The Power and Pain of Partnerships: The Minnesota Bulgaria Connection

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Abstract

In May, 2003, a delegation from the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights prepared to leave for Bulgaria to help partners there pass the first ever order for protection law in Eastern Europe. But when Women’s Human Rights Program Director, Cheryl Thomas read the final version of the law, her heart sank. Should they lend support to a law that made victims of domestic violence subject to prosecution for making false claims? Could a law be passed that did not have such troubling provisions? If they pulled out now, would they be betraying their long-time Bulgarian feminist partners?

This case discusses the dynamics of an international partnership between two women’s human rights advocacy organizations in the context of their common goal and their work to end violence against women. Students will learn about the international women’s human rights movement in the 1990s and in particular about the effort to lobby the United Nations to name violence against women a human rights violation. The case highlights the development of NGO partnerships across borders to combat violence against women and focuses on legal reform efforts in Central and Eastern Europe and in particular, Bulgaria. The case gives an inside look into the relationship between advocates in two women’s human rights programs in Minnesota and Bulgaria as they work toward their common goal.