Croatia.

Two years ago, the Law Faculty at Rijeka University started a theory course on Nonprofit Law. The young professor who taught the course is a CEU graduate and received intensive training in the ICNL Budapest office. ICNL also funded the first year of the course and assisted in the drafting of the syllabus and teaching materials. Students from the course have applied for internships with ICNL.

There has been considerable interest in developing the theory course into a legal clinic, and ICNL is working with the staff at Rijeka University to assist in these endeavors.

In the Spring Semester (March-July) 2001, Zagreb University introduced a theory course on Nonprofit Law, with ICNL's active support and participation. The professor teaching the course underwent intensive training in the ICNL Budapest office and has maintained an active relationship with ICNL lawyers in the process of preparing materials.

Kosovo.

In 2000, the Faculty of Law at the University of Pristina included "Introduction to NGO Law" in its curriculum. The course is optional and available to 3rd year law students. In addition to focusing on the legal framework for NGOs and their relationship with public authorities in Kosovo, the course examines best international practices in NGO legislation, ECHR decisions, and European and other international conventions related to freedom of association and other NGO issues.

The professor who designed and is teaching the course is an ICNL trainee and partner. She is also an active member of the EI-CEE. Teaching materials were developed in cooperation with ICNL legal staff.

VI. New NGO Law courses expected to be launched throughout CEE

Through ICNL's continuous efforts to expand the Initiative, and as a result of increasing interest toward NGO academic studies in the region, further positive developments are likely:

The *Rousse University in Bulgaria* has been operating a legal clinic for more than two years now. The clinic has developed an efficient scheme for providing the students a good theoretical background in each subject of their studies before providing specific practical training useful for future practitioners. Each of the clinics works with a limited number of students (4-5), and thus provides an excellent opportunity for intensive and comprehensive theory and practical training. The management of the clinic became interested in introducing an NGO Law component about a year ago. Nonetheless, due to a lack of funding, the University has been unable to introduce an NGO Law clinic, despite the development of the program and materials, and the obvious student interest.

The Rousse clinic intends to integrate its NGO Law component over the next few months^[5] as an experimental course. ICNL has assisted in drafting the syllabus and course description, and has involved teaching staff and supervising attorneys in national and international seminars on NGO legal issues. Various teaching materials have also been provided to the new clinic. ICNL and BCNL will be ready to assist in establishing a working relationship with local NGOs and resource centers in order to ensure possibilities for "live clients" work for the students.

ICNL also expects that the *Cyrill and Methodius University of Skopije* in *Macedonia* will launch a new course on NGO law. ICNL has been diligently working with professors from the University to prepare the ground for introducing such a course. These efforts have included training, involvement in international seminars and conferences, exchange of comments and research work, and most recently, the joint drafting of a textbook on NGO Law by ICNL and local academicians. The textbook contains an in-depth comparative analysis of the laws of neighboring countries and good practices of NGO legal provisions, and might serve as a good example for other universities throughout CEE.

During a recent visit to *Romania*, representatives of *Bucharest University* expressed interest in the establishment of an NGO Law clinic within the existing clinical structure at the Law Faculty. While it will be possible to implement this course in the future, its initiation during the academic year 2001/2002 is not possible. There are funding and timing problems and a lack of qualified teachers on the subject.

VII. Other ICNL Educational Projects

The Educational Initiative for CEE is not an isolated project among ICNL activities. It is part of a more comprehensive strategy aimed at expanding the legal capacity on NGO issues throughout all countries where ICNL conducts its work. Through expanded capacity, ICNL can create a more complete and diversified database for NGO Law studies and science, stimulating useful and productive exchanges.

ICNL has been contributing its expertise to ABA-CEELI's Judicial Institute for several years now. Based in Prague, Czech Republic, the CEELI Institute offers training courses for professional participants, such as judges and lawyers. Currently, ICNL and ABA-CEELI together are contemplating a two-week seminar on NGO Law, to be held at the CEELI Institute. ICNL expertise will combine with ABA-CEELI organizational and funding support to stage a successful educational event.

Negotiations with funders are underway regarding a project to launch an NGO Law course in East Africa. Teaching will be based at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, and will contribute towards the creation of a core group of young lawyers with substantial background on NGO legal issues. The success of the EI-CEE has led ICNL to believe that this approach will work in other regions as well.

ICNL's programs in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS) are drawing on the success of the EI-CEE and developing courses at various universities in that region, at times in partnership with other entities.

VIII. Most frequent problems encountered in the course of implementing the EI

During the life of the EI, local academicians, administrators and ICNL legal staff have wrestled and worked to solve numerous problems. Confronting these problems has proven invaluable for all parties in identifying acceptable and appropriate solutions. The most common problems facing universities in the region include:

Sustainability (funding). Most often it is the lack of funding that prevents a theory course from being introduced. Even when funders are ready to offer initial support, the local universities fail to ensure continuous sustainability and thus the long-term operation of the course. The lack of sufficient funding is not only due to the still-existing general economic crisis throughout CEE,

strongly affecting academic institutions, but also due to the specific nature of NGO Law as a university subject.

Legal clinics, which in theory have great potential for self-sustainability, faces very real financial difficulties as well. NGOs as clients pose a number of problems; they are not used to seeking legal advice and they are not among the most profitable clients. Consequently, the introduction of theory courses as a part of the traditional curriculum poses fewer financial burdens. Nonetheless, some universities cannot afford or are reluctant to allocate a professor's salary for the new subject, considering the expenditure too risky and fearing a lack of interest by students.

Securing some initial funding is sometimes the first necessary step in making NGO courses part of the university curriculum. Sometimes funding from additional sources or matching funding becomes available. If the course goes well during the first year, faculty administrations are more likely to invest university funds in the new initiative. Typically, students and NGOs demonstrate a keen interest in the course. The growing number of effectively operating NGOs throughout CEE provides a promising labor market for law graduates with the appropriate background.

Teaching staff (qualified professors). NGO Law did not exist as a separate discipline in CEE law schools until a few years ago. Other courses, such as civil law, devoted very few hours of instruction to associations and foundations, the most common legal forms of NGOs in CEE countries. Until a decade ago, NGO Law had received scant attention from legislators, academicians, students, courts, and practitioners.

With the new laws enacted in CEE countries, NGOs faced a vacuum of both legal research and practical experience, and universities did not have qualified law professors to handle the newly created courses. However, as mentioned above, genuine and strong interest exists, particularly among young law professors, and it has not proven difficult to identify persons willing to be in charge of the new courses. ICNL has provided intensive training to these young academicians and assisted and encouraged them to devote more time and efforts in designing an NGO law course. ICNL intends to continue to provide such support and training when new courses are being developed. It will also continue to provide opportunities for exchange visits to encourage the development of teaching capacity in CEE.

The successful operation of the new courses, by giving lawyers specialized knowledge of nonprofit law, will gradually eliminate the staffing problem. The increasing interest in research in the field is also expected to provoke further academic work in third sector studies.

Teaching materials/syllabi. A third major problem facing NGO legal education is the lack of course materials. Because of the lack of specific NGO legislation in the CEE countries, little attention had been paid to research in this area. To overcome this problem, ICNL has adopted a dual approach:

translation of available teaching materials (ICNL papers, articles, and studies, materials from other CEE countries, sample syllabi, etc.);

commissioning and encouraging local academicians to prepare teaching and research materials based on the national laws as well as on international practices and standards.

ICNL's technical assistance has been a support to both processes. As a result, in each of the countries where the EI has been implemented, the database in the area of NGO law has been growing richer. At the same time, ICNL is collecting materials into a regional library, which is continuously being supplemented and updated. Increasing interaction between professors and programs has also done much to alleviate the needs of the NGO Law teaching community.

Lack of student interest. As mentioned above, this problem is one of perception rather than of reality; university administrators will use the excuse of the students lacking interest to justify their reluctance or refusal to launch an NGO course. As experience has shown, however, in all universities introducing a course on NGO law, students have demonstrated an overwhelming interest in the new topic. Indeed, faculty administrations have been forced to select a limited number of students in each of the courses, based on the submission of written papers, statements of interest, or interviews with the applicants. Several of the students have volunteered to prepare articles on NGO legal issues, to attend seminars, and to make presentations.

Interest and commitment by faculty staff. Once universities have agreed to introduce an NGO course into the curriculum, it is common to find faculty administrations reluctant to make a long-term commitment to the course. Initially, there is no difficulty in identifying a professor willing to handle the new course, to work with the faculty administration to add the new course to the academic agenda, to prepare materials, and to teach the theory classes. In a number of cases, however, the faculty management has been reluctant to undertake an ongoing commitment to maintain the course and to ensure its financial support. Thus, the problem has been institutional rather than individual, and can be explained perhaps by traditionally conservative approaches to new subjects and the lack of understanding of the importance and relevance of NGO Law for modern society.

To combat this problem, ICNL has been working with faculty administrations and has provided various types of assistance, including technical assistance in drafting syllabi, materials, translations, help with fighting administrative obstacles, and partial funding, where possible. This support reduces technical issues that are ordinarily faced when a new course is introduced. ICNL seminars have proved as educational for the teaching staff as for students and have helped broaden the academic network created by ICNL. Once NGO Law courses are introduced, their success and the attention they receive from students, society, and the media, serve as significant factors in generating deeper commitment from universities.

IX. General conclusions drawn from the implementation of the Educational Initiative

NGO course methodologies are more smoothly introduced into a university curriculum where there is an existing structure within the university using that same methodology.

In other words, it has proved easier to introduce an NGO component to an already established legal clinic than to create a new clinical structure for an NGO Law course. Also, where existing theory courses have devoted some time to NGO law, universities have been more receptive toward developing the NGO Law component into a separate subject. At CEU in Budapest, the addition of a second course on the theory of NGO law was made easier by the successful launch of the simulation clinic during the previous year.

Legal clinics attract the most interest but at the same time they pose bigger financial and sustainability problems.

Until just recently, clinical legal education was completely unknown throughout CEE and there existed no tradition of clinical teaching methodology. The characteristics of clinical education -- intensified practical training, more comprehensive preparation for legal practice, and working with real clients -- have attracted much interest among students, law professors, and legal practitioners.

However, these same characteristics pose the two most significant difficulties in establishing a legal clinic on NGO Law and in maintaining it as an efficiently operating unit of university education.

NGOs represent a very specific category of clients; identifying them, reaching them, and working with them as legal entities poses a number of hardships. In many smaller towns where NGO resource centers do not exist, it is almost impossible to create a center offering legal services to NGOs. In cases such as this, a legal clinic for NGOs might consider operating as a simulation clinic.

Furthermore, a legal clinic normally poses greater demands for financial support. In addition to the professors' fees, money is required to pay for a psychologist, a mediator, an expert on legal ethics, a supervising attorney, and other experts engaged in work with the students. Unless the clinic generates income and thus ensures its own sustainability, securing funding becomes a real obstacle.

Universities are reluctant to commit continuing financial support for NGO Law courses once initial financial aid has been suspended.

For a discussion of this issue, please refer to section VIII.5.

Technical assistance in drafting textbooks and other teaching materials provides significant support to new courses.

Again, as discussed above, ICNL has been trying to make sufficient materials available to professors and students. Translations of similar materials prepared for courses in other countries have been as helpful as the preparation of new papers designed to assist the teaching in each country.

Normally, attracting students' interest to the new NGO law courses does not pose a problem.

On the contrary, faculties have had to develop specific selection criteria to choose a limited number of students among a large number of applicants. The particular set of criteria appropriate for each university depends on the circumstances, including the academic traditions, the methodology of teaching, and the number of applicants. Practice has shown, however, that requiring a statement of interest or a short essay, followed by a personal interview, creates the most objective and efficient selection procedure.

Exchange academic visits contribute substantially to the general interest in NGO Law courses and broaden the educational background of professors and students.

During the past year, ICNL has organized and assisted several exchange academic visits throughout CEE. There has also been one exchange visit to the United States. Usually, both the hosting university and the visiting professor's institution have either initiated a course on NGO Law or are considering doing so. Thus, the ensuing interchange on substantial, administrative and technical issues is invariably useful.

Such visits can be especially productive where the hosting institution has at least a year's experience teaching NGO Law, and the visiting academician is considering her/his involvement in such a discipline. The exchange of knowledge and expertise in this case, although inevitably one-sided, can prove invaluable. Its importance for regional and national networking is substantial.

In most of the CEE countries, new laws on NGOs have been enacted over the past few years. Despite the national differences, these laws possess certain common characteristics, and problems of their implementation are often issues common to many countries. Consequently, the exchange visits can be useful for comparative purposes. For example, last January, Simona Luca, an attorney working in NGO resource center in Romania attended a seminar at Sofia University and spoke on the new legislative provisions for associations and foundations in her country. Such lectures and meetings help improve the general legal background of academicians, students, lawyers, and NGO experts, and enhance academic networking.

Launching seminars make an excellent kick-off for a new course.

ICNL has conducted three such seminars in Bulgaria to announce and support the introduction of the new NGO Law courses added to the university curricula of the universities in Plovdiv, Sofia, and Veliko Tarnovo. In all three cases, the seminars have attracted a large and diverse audience including academicians, judges, prosecutors, journalists, public administration officials, and students. The seminars pursue multiple objectives:

To provide the new course with local and national publicity;

To promote students' interest in the course;

To assist local and national networking, by bringing together various experts interested in this area of law;

To provide an informative overview of NGO legal issues through the seminar presentations;

To persuade the university and faculty administration that the new course is worthy of support;

To help identify emerging areas of interest within NGO Law (e.g., areas for research) and new specialists who could contribute to NGO legislative development and implementation.

Seminars or mini-conferences for professors strengthen the academic network and increase the self-confidence of its members.

To support this point, we need look no further than the success of last year's NGO teaching Workshop in Budapest. NGO Law is a new subject and has yet to become a firmly secured addition to the academic structure of the schools of law throughout CEE. Professors of NGO Law courses need to know that they are not "lonely fighters" but members of an efficient network that is expanding and progressing. Sharing experience and discussing problems and potential solutions is valuable for each of the network members.

Seminars and mini-conferences can be beneficial both at a regional and at a national level. In the former case, discussions help identify the most common practical difficulties faced in the process of launching an NGO Law course. Regional conferences can also focus on potential legal research and provide a constructive basis for comparative analyses of NGO laws.

National seminars or conferences also possess great potential benefit. The seminar held recently in Burgas, Bulgaria serves as a good example. Participating in the seminar were law professors, lawyers, and students from all four universities where an NGO Law course has been or is about to be introduced. The seminar offered an opportunity for all of them to meet and discuss common concerns and achievements, and was unanimously declared a unique and long overdue event.

Perhaps its primary benefit of the event was the creation of a national NGO academic network whose members can communicate among themselves and on an international basis as well.

Participants from previous kick-off seminars volunteered to make presentations, including one student from the Sofia legal clinic. Some of the seminar participants have started working on NGO legal issues and have submitted articles for publication in the IJNL. For example, assistant professor Maria Gerassimova from Veliko Tarnovo University is currently preparing an article on some key issues related to the implementation of the new law.

X. Conclusion

ICNL's Educational Initiative for Central and Eastern Europe is a timely and much-needed project. It has generally received a warm reception from local partners, academic communities, and the public, and has generated considerable interest and commitment. The recent legislative developments in the area of NGO Law and the development of third sector activities in the CEE countries have provided fertile ground for introducing NGO Law in the curricula of regional law faculties. The Initiative has the potential to expand on a country-specific basis, regionally, and internationally, using the experience of its legal staff and the members of the academic network created by the Initiative. It will continue to be a major focus of ICNL's activity in the region.

In a previous article on this project, we expressed the hope that ICNL's efforts in implementing the Initiative, in addition to the enrichment of the academic community supporting the third sector, will lead to rewarding developments in the third sector in our own professional background. We believe that the Initiative has helped accomplish both results, as evidenced by the number of new NGO law courses throughout CEE and by the interest in further progress in this area.

For more information about the Educational Initiative in CEE, please go to the web site www.ngolaw.org.