

"My wish for all women: do not hide your talents, enter the world and share your experiences with others"

Geneva, 14 February 2001

UNECE launches its Portrait Gallery on Excellent Women Entrepreneurs

On 14 February 2001, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) launched the first Portrait Gallery of Excellent Women Entrepreneurs in Transition Economies on its Internet Site <http://www.unece.org/>. This portrait gallery has already gathered more than 50 women entrepreneurs from 12 countries with economies in transition -- Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine.

The aim of this portrait gallery is to promote women entrepreneurs in countries with economies in transition, to let them tell you what their vision of entrepreneurship is, how they became entrepreneurs and what their messages for the 21st century are. It is envisaged to invite these entrepreneurs to a conference that will review the situation of women entrepreneurs in the transition economies. This project was launched at the Round Table Discussion on "Innovative, Growing and Family-based Entrepreneurship" organized within the framework of the third CEI Summit Economic Forum held at the end of November 2000 in Budapest.

Women's full economic and political participation in the former socialist countries was guaranteed by constitution, and they enjoyed equal access to education and employment. Transition to a market economy has affected women in various and often negative ways. Millions of women have lost their jobs. For many, the perspective of finding a new job has been further complicated by the abolishing of public child-care services for working mothers in many countries. The necessity to provide care for children and retired members of the family (due to the erosion of the real value of pension) has also forced many women to quit their jobs and stay at home. As a result, the economic dependence of women on men, and, consequently, their vulnerability, has dramatically increased. In some countries, this has brought an erosion in the overall social status of women in society, leading to the resurgence of some of the nastiest traditional practices and violence.

Despite all of these difficulties, many women have been able to utilize new opportunities brought by the market and start their own businesses. Our Gallery introduces such women to you. The enterprises they have created range from micro- to large-scale enterprises in areas from fish-breeding to manufacturing of household appliances. You will discover their opinions on entrepreneurship, their personal stories of how they became entrepreneurs, and learn about how courage, creativity and talent can lead to success, satisfaction and wealth.

Shpresa Shkalla from Albania believes that "Entrepreneurship is the driving force for a small country ... on the difficult road of economic development." Cristina Maria Grigorescu from Romania states that "Entrepreneur is a visionary, who sets his or her own goals and works hard to achieve them. They are initiators who bring new ideas and make them happen, see them grow and eventually succeed." The Belarusian Anikeeva Tamara Anatolievna explained that the "Dissatisfaction with my previous employment made me recognise that I could do more, and I changed my job." Bozena Batycka from Poland sends the following message to all women at the beginning of the 21st century: "Follow your star. ... What I would like to tell them is to take their future into their own hands. The definition of happiness is different for different people. To me happiness is the joy of life, creativity and inner harmony. So, I chose the entrepreneurial way of life that is fulfilling my needs and giving me all these things together. As well as being a mother, I also have satisfaction in my profession." Marina J. Korneva, a medium-sized enterprise's owner in Moscow, states that "As a business woman, I believe that my mission is to contribute to the creation of jobs and raising living standards in our country which is an economy in transition. Modern businesses should improve all possible aspects of a woman's life. The 21st Century should be seen as under the sign of women. My wish for all women worldwide is: do not hide your talents within the walls of your houses, but enter the world and share your experiences with others."

Further candidates for this portrait gallery may be submitted in accordance with the questionnaire at the following

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