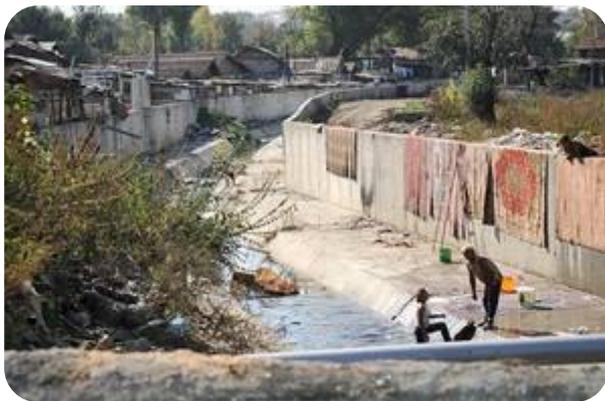


Exemplary organisations: animus and Pulse Foundation

Eulogy by Marieluise Beck

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was only last week that the Bremen-based association "Notruf für vergewaltigte Frauen und Mädchen" (telephone hotline for sexually abused women and girls) commemorated its 30th anniversary. A reception was held right here, in the town hall of Bremen, in appreciation of the association's longstanding work. Its support is essential for many women, even in a country, where equality is guaranteed by the constitution. Just 30 years ago, there was a big public outcry even here in Germany, when attempts were made to put such issues on the agenda: for a long time it has been very difficult, even here in Germany, to break taboos and openly discuss homosexuality, familial violence, child abuse and prostitution.



How essential could such an association be in patriarchally geared societies? In countries, where women do not have the same options and opportunities as men? Where women are disadvantaged in the areas of education and access to the labour market? Let us look at Bulgaria: Every fifth household is led by single mothers, out of which 65% live in extreme poverty. A study published by the GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation) shows that approximately 450,000 Bulgarian women would take the risk to seek employment in other countries illegally. Out of need and distress, thousands of them accept offers made by traffickers promising them jobs in catering services, hotels, nursing and as domestic workers. Hoping for a better life abroad, they get convinced by traffickers. As a result, women – frequently also children – are lured into trafficking only to find themselves forced into prostitution.

Those who succeed in escaping their unscrupulous tormentors from Western Europe, from Germany, from Bremen and return to their home-country Bulgaria, have to face discrimination by families as well as by society as a whole. Fortunately, there are two organizations, one in Sofia and one in Pernik (a small city near Sofia), that offer overnight shelter, medical treatment and psycho-social support to abused and distressed women. Today, these two Bulgarian organizations, Animus und Pulse, will be awarded the Bremen Peace Prize in the category of "Exemplary Organization".

How are these two organizations connected?

animus and Pulse are self-help initiatives founded by women. Both are non-governmental, independent and non-profit organizations and their common goal is to offer counseling and support to victims of violence, especially domestic violence.



animus

animus was founded in 1994 by two committed women – Nadejda Stoytcheva and Maria Tchomarova – in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. Both women, who are professional psychotherapists, saw the necessity of founding a counseling centre for women who became victims of violence. Furthermore, their intention was to sensitize the Bulgarian public on violence against women.

The victims of human trafficking who returned to Bulgaria played an important role since the organization's inception. Animus' support went beyond providing these vulnerable women shelter, as its primary concern was to give long-term support: psycho-social and medical care for needy women.

The organization is headed by its two founders, now working as fulltime staff. With determination and accuracy, Ms. Nadejda Stoytcheva and Ms. Maria Tchomarova have jointly succeeded in transforming their project into a distinguished and effective organization. Today, animus has 26 staff members who are supported by more than 30 volunteers.



They offer counseling, provide support, raise awareness, organize conferences, and do networking at regional, national as well as international levels.

Besides working with women, the organization also attends to children who have become victims of domestic violence. animus has set up a national emergency 24-hour hotline, which is often the last resort, even to these children: through this hotline, women and children in need can get access to professional counseling and support.

Despite or rather due to the founders' modesty, animus' reputation and success has grown constantly. Meanwhile, even the Bulgarian State has finally realized (partly being forced to) the necessity and importance of animus' work. Foreign non-government organizations (NGO) are aware of this for quite some time now and have been supporting animus structurally and financially.



Pulse

Pernik, 60 kilometers southwest of Sofia, is a monotonous and pathetic town, where people have no prospects: their everyday life is characterized by drug consumption, neglect and violence, also against women and children. Pulse, a smaller sister organization of Animus, has been working here since 2001. Its goals are similar, but the organization is not as renowned as Animus, which is a well established organization based in the capital. Since the situation in and around Pernik is more desolate and offers even lesser prospects, the women's commitment of Pulse cannot be valued enough.

Since Pulse is a rather new organization, it faces a number of problems in its daily work. Nevertheless, Pulse pursues its goals with considerable commitment and determination. Six full-time and five part-time staff members as well as 30 volunteers tenaciously work with Pulse – all of them courageously, admirably and effectively. It is the personal commitment of this courageous and qualified team that keeps Pulse alive.

Large projects are not part of Pulse's daily work: financial means are unfortunately limited. Meanwhile, the city of Pernik has promised to support Pulse as the organization also takes care of drug consumers in the city, whose desperate presence is becoming increasingly obvious. Thus, Pulse has become a recognized and steady part of the "social scene" of Pernik. I hope that the News about today's Award Ceremony in Bremen also reaches Bulgaria and could help to accelerate regional and national funding for Pulse.



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What links animus and Pulse to Bremen?

As long as men from Bremen go to such despaired women, the work of Pulse and Animus will remain indispensable.

According to the United Nations, around 4 million people become victims of human trafficking yearly. According to UNICEF, 1.2 million children are estimated to be trafficked worldwide. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that about 500000 women and children from Central and Eastern Europe are trafficked to Western Europe annually. By now, this can be described as a form of modern slavery.

Around 600 to 700 forced prostitutes of foreign origin live in the city of Bremen alone. The majority of them come from Eastern Europe, especially Bulgaria. They are young, many of them even minors. Most of them can neither read nor write. Before their abuse here in Germany they have already been traumatized by domestic violence as children. Even here they are treated inhumanely: through physical and psychological violence they are forced to attend to sex-customers twelve hours a day, seven days a week. They have almost nothing left from their earnings. They do not have access to health care. They do not have social contacts. They do not speak German, nor do they have any identity documents.

Even when these downtrodden women succeed to escape from oppression, when they cannot bear it anymore and find the courage to seek help, their future still remains uncertain. That means, we, the people of Bremen, also have a responsibility and duty towards these women: we have to strive for the right, their right, to protection and, if necessary, a stay-permit, because they cannot return to their home country easily: they will have to face familial pressure, acts of revenge by gang members as well as social stigma.

If they succeed in returning to their home country – in spite of all hindrances – local help centres such as Animus and Pulse, supporting women who have become victims of sexual exploitation, are indispensable and worth every cost. These institutions need our – and therefore international – recognition and financial support, so that this work can be continued in the future.

I am very glad about the decision of the Threshold Foundation and would like to express my admiration to you, Ms. Nadejda Stoytcheva und Ms. Katja Veleva (Pulse), representing animus and Pulse, for your outstanding efforts and persistent courage – and to congratulate you on this award.