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REPORT AND MESSAGE FOR THE SEMINAR FOR WOMEN FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, HELD IN PRAGUE ON 19-26 APRIL 1995.

The seminar was prepared by women from various churches in the Czech Republic, who came together in the women's commission of the Czech Ecumenical Council of Churches.

The aim of the seminar was clear: after many years during which Europe had been divided into East and West, after years of imposed isolation of both individuals and of whole communities and nations within one political bloc, women now need to express their position, discover their own identity, and understand one another. There was no question of any new division of Europe, for invitations to the seminar were sent out to and accepted by women from Western Europe and the USA as well. Our limited resources meant that women were only invited from seven countries of Central and Eastern Europe--the former East Germany, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and the Czech Republic--and from churches of three denominations--Reformed, Lutheran, United [the combination of Lutheran and Reformed], and the Roman Catholic Church.

The overall theme of the seminar was the question "Do you understand?" Basing ourselves on the biblical passage Acts 8:26-40, we tried to find among our ranks a Philip who would open the Scriptures to us and thus the minds and hearts of others. We were glad to be able to discover during the course of the seminar that openness is both necessary and possible. Friendly discussions, sharing of information, comments, questions, and critical remarks were to be heard throughout the course of the seminar.

In the first part of the seminar, the theme "Do you understand?" was discussed from two viewpoints: how Western European women understand and know women from the East and the other way round. It was very useful to be able to hear from both sides what women value in their sisters from the other part of Europe, where they see differences, and what they see as tasks to be shared.

After the weekend spent with congregations and families in and around Prague, we continued with the theme "How shall we carry on? How can we make use of new possibilities in the future?" It is hoped that an answer to these questions will be provided by the "Eunika" project, which organized this seminar as its first activity. The "Eunika" project arose out of the need for a special approach to the women of Central and Eastern Europe. Women from this area have long been aware that they are slightly different from Western European women--they have a different status, usually being more strongly tied to the

family setting; they are not so emancipated; in the churches they are more closely involved in their local congregations; they have a different approach to feminist theology, and ecological issues do not yet command their full attention. According to Western European women, women from our part of Europe are more unassuming and more deeply religious.

The "Eunika" project aims to discern, study, and support the different gifts with which women are endowed. It aims to react to specific tasks and situations in specific countries. It is necessary to find women who want to be involved in this work in all countries, churches, and Christian communities.

The words of the message which we want to be heard everywhere both in our countries and elsewhere are as follows:

- both now and in the future, Christian women in Central and Eastern Europe want to express openly their views on the problems which surround them and to play an active role in resolving them;

- we wish to express and share with others our visions for the future and our experiences on our own, without having them mediated by others. We defend the idea that those best placed to understand specific situations and needs are those who come from that setting and who have the necessary overview and knowledge;

- we do not want to accept the view that the period of repression we have lived through together has only left a negative impression on us. In spite of all the difficulties, which in many cases still persist or are re-emerging, we want to profess with gratitude that our Lord led us in troublesome times and that he gives us hope in all circumstances;

- let us pray that we shall be able to remain steadfast, patient, unassuming, and courageous. The Church and society urgently need us to give this kind of witness.

The participants in the seminar of women from Central and Eastern Europe

Prague, 25 April 1995

On behalf of the organizing committee: Helena Brabencová, Vera Lukášová, Daniela Brodská, and Nadeje Mandysová.