

# Successful venture to build democracy



JARL  
HJALMARSON  
FOUNDATION

*Since 1995, organisations associated with the Swedish political parties -- represented in Parliament -- have spent SEK75 million promoting democracy through cooperation with political parties in developing countries and in eastern and central Europe. Jarl Hjalmarson Foundation and the Olof Palme Centre are the two largest Swedish democracy building foundations.*

TEXT: ELISABETH PRECHT PHOTOS: COURTESY OF JARL HJALMARSON FOUNDATION

Sweden was one of the first countries in the world to support party systems abroad through financial aid to party associated organizations at home. Recently the Swedish government decided to set aside an even larger part of the development aid to promote democracy and human rights. The Palme Centre and its around 30 member organizations are involved in approximately 375 international development projects a year. These range from civic education and organisational structure, to human rights and reconciliation projects," the Centre explains. The Hjalmarson Foundation on the other hand has promoted some 100 activities during 2008, i.e. teaching approximately 3000 people "how-to" in a free and democratic society.

Hjalmarson Foundation imparts hands-on training on the principles and functioning of democracy and European integration. The importance of cooperation between political parties is emphasized. This is important in countries such as the Balkan states, explains Eva Gustavsson, Managing Director of the Foundation.

The objectives are "to strengthen our partners to become fully developed and working parties," said Eva Gustavsson. The underlying rationale is that a well-functioning party system is a requirement for a representative democracy.

#### *How is this accomplished?*

"Mainly through training – lectures and seminars – but also study visits to Sweden and Brussels. In addition we communicate know-how on the executive-level," Eva

Gustavsson explained, adding that the Hjalmarson Foundation gives priority to activities aimed at politically active women, youth and students in the 30 countries.

The number of countries with popularly elected governments has more than doubled during the last 25 years. "Early on we started supporting democratic forces in Estonia," said Eva Gustavsson. A number of board members, of the Foundation, initiated the Monday movement to support the opposition in Estonia. "Today Estonia is a member of the European Union and is mentoring other former Soviet republics.

#### *How are projects identified?*

"The countries are often selected in collaboration with European and global sister parties and foundations.

#### *How are countries chosen?*

"It is important to evaluate the extent of lack of democracy and need for parties to strengthen their organization. In addition we evaluate whether our project can make a change for our counterpart," said Eva Gustavsson.

During the 1990s the Hjalmarson Foundation focused its activities on countries in the Baltic region: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. In later years the Foundation has gone further afield and widened its activities to such countries and regions as Russia, Belarus, South Caucasus, the Ukraine, the Balkans, Turkey, Africa and Latin America.

Simultaneously, the Hjalmarson Foundation has developed its activities from single events to long term commitments and closer cooperation with counterparts abroad.

#### *What does the future have in store ...?*

Eva Gustavsson is convinced that she and her team of project managers will develop even better methods to educate all the more people. "We would like to see a closer cooperation with Parliament which is at the core of the Swedish democracy. In Parliament we have a source of invaluable knowledge about how a representative democracy works, how elections are run, etc. Our democracy projects could benefit a lot from this." ■