

Regional Review Report

**Improving
Ethnic Relations in
Southeast Europe**

2001-2004

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Regional Review Report

**Improving
Ethnic Relations in
Southeast Europe**

2001-2004

**A capacity building,
learning oriented and
development grants
programme**

Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe. Regional Review Report. 2001-2004

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Preface

Destroying the Balkan walls

"It was November 8, 1989. The Yugoslavia [-case] did not yet exist in the world's consciousness. The East German authorities had just announced that they were going to break holes in the Berlin Wall and declare Berlin an open city at midnight. The Cold War and false division of Europe were over. A different, more historically grounded division of Europe was about to open up, I knew. Instead of democratic Western Europe and a communist Eastern Europe, there would now be Europe and the Balkans. But who cared? I was definitely not where the Story was. It struck me just how far away from the Story, in both time and space, the Balkans were."

This excerpt from Robert Kaplan's politically influential *The Balkan Ghosts* could serve as a compulsory introduction to any book on the last decade in the Balkans. It is not simply a reflection on the invisible "Balkan wall", but also a brick in that wall. It contains most of the myths that have governed western perceptions of the region over the last decade.

Now, when the Balkans has become the Story, the need for a radical re-reading and re-conceptualisation of the Balkan debate is not just an intellectual but a political imperative.

The Balkan questions of the last decade ring loud. *Can we live together with those of different cultures? Can we argue instead of fight?* The major challenge remains how to think and act with respect to interethnic relations.

In the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars, ethnicity was criminalized. Shocked by the rise and human cost of ethno-nationalism within the borders of Europe, many western foundations concentrated their efforts on promoting reconciliation and ethnic tolerance in the region. Their projects were rich in passion but often poor in vision: most were war-driven and tended to impose western practices on Balkan realities.

The experience of the programme *"Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe"* summarized in this book is very different from those "Blue helmet"

projects that proliferated in the Balkans at the end of the 20th century. It goes beyond the notions of historical reconciliation and protection of minority rights.

The striking consequence of the Yugoslav wars was the fragmentation of post-war societies and the rise of the process of "ghettoization". Closed societies were replaced by societies representing mechanical mixtures of closed communities. This process of closing the Balkan mind cannot be reduced to the self-isolation of the ethnic groups, although ethnic self-isolation is one of its manifestations. The Balkan wall became multiple Balkan walls, bringing greater vulnerability and passive despair within and more prejudice and hatred throughout.

In the context of this new challenge, the response summarized in this report illustrates the long-term process of re-building community based trust and links beyond ethnic divisions, whilst transforming passive ethnic minorities into active political constituencies. The key element of this approach, in my view, is the development of capacity for hermeneutical advocacy. In order to tolerate differences of opinion in society as a whole, both the majority and the minority groups should be encouraged to tolerate differences between and within themselves. Instead of relying solely on the interventions of the international community, minority groups should develop capacity to influence the political process through channels that are available in democratic societies. This is the task of emerging new communities of civically active people who aspire to live and work beyond closed groups and ethnic walls.

At a time when we all are hostages to short-term goals and approaches, this programme based on common effort is a heartening reminder that the courage to think about the long-term with strategic partners in the region is not a lost cause among western foundations.

Ivan Krastev

Programme Director, Political Research, Institute for Liberal Studies Sofia

Work in progress

Ingrained tension, exclusion and divisions in ethnically diverse communities are a major challenge to the sustainability of democratic transition in Southeast Europe. Though the situation varies from country to country and from community to community, prejudice and poor communication between different ethnic groups remain a shared concern. In this regard, the recent eruption of violence in Kosovo was a powerful reminder that, despite the efforts of the international community to bridge the ethnic, cultural and religious divides, the job is far from being completed.

The improvement of ethnic relations based on the respect of minority rights is indeed a fragile and complex process that calls for long-term investment and must be addressed as an integral feature of civil society development. This book illustrates the lessons learned from the integrated approach that was a key feature of the "Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe" programme, which was set up as a joint initiative of the King Baudouin Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the respective national Soros Foundations, in partnership with the Human Development Promotion Centre (Albania), the Interethnic Initiatives for Human Rights Foundation (Bulgaria), the Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia, the Ethno-Cultural Diversity Resource Centre (Romania) and Civic Initiatives (Serbia).

Through support to over 220 local projects, in five countries over the last three years, the programme was able to nurture innovative practices to deal with various levels of divide, prejudice and exclusion. It also empowered a large number of local activists and organisations from all ethnic groups, through hands-on experience of valuing and practicing minority rights and diversity.

One of the suggestions for future action made in this book is the need for sustained efforts to increase the awareness and competence of authorities and state institutions to adopt a policy of inclusion towards ethnic minorities, based on the democratic concepts of human rights. In recent years the governments of countries in this region have made a major effort to adapt their ethnic minorities legislation to international standards. However, despite the emerging legal provisions and mechanisms, real participation of ethnic minorities in decision-making remains very limited. This situation has led the

King Baudouin Foundation and its partners to further develop their partnership efforts in the field of ethnic relations and minorities. These efforts focus on taking common action for policy change at local, national and international levels in order to overcome discrimination and advocate for the effective participation of minorities. The result is a new regional initiative called "Minority Rights in Practice in South Eastern Europe", which builds upon learning from the "Improving Ethnic Relations" programme and increase the impact of the latter at political level, especially with regard to the process of European integration in the countries of Southeast Europe.

The King Baudouin Foundation would like to thank all the funding and operating partners that joined forces to make these outstanding achievements possible, as well as for their commitment to the new phase. Our gratitude is extended to the authors of this book for their active involvement in all stages of the programme, from inception to evaluation. It is our hope that the following pages will not only pay tribute to the joint efforts of the last three years, but that they will be read as the cornerstone of a long-term strategy designed to take one more step towards new approaches that will address the challenge of diversity and stability in the Balkans.

King Baudouin Foundation
July 2004

Approaching diversity

A brief history of the programme

Developing strategic partnerships

Working approaches

Approaching diversity

A brief history of the programme

The King Baudouin Foundation has been active in Central and Eastern Europe since 1993 and has given priority to the crucially important step of improving relations between different ethnic groups in emerging new democracies. From the outset, respect for human rights and diversity have been considered as a crosscutting and integral part of civil society work and democratic governance.

The "Improving Ethnic Relations" programme began as a large-scale, multiple donor partnership effort to find and support creative projects in nine (1996) and subsequently sixteen countries (in 1998) in Central and Eastern Europe. To be able to cover such a geographically large region, it was coordinated regionally by the King Baudouin Foundation and at country level by the national Soros Foundation. Regionally it was also supported by the European Cultural Foundation and, since 1998, by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Between its inception, in 1996, and 1999 the programme supported more than 400 local projects, in 16 countries, covering a wide range of fields concerned with interethnic relations. Some initiatives involved national research or conferences: others were more local, in the fields of media, intercultural education and culture. The programme also sponsored eight regional meetings, which brought together the representatives of local projects to discuss practices and receive further training.

The programme's history has provided a great deal of learning about the different ways of approaching diversity and minority rights and about the complexity of these issues in function of local and regional dynamics. The programme was unique in bringing together at regional level people from very diverse origins, with different backgrounds and experience, and in proving that, despite their differences and language barriers, they could relate, communicate and learn together across communities and countries. A major challenge was how to increase the effectiveness of the efforts invested and how to identify ways of securing more in-depth involvement, better focus and work at in-country level.

Based on the learning acquired in previous years and the latest developments in the Balkans, the programme was redesigned in 1999. It was decided to focus geographically on those countries in Southeast Europe seen to be the most vulnerable with regard to ethnic tensions, division and clashes, namely Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. It is the programme focusing on these countries during the period 2001 to April 2004 that is the object of this report.

Strategically, it was agreed that, in order to respond to the complexity of the region and the diversity of situations in the chosen countries, a more developmental approach was needed to stimulate initiatives in ethnically diverse communities and – linked to this – to make both the general public and institutions aware of positive alternatives to existing situations.

It is often the practice for donors to design their strategies and only afterwards to invite local organisations to apply for support. As a result, the organisations are obliged to accommodate their work in function of external assumptions. Such approaches tend to increase in times of crises and turbulence. We decided to take a different approach, despite being under very great pressure to meet the urgency of the communities' situations and needs. Our strategy was developed during a wide process of consultation, during which people from "inside" and "outside" the region provided input as to how one could make a difference, given the limited resources and highly complex issue of improving interethnic relations in such a turbulent zone as the Balkans.

The main idea was to secure as wide a perspective as possible, combining local experience and practice from both inside and outside the programme and listening carefully to local views. In this respect the consultation process, which took almost a year, was part of the programme itself and provided a regional discussion forum on practices and challenges in the area of ethnic relations and minority rights. Some might argue that consultative processes are a luxury when time is limited, but at the end of the day, we found this investment very worthwhile. We all know that providing grants to local initiatives is only one aspect of support. We believed then, as we do now, that *how* support is provided is equally important, as is the ongoing learning and updating of approaches and requirements needed to meet rapid changes in local environments. The best source for such learning is the people who live in and have experience of the local environments.

The consultation process resulted in the formulation of overall strategic guidelines,¹ drawn up with the aim of improving relations between different groups in ethnically diverse communities in Southeast Europe. The new programme design combined development grants, capacity building and ongoing learning from emerging practices and was built on three levels of engagement:

- The core of the new approach lay in the **development of community-based initiatives** to establish dialogue in ethnically diverse communities, bringing together different minorities with the majority, around issues of common concern and stimulating effective communication with relevant local institutions and the media.
- The objective of bringing together community groups was to **create and nurture networks** that could share common values, further interactive learning and "feed" the outreach of the programme to national level – educating the media and the public and influencing institutions about possible alternatives to current practice.
- At the SEE level, the aim was to **enhance regional links and communication** in order to disseminate practices and approaches that had been tested or seen to work, to learn from each other and to help others to learn from our experience.

Developing strategic partnerships

One of the keys to the success of the programme was the identification of national coordinating partners who were able to provide strategic leadership and effective management of this challenging programme. We imagined potential partners as creative and devoted NGOs, committed to human rights and respect for others as a crosscutting issue of civil society; who were credible at both community and national level; able to respond strategically to real needs and to rapid changes in the environment; open to learn from other communities and able to develop advocacy and public campaigns.

The identification of such partners was not easy. It was a process we began in 2000 with Bulgaria and Romania, and continued in 2001 with Albania and Serbia. The process of partner identification in Macedonia was hampered by the crises there, but was eventually finalised after a six-month development phase.

The national strategic partners² that started this exciting journey with us were:

The **Interethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation (IEIHRF)** in **Bulgaria**, which emerged from a citizens' pressure group called the Committee for the Defence of Minority Rights. IEIHRF promotes the philosophy that successful inter-ethnic cooperation and full participation of minorities in public life are only possible where both sides in the process have equal rights and are equally respected.

The **Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Centre (EDRC)** in **Romania**, initiated and facilitated the establishment of a creative partnership with three other organisations in order to combine resources, skills, beliefs and learning in this challenging programme. EDRC is the successor to the Ethnic Minorities Programme of the Cluj Branch of the Open Society Foundation, which had been administering the "Improving Ethnic Relations Programme" since 1996.

In **Serbia** we found our partner in **Civic Initiatives (CI)**. CI's mission is to promote democracy and to strengthen civil society through education and the support of citizens' active participation in the decision-making processes, as a means of breaking down regional, national, ethnic, religious, gender and social barriers.

The **Foundation Open Society Institute – Macedonia (FOSIM)** was founded in 1992 as part of the Soros Foundation Network. Over the last ten years, the Institute has played the role of a catalyst for civil society in Macedonia, combining support with pro-active programmes in order to create and strengthen citizen groups and organisations able to address key development issues. Human rights, diversity, minority integration and improvement of inter-ethnic relations have been a long-term and crosscutting priority for the Institute.

In **Albania**, the **Human Development Promotion Centre** had as its main objective to assist human development by promoting the active participation of society in the processes of political, economic and social reform. With its knowledge of the stage of development, the traditional values and mentality of Albanian society, HDPC is involved in projects which guarantee sustainability to deprived people, particularly from the perspective of human rights and alleviating poverty.

² For a fuller presentation of the partners see our website www.ier-see.org and the links to the partners' websites.

Although all the partners followed the overall strategic direction of the programme, each partner adapted the strategy in function of local priorities, needs and opportunities. Looking back at this process of trying to identify what would best make a difference, and observing the results of mutual discovery with our national partners, the efforts of the last years seem to have been a worthwhile investment of time and resources.

It is always encouraging to feel that one is more than just a donor, that one is part of a community of people devoted to change and learning from change. The following chapters set out the achievements and results of the last three years' effort, as identified by all of those involved in the programme implementation. In the final chapter we have tried to take this learning a step further by translating it into recommendations. We hope that our comments will provide help and inspiration to all of those concerned with improving ethnic relations.

Working approaches

The challenge to any regional strategy, but especially in the region where this programme has been operating, is to achieve a balance between structure and openness, whilst nevertheless putting a strategy into practice across immensely varied communities and countries. How could we best approach the issue of ethnic relations in a region marked by so many forms of violence and exclusion resulting from recent and not-so-recent conflicts and wars, structures and policies that were barely, if at all, inclusive of minorities, and cultural prejudice, chronic hostility and divide? Our experience has shown that the best way of tackling such a dilemma is to reach agreement in general on directions and methods that provide a lot of space for creative thinking, flexibility and change based on systematic learning.

On a more general level, we believe that the strength of the programme lay in the following:

- Approaching interethnic relations in an *integrated* way through:
 - i. making the issue of minority rights and diversity an *integral* part of civil society work and
 - ii. *combining* grant making, networking and capacity building as instruments for consistent and interrelated work at local, national and regional levels.

- Putting the issue of developing *local capacities* of both minorities *and* the majority living together in communities at the very centre of the programme. A very positive asset in this respect was *flexibility* and providing the space to take *a few small steps at a time* as part of the process of experimental learning and encouraging new types of attitudes to develop, whilst also creating new practices of dialogue and joint action.
- Providing for the *bottom up, participatory development of strategies over time*. At in-country level, this included regular consultation with community groups, local organisations and other key actors, which then led to updating country strategies.
- Regionally, the in-country partners have functioned as a *strategy group*, meeting regularly to discuss what works in the different countries and gradually defining the general and the variables in working approaches and practices for dealing with ethnic relations.

The working approaches in each country nevertheless did have a lot in common. In all countries the programme worked in areas of ethnically diverse populations, reaching out to communities that were often isolated, closed and not very receptive to "outside" influences. Approaching the communities in this way combined the pro-active search for promising ideas with careful selection and the facilitation of initiative development. It involved recruiting active people from the majority as well as the minorities and searching for dialogue with local institutions and the media.

Capacity building was strategically designed as ongoing support to increase the skills and motivation of selected local groups and organisations. It combined various forms of training (mostly facilitative and interactive rather than lectures), constant consultation, visits and regional meetings and discussions.

At the same time each partner was unique in its strategic response to the complexity of the in-country context. Several models or approaches were identified³:

- The model of **community facilitation** was used in Romania. This type of developmental approach requires a lot of investment because it makes great demands on resources. The time factor here is crucial, involving as it does the long process of building confidence between people. It consists of many small steps.

- In Albania, a **"multi project" approach** in the same community was used. Providing more than 2 grants to organisations with different target groups in the same locality has proven to be very effective because it reaches more targeted and varied constituencies. Such an approach also creates possibilities for future cooperation at local level.
- A more **"civic action"** oriented approach was implemented in Serbia, which gave support to community initiatives throughout the three years of the programme. This was combined with cross fertilisation with other initiatives taking place in different districts and linking it with citizen-based advocacy.
- A **"rights based development"** approach was used in Bulgaria. There, the work with community groups was structured around capacity building for advocacy and providing rights-oriented training.
- **Confidence building** was the basis of the approach in Macedonia. After the conflict it was necessary to pro-actively address efforts of dialogue, especially in communities affected by the war.

The range of projects

Factors of change

The lessons of change

Making a difference

Making a difference

The range of projects

Over the last three years the programme has supported 220 local projects and initiatives conducted by over 500 local CBOs and informal citizen groups. The total amount of support distributed amounted to €928,220. Some 150 training sessions and network meetings were organised. It is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to calculate the total number of direct and indirect beneficiaries of these local initiatives, but first indications put the number of people who participated directly in local projects at 56,000.

The local projects and initiatives supported over the last three years vary in the scope of issues they addressed, their activities, actors and outreach. This is because of the huge variety of communities approached, each with its different history, memories, ethnic group interaction, institutions and decision makers. Some initiatives involved very small start-up steps, discovering which issues could bring ethnically different people together. Others were more systematic and organised. And of course this changed over time, in function of the accumulated experience of both the communities and our in-country partners.

During the first year, most initiatives lasted from 6 to 12 months, but as the programme progressed, the search for continued momentum in the communities grew, resulting in projects that were supported for longer periods, or follow-up initiatives in the same locality. Project duration was also a function of the strategic priorities of the in-country partner and the method of facilitating community responses to them.

Factors of change

What helps to improve relations in ethnically diverse communities? Each country provided many answers to this question, with interesting examples, case studies and personal stories. Below are some of the more general lessons which emerged from work conducted with communities in different countries, as summarised at partners' meetings and in the national review reports⁴.

1. Opening up communication and dialogue across the ethnic divide is an important initial step and prerequisite for subsequent stages.

Most communities participating in the programme had hitherto experienced only the parallel coexistence of ethnic groups. There were no common meeting points, even though they lived in the same locality, and knowledge about other ethnic groups was almost always negative, varying from prejudice to hatred. Feelings about one's own identity, culture and religion were hidden in the safe environment of a single group. Outside the group, such feelings translated into fear and uncertainty. In this context, the community projects that were supported provided a practical and shared space where people could talk and learn about each other. In most cases this was a uniquely new experience. (*"Only now we felt like all the others. For once in our life we felt appreciated"*. A Romani alderman, Cuka village, Saranda, Albania.)

Getting together was especially important in those communities living in a fragile peace after recent conflicts. In some cases, work inside each ethnic group was also needed to overcome the fear and heal mutual mistrust, before the groups could be brought together.

2. Creating shared understanding of the common interest of the whole community in solving problems across ethnicity is a process in itself: it needs time and usually requires taking just one step at a time. Just getting to know each other cannot automatically improve relations. Good results occur when there is mutual recognition that the problem of one particular ethnic group in the community is a concern for everyone and they all experience the benefits of solving the problem together. However, even creating a shared vision and joint action is not always easy. It is a process by itself, of finding links between the interests inside and between ethnic groups, all of which are also affected over time by numerous internal and external factors (political, financial, social and cultural). It would be unrealistic to imagine that projects could be based on the assumption that everybody wants and understands the same things when talking about improving interethnic relations. Interpretation can be very different between the majority and minorities, but also within the various minorities. More often than not, the starting point is the *"us versus them"* non-inclusive perceptions and exclusion practices.

"Diversity" is not a neologism. It is a linguistic fact. The word is used by each of the ethnic groups in Romania, always taking care not to include any other groups in its content. At the level of interethnic relations, for the time being, diversity is indeed a neologism. To reduce the space between the word and the reality, the EDRC has taken on the role of interpreter, an interpreter that changes a neologism into normality.

The community initiatives we supported helped in the gradual creation of a common and positive vision for improvement. The issues addressed by the initiatives varied because they came from the communities themselves – renovating a building, solving a problem of waste water running through a village, organising school and youth initiatives, addressing unemployment and economic development, theatre, culture and so on. What really made a difference was not solving the problem itself: it was the positive momentum of recognised diversity, based on the respect for, and inclusion of, all ethnic groups in the community.

3. Creating positive experiences of joint community initiatives in ethnically divided communities requires careful and constant facilitation. There can be many steps between talking to each other and acting together and the process is neither automatic nor linear. An external facilitator or mediator plays a crucial role in stimulating and accelerating such a process. Ethnic groups are usually isolated and not interactive. In our experience, the work of all in-country partners as external motivators, stimulated and "seeded" interethnic community activism with much more than small grants. It was the ongoing work done directly with the beneficiaries, the numerous facilitation meetings and discussions, the value-based training and networking across localities and regions that helped to increase the effectiveness of the initiatives.

In this regard, it is preferable to envisage a longer-term perspective for the projects, which can provide space for development. (*"Localities where we worked for more than a year created stronger cases of positive experiences and motivation to continue with other joint initiative."* Civic Initiatives, Serbia)

Our Romanian partners designed a significant part of the programme as long-term community facilitation, aimed at in-depth changes across the community. It lasted 14 months, covered 16 communities and included ongoing assistance to communities from external facilitators and mentors. It was a process of frequent visits to identify leaders; to pinpoint specific problems in each ethnic group; to stimulate the emergence of an initiative group made up of all ethnic groups; and determine problems that were common to the community. This was accompanied by organising meetings of the entire community to encourage involvement and to raise awareness about common needs and the benefits of working together for solutions, of looking for solutions and resources inside the community and not relying only on outside help. "External" facilitators gradually transferred responsibility to the community leaders, although they remained mentors who could provide feedback and support.

4. Working with young people inside and outside the education system is crucial for improving interethnic relations. Around two thirds of the community initiatives developed by this programme involved young people. Some were directly related to the school system, bringing in various aspects of intercultural education, such as working with teachers to integrate new approaches to classroom teaching, school competitions (essays, drawings, publications, debates) and extracurricular activities (clubs, music and culture-related courses, computer education, sport, study groups). Others included working with young people outside the school – summer camps, informal youth action groups, theatre and so on.

No matter what the scope of the initiative, work with young people proved to be a very good entry point for change in divided communities. Joint participation and public presentations by young people brought parents together too and result in a broader effect on the community at large. New approaches to intercultural teaching also changed the attitudes of teachers and school administrations. For most of the young people who participated in the projects, the experience they shared changed their lives and perspective: it made them more confident about their own identity and provided hope that they could enjoy other relationships than those based on prejudice and hatred.

"I live, but why? This is a question that many young people ask themselves... This is what really scares me. I'm afraid that I'll lose the will to live. Yet, I know that everything will turn out right; everything will have its place through work and trust. Although I live in uncertainty, I think that it must be possible to live. Even though we know so little of each other, it must still be possible to get to know each other better. I want us to build a fortress together, where everyone will be happy, where we will all have the desire to work and to live!" This excerpt is from the essay of a 15 year-old girl in Struga, Macedonia, entitled "Where do I see myself in the future?", one of the many initiatives of "Struga – A Multiethnic Place". This project was initiated by an informal group of women and later grew into a youth movement of 60 young people from all ethnic backgrounds, who wanted to be together, despite the ethnic separation in their schools, cafes and other places they frequent.

5. Creating civic interethnic structures is key to stimulating local engagement.

All of the projects helped increase the capacity of the groups and organisations that had initiated and managed them. In most cases the local teams were interethnic and brought with them practical experience of conducting joint community development. Systematic capacity building support (through training, visits, discussions) was also extremely helpful in carrying out effective citizen work, understanding minority rights, cooperation between NGOs and local institutions and in working with the media.

In many cases, initiatives were carried out by more than one organisation. This increased over time, as it became the approach of the in-country partners to support projects. In this way projects came to serve the community as a whole because they stimulated cooperation between different NGOs (most of which represented one or other ethnic group present in the locality). Many projects resulted in the creation of new multiethnic community structures – civic councils, community school boards, issue-based working groups or advisory groups to local government. Other projects that had been initiated by informal groups grew to become registered local organisations. In many cases, these organisations represented the first-ever registered civic group in the locality, especially in very isolated and rural communities. In all cases it was unique in bringing diversity to civic organisation.

6. Involving local government and local institutions is vital. Local decision-making is a projection of the overall political approach to minorities and interethnic relations. How such decision-making translates locally also reflects the complexity of the community's history and relations. In general, ethnic and minority issues are very politicised and are regarded as more of a problem than a factor of interest to local development. They also remain the last item on the political agenda and are more restrictive in nature than encouraging or inspiring.

Work to involve local authorities in relevant projects (schools, health care, social service, employment departments etc.) gradually became a feature of the programme in all countries. In the beginning their response was more formal, such as signing letters of support for initiatives, or attending a meeting. Later local authorities' roles changed and they became partners of local NGOs and community groups, rather than their target group. One of the working approaches used to stimulate this process was to involve local authority representatives in various meetings, training sessions and discussions at local and regional level. Their involvement made a significant contribution to the initiative, since the issues addressed were usually influenced by the attitudes and policies of the institutions. However, it had also a more profound effect: their involvement provided local officials and administrations with new experience of dealing with citizens, especially those from minority groups, and this in turn led to greater understanding of the importance of their participation.

"This programme helped us a lot in identifying new dimensions to analyse and improve interethnic relations and minority issues", said the Mayor of Permeti, Albania.

"The training courses under this programme opened my eyes. They were not dreary old seminars. Nothing in the seminars was just a mere formality. Every aspect set out to answer our real needs", Asparuh Angelov, Romani Mayor, Kaspichan, Bulgaria.

7. Raising awareness of the wider community (across ethnicity) was another important part of the community approach to the programme. Increasing public awareness of the projects was achieved through various approaches,

including public presentations, community meetings and gatherings and helping local organisations to work more effectively with the local media. Projects that directly supported local media initiatives, which included training journalists about responsible minority reporting, editing publications, live radio discussion shows and documentaries proved to be particularly effective. As for relations with local institutions, partnerships developed between local organisations and local radio and newspapers, which helped them to address some of the burning community issues in a more responsible way.

The lessons of change

Improving ethnic relations is an ambitious task and difficult to achieve through small scale initiatives alone, especially if these are fragmented and known only to the direct participants and beneficiaries. In complex environments such as Southeast Europe, it is crucial to identify ways to affect the bigger picture, how to modify the attitudes, policies and practices of institutions, the media, other NGOs and development actors as well as society at large.

Work at national level was therefore envisaged in the area of networking between community groups and with other NGOs, and making other sectors and the public aware of the programme and its projects. The capacity to facilitate these aspects of the programme was one of the criteria used to select national coordinating partners. The main aspect of this work, however, remained at local level where participants had to explore working models, to build positive case histories that could be disseminated, and to create a new community of local advocates for minority and ethnic rights and diversity.

In all countries in the programme, work to change the environment at country level was designed as a process that could be developed gradually, by building upon emerging local experience and successes. The method employed differed according to the strategy and overall approach of the in-country partner with regard to *how* they could communicate their message to decision makers and the public with limited resources (as more than 70 % of programme funds provided were to support community projects directly). The method also depended on the profile of the coordinating partner and the possibility of optimising work at national level by linking this programme with the partner's other programmes or projects.

- *In the case of IEIHRF, Bulgaria, the strategy for policy change to put minority rights and international standards into practice at all levels led the work both locally and nationally. Support was increasingly given to local initiatives that had priorities that had been identified for advocacy action.*
- *The HDPC in Albania focused its work mainly in the area of democratic local governance and sustainable development.*
- *The in-depth facilitation approach chosen in Romania required more time and space for work at community level. Advocacy for a community-based approach to development in various communities was carried out using the channels of each of the three partner organisations coordinating the programme, ERDC, ARDC and the Pro-Europe League.*
- *Civic Initiatives in Serbia integrated this programme in its overall work of energising civic action and advocacy for democratisation, based on the recognition of rights and diversity.*
- *The programme team hosted by OSI Macedonia had as its priority to re-connect and rebuild trust in post-conflict communities. Local groups were involved in other general campaigns of the Institute. More nationwide action has been planned for the third, and last, year of the programme.*

The good working practices created whilst influencing and changing the environment provide evidence that there is more than one way of "doing it well". Whilst it is difficult to generalise across the variety of cases and approaches, there are several lessons to be drawn from the practices of this programme:

1. Local and national levels are interconnected. A case in one particular locality can provide a very strong instrument for promoting decisions at central level. National policy has proved to be empty and ineffective without an active and empowered local level. In the process of decentralisation and paying more attention to local and regional development, there is an increasing need to develop local capacities for policy design, change and implementation.

"The fact that the Municipal Council in Silistra has for the first time committed itself to working specifically for human rights is not just a breakthrough for the two non-governmental organisations implementing the project... Practices such as this will gradually change the prevailing view that successful human rights activities and initiatives generally come from the capital city. This view is damaging to the cause of human rights." Todorka Tzoneva, Media Bridge Association, Silistra, Northeast Bulgaria.

2. It is important to develop good local cases about the working practices of citizens and institutions in order to make the bigger case for policy change.

("In our opinion the logical way of taking advocacy to a higher level is to first achieve certain results locally and then, with the proof of obvious progress, to try to advocate for change at national level." Civic Initiatives, Serbia)

As we have already indicated, most of the local projects gradually came to include local officials and institutions as partners in the initiative. In some cases, even though they were not designed or defined as direct advocacy, the projects influenced local authorities and institutions by creating awareness of a particular issue and the need for inclusion and respect of the rights of all ethnic groups living in their locality. *("We have been pushed by all these activities to seriously re-consider the arrangement for transporting these children to school. There had been an idea to establish a separate school for the Romani children in the Roma village, but now we are convinced that this is not the right approach. They should learn together with all the other children."* Director of the Education Department, Fieri, Albania.)

Other initiatives were specifically designed to encourage the development of rights-based policies in institutions. A good example of this comes from Bulgaria, where various projects resulted in the creation of nine municipal strategies and minority integration programmes; the establishment of three human rights commissions at municipal level; and seven public councils responsible for minority issues.

The most successful cases of local influence on national policy were probably in the area of education. Methods that resulted in successful changes in local school policy later led to changes in educational policies at higher levels in a number of instances:

- A joint initiative by three local NGOs in Presevo, Serbia, succeeded in organising a basic music school for 70 children from all ethnic groups. In a community wounded by conflict and division and where children had no other meeting point, this required a real effort. The success of the initiative also lay in the bridges built between parents during the public performances organised. The Republic's Ministry of Education and Sport (which, in the past, had several times refused to even consider support for such an initiative) has now recognised the school, based on its success and the final exam results of its pupils, which were similar to those of the state schools.
- Intercultural education, which had been introduced by several local projects in Bulgaria, was later adopted as part of the local school curriculum and led to changes in municipal policy, whereby optional subjects on multiculturalism and the history of religions were introduced. This was instigated at the initiative of teachers and the school administrations involved in the projects. Other local cases were used to create pressure and provide practical suggestions for the national policy on desegregating Roma schools.)

3. Creating interethnic networks of local activists in all countries is the most important asset to effective work to change policies and practices and to influence public attitudes countrywide.

Creating interethnic networks of all those who participated in the programme involved a facilitated process of creating a common and recognized value system, based on diversity and respect for minority rights. It involved disseminating knowledge about concepts and standards and of civic approaches and practices. Meetings, joint training, discussions on key issues and exchanges of lessons derived from ongoing work and supported local projects, were all considered to provide invaluable experience, not just acquired knowledge and skills. The networks also created trust and relationships, a sense of not being alone and of belonging to something larger, beyond a single closed community and group (and across several countries).

"The network of organisations, which shares a common cause in the promotion of minority rights, has given us vulnerable minorities a sense of security that, in the event of human rights related problems, we can mobilise a powerful NGO resource to advocate for solutions to them. And no less important, it has given us the confidence that we can be successful in our dealings with institutions, that we can initiate significant change in their practices and in the environment in which we live". Fetie Sharanska, The Yakorudchanka Association, Yakoruda, Southwest Bulgaria.

In Serbia, civic groups and local authorities in five municipalities signed a cooperation agreement in the area of interethnic relations as a result of NGO activities supported by the programme. The agreement was the result of systematic efforts to bring together the mayors and to advocate for the common benefit of applying the principles of sustainable development and inclusion of all ethnic groups living in each community. Local groups from the network were also actively involved in other nationwide and regional civic campaigns organised by Civic Initiatives.

In Bulgaria, the network of local organisations participated in various national campaigns on important dates related to the Human Rights Calendar. They were also active in developing the IEIHRF alternative reports for monitoring implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and in the European Commission Regular Annual Report on meeting the pre-accession criteria.

4. Effectively working with the media is a very important element of work to change the environment. Once more, work at local and national levels was interconnected. The numerous publications, events, radio and TV presentations, meetings of journalists and partnerships between NGOs and the media that came about as a result of the programme have all gradually created the potential for a different way of presenting minority issues and interethnic dialogue in the media. The biggest asset was the emergence of a new community of journalists at country level, with high awareness of rights and diversity and with practical experience of partnership work with local civic organisations.

"The unquestionable achievement of the media projects and the programme as a whole is the increased presence of minority issues in the media, an increase in minority representatives in the media and the creation of working models of cooperation between representatives of the majority and minorities in making media projects. Ivan Bedrov, journalist, Bulgaria.

Participation of journalist teams from the media projects in the networks of local groups and organisations was also a way to increase partnership and intensify reporting about positive cases in the media. ("Three years ago, we

were only three individuals in our organisation dealing with activities that targeted minorities. One of us was in charge of TV programmes, the other of radio programmes and the third was responsible for the newspaper. Now, we are not three but 80 working in different cities. Now we feel more confident and it's easier for us to organise discussions in the media around minority issues" Local activists Albania).

5. Disseminating effective approaches and working practices in ethnically diverse communities to other programmes and development actors. One of the biggest problems in this field of work is the fragmentation of good working practices: they remain confined to a particular project or programme, thereby limiting the potential of their being adopted by other people in other projects and communities. In most countries, the in-country partners of this programme were very pro-active in advocating that some of the working practices and models developed were adopted in other programmes they were running.

Thus, the community facilitation model has been integrated into a large scale EU-funded Roma programme, managed by the Roma centre in Cluj. The Foundation for Local Government Reform in Bulgaria increased its focus on ethnically mixed projects designed to bring together citizens and local government using the experience of this programme. Civic Initiatives in Serbia expanded the effect of this programme by linking it with some of its other initiatives, such as "Becoming a Citizen" (a nationwide project with young people) and providing technical assistance for building teacher capacity.

Defining and recognising success

What is a good project and how can we measure success in improving relations among ethnic groups in diverse communities? How can one stimulate country-wide change? We have genuinely struggled over the years to find a common answer to these questions. Given the tremendous variety of local contexts and the cultural, structural and political factors that hinder interethnic communication, it is very difficult to define a uniform model of success. Success can have many facets. What is a starting point in one place can represent success in another. Success can be ephemeral. A local event or the projection of national policy can influence a community to revert to hostility.

The main achievement of the community initiatives is that they have created a common, democratic space of interethnic civic interaction. They have introduced a new type of dialogue between ethnic groups, as well as between them and the institutions and the media, based on recognition and understanding of rights and diversity and the need to help minorities out of isolation and marginalisation. The community initiatives have gradually created a new type of interactive leadership that can bring about change in local interethnic teams and they have helped them to develop local capacity to work with their communities, their local authorities and the media.

Measuring this success can hardly be based on statistics alone: indeed in most cases we are talking about qualitative change occurring in the individual, the group and/or the relevant institutions. Over the years we have invested a great deal in evaluation, designed to be an accompanying process, but the type of evaluation has differed from country to country. What was common, however, was the learning-centred approach and the search for as wide a participation as possible. Evaluation discussions and interaction also played their part in building awareness and promoting the cause of the programme.

Some indications of the programme's success include:⁵

- increased recognition of self-identity and self-esteem and a greater capacity to engage and participate among members of minority communities;
- increased interest in others' cultures, languages and religions and newfound friendships across ethnicity (especially among young people and children);
- interethnic teams created on the basis of common values and a shared desire to work together to transform their community (most of the teams have planned to continue to work together after the projects have ended and plan follow-up initiatives);
- a greater willingness among local institutions to consider and include the input of all ethnic groups, to provide support for initiatives and to adopt new policies and/or decisions;
- increased understanding and a new type of reporting on minority issues and ethnic relations in the media;
- the introduction of a feeling of optimism in previously divided communities about the potential to create a different future, different relationships and cooperation (thanks to positive examples of interethnic cooperation);
- the establishment of operational networks of active people from various

- communities and ethnic groups across the country, with shared values, motivations and commitment;
- new models of facilitating interaction between different sectors and ethnic groups.

However all of these factors are just steps in a process, a process that requires a great deal more work and facilitation in order to sustain the positive momentum achieved to date and to expand the interactive experiences created to more people in the communities and to more communities.

"In terms of impact, it will take decades of work on ethnic relations to achieve lasting and measurable progress. It is obvious that the projects have made a difference in parts of or in whole communities. It will be a much harder job to maintain the momentum created. One has to be aware of the immense difficulties, of how fragile and easy it could be to reverse all of the positive steps taken, and how hard it will be to measure their impact... Looking at the aim of building capacity and creating a critical mass of those working on improving ethnic relations, this programme has already made a significant impact... It will be the sum of the small community initiatives and capacity building exercises that will, like those within this programme, bring the lasting and sustainable improvement." Mia Vukojevic, who made an internal evaluation of the programme in 2002.

Looking forward

The context for the future

Long-term considerations

Issues of concern

Looking forward

The context for the future

Compared with the violent conflicts of the Balkans' recent past, many positive developments to reconnect this region to Europe have resulted from the common efforts of the international community, governments and civil society. Nevertheless, peace can be a fragile thing in this part of the world. There are everyday reminders of this across the region. Explosions are usually detonated at the very level where people coexist, namely the community. Ethnic communities all over the region still live parallel lives of human insecurity, prejudice and division, whilst relations between them are increasingly affected by growing poverty and exclusion. The interpretation of minority issues remains highly politicised and easily reverts to nationalism and discrimination.

At the same time, the nature of funding is changing with regard to the donor community, the intensity of its involvement, attention, priorities and the type of support provided. Many leave this region to respond to some other crisis hot spot. Those that stay think more in terms of "phasing out". While the donors search to discover how to sustain efforts in the limited time left, the pressure for results and faster impact grows. Political aspects of the work, in the form of policy and institutional change, increase as the priority shifts to preparing the countries and the region to respond to the requirements for EU integration.

Key development goals for every country in Southeast Europe are to embrace diversity as part of the process of democratisation of the region and to continue efforts to sustain peace along the route to becoming part of the European Union. These include adopting domestic legislation and institutional practices that enable minorities to actively participate in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of policies in the public sector. However, the step from getting the paper work done (with its mass of required provisions and regulations) to making the paper work (i.e. sustainable implementation) requires a long-term, shared vision and the commitment and interaction of all of the development actors, at all levels. This implies changes of attitudes, behaviour and of the leadership culture. The practice of democratic governance based on respect of diversity and human rights has to be adopted by all.

"Spreading the idea, providing the appropriate conditions and encouraging interethnic cooperation is a complex task requiring a great many diverse and synchronised activities, as well as the strategically designed participation of the public sector, the third sector and even the private sector. So we speak about horizontal and vertical inter-sector networking." Civic Initiatives, Serbia

Long-term considerations

Based on our experience across a wide variety of local contexts, we believe that several critical priority areas must be considered for the long-term⁶:

- **There is a need to increase the awareness and competence of politicians and all levels of governance with regard to the democratic concepts of human rights and to adopt an inclusive approach in mainstream policy.** Without this, policy design and implementation will be both inadequate and distorted. *"A requirement to be informed about human rights and the ability to apply rights-based approaches to development should be integrated in job descriptions for public and municipal administrations and elected officials. Relevant training should also be provided"* (IEIHRF, Bulgaria).

This is particularly important because governments are increasingly becoming the main channels for international development assistance. If they do not have the appropriate knowledge and skills in relation to human rights and the need to respect diversity of input and facilitation development approaches as an integral part of good governance, then the programmes and the funds they provide will have limited effect. They might even reconfirm existing models of minority exclusion.

- **It is necessary to increase the knowledge and the capacity of minority communities so that they can participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of development policies.** Creating a critical mass of local activist groups, able to act as mediators and represent the interests of their communities, is a strategic task not just for minority NGOs, or NGOs working on minority issues, but for any organisation claiming to do development work. This will also be of real help in monitoring the practical implementation of legislation adopted and regulations.

⁶ More detailed and country specific recommendations can be found in the national review reports on www.ier-see.org.

- **Long-term programmes to improve the situation in marginalised communities should be a priority and an integral part of local strategies for sustainable development.** There is growing poverty and exclusion of Roma communities throughout the countries of Southeast Europe and poverty is also striking rural and urban communities of various other minorities. The growing gap between communities according to their level of development and access to resources reconfirms their isolation. Ideally, any programme such as this one should be designed as an integral and targeted part of the overall development strategy of a given municipality or district. Governments and NGOs should ensure that the public understands that programmes targeted at vulnerable minority communities will benefit the society as a whole, as well as those minorities.
- **Systematic policies for changing public attitudes and perceptions are needed. These include developing media policies and standards for journalists** for reporting on ethnic relations and minority issues, developing media products that promote diversity and showing positive examples of this in practice. This should be also part of information campaigns on European integration, thus building a broadly based awareness of human rights, both as part of and for the benefit of democracy.
- **Working with young people and changing the educational system will be of critical importance. Teaching civic awareness and respect for "otherness" is the basis for sustaining democracy in the region.** Human rights and multiculturalism have to be integrated into the school system from a very early age. These subjects should be an integral part of teacher training. Relevant competencies should feature in the job descriptions of school and educational administration at all levels. This applies not only to regions with minority communities, but also to schools with only a majority population. Systematic youth programmes providing common ground and interethnic communication should be considered by governments and NGOs.

The complexity of minority and issues of ethnic relations cannot have top-down, fragmented or one-sided solutions. The interconnectedness of the issues and the levels for their solution means that a new type of strategic programming is required to optimise the effectiveness of existing and forthcoming resources.

Based on our learning, we should like to put forward some suggestions for practical approaches and working practices:

- **The issue of minorities' equal participation and the promotion of interethnic dialogue need to be regarded as crosscutting for any effort directed at change in the region.** The region and the countries themselves are ethnically diverse by default. Ethnic relations are issues not only in mixed and minority communities, but for the countries as a whole. Awareness of these issues and a concrete set of relevant actions should be a functional component of any programme, no matter what aspect of the problem is being dealt with.
- **It is crucial to provide help inside the minorities aimed at increasing their capacities so as to provide an opportunity for real participation.** In our experience this should also be linked with working *across ethnicity* (among minorities and with the majority). Building an interethnic space where meaningful dialogue and joint initiatives can be experienced is crucial to sustaining efforts to raise awareness about human rights as an integral part of a functioning democracy.
- **Programmes should envisage a thorough consultative process with local stakeholders from all ethnic groups and from the different sectors.** If integrated into the overall programme design, at the beginning and at different stages during implementation, this will provide a good investment in sustainability of the effort. It should also be accompanied by a certain level of flexibility in time and place in the overall strategy, so as to be able to respond to the dynamics and changing needs of the local environment. Such an approach can reduce the gap between "outside programming" and local ownership of the desired change. This is relevant to international and regional efforts, as well as to national and in-country district programmes. It will increase the practice of inclusion and respect for diversity of input and help develop new approaches in domestic institutions and governments at central and local level.
- **The experience of this programme has confirmed the importance of selecting the appropriate implementing partner.** Ideally, selection is made on the basis of a careful pre-assessment of professionalism and the presence

of real commitment and values. Technical skills alone are not enough. The allocation of funds for development initiatives in ethnically diverse environments is much more effective through in-country NGOs that have a clear long-term strategy, and a good record of combining community outreach, facilitating the development of local initiatives and capacity building. It also requires the partner to be able to provide links across communities and between local and central levels so that change in the overall environment can be brought about.

- **If programmes aim for sustainability in overcoming ethnic divide, they need a solid strategy to create a new type of local leadership that is interethnic and interactive, across sectors and with the media.** The best approach is a strategic combination of seed funds to test out local initiatives (capacity through doing) and interactive training programmes. Effectiveness increases if support (funds, facilitation and capacity building) is longer than a year in the selected districts or regions, thereby providing space for development (start-up, development, the creation of internal capacities to continue). Another important factor is facilitating practical interaction among the various local actors – local NGOs, community groups, local government and local institutions, the media and local business. This relates to support for local projects, as well as to the design of training.
- **Work in ethnically diverse and isolated communities requires considerable efforts to raise awareness and self-esteem and to create trust.** It demands small but consistent steps designed to create motivation and self-esteem out of defeatism and fear. In this respect, another important actor is the mediator, facilitator or mentor, who stimulates dialogue and interaction in the communities and helps learning and the gradual growth of local capacity, rather than substituting them. This type of community facilitation approach can be particularly useful in places where there are no NGOs or civic structures (which is the case in many small minority and ethnically diverse communities). The community facilitator's job is very demanding and requires specialised training. It is important to develop these skills among members of the minorities.
- **Development models and practices of this, and other, programmes should be systematised and transferred to institutions and local authorities working directly with disadvantaged communities.** Part of this transfer can come from

working in partnership with NGOs. However, constant capacity building, based on actual cases and targeted at different levels of public administration and local institutions, is crucial for "institutionalising" development approaches. Understanding diversity should combine capacity building a) for community development (understanding various cultures, possible approaches and community development) and b) of standards, principles and working practices in minority rights and diversity.

Issues of concern

International support (especially in view of the increasing importance of EU funding) remains a key factor for development changes in the region. The practical effect on the ground, especially with regard to minority issues and ethnic relations, depends on the way priorities are defined and how intervention and implementation are organised. We believe that many of the above recommendations are relevant to larger scale programmes, including EU funds. The biggest challenge, however, will be to identify the balance between the size of funding, the pressure exerted for delivery of results and the time needed to secure consistent processes of change and local ownership.

Some key issues of concern for future programmes include:

- Interaction between international and in-country development actors with regard to EU tender regulations and eligibility criteria, notably the leading role of short-listed technical consulting companies and the business approach to forming consortia for implementation, as well as the increasing competition for funds between international NGOs and in-country NGOs.
- The extent of interaction between local NGOs and governments in the design and implementation of programmes (especially in view of the fact that EU funds are increasingly channelled through governments).
- Levels of accessibility to these funds for the more vulnerable and remote communities (their access to information, their ability to cope with the "technology" of applications and their need for development phases providing for capacity growth through small but consistent steps).
- The way programmes are monitored and evaluated (to what extent are the beneficiaries of the programme involved in the evaluation process).

- The impact of international assistance is a common responsibility of both donors and in-country development actors. It is also a shared interest to make the Balkans a better and more European region. In this respect there is a growing need to organise discussion fora that provide critical feedback from the field on elements that help or hinder the effectiveness of international funds regionally, in-country or locally (especially in more isolated regions and communities).
- Last, but not least, is the importance of donor partnerships, not only in terms of budgets, but more importantly how far they complement one another. The experience of this programme and the overall approach adopted in the region, have provided proof that complementary donors is one of the key factors that makes a difference to the overall success of the programme.

Appendices

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The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

OSI & the Soros Foundation

Appendices

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The King Baudouin Foundation

The King Baudouin Foundation is a public benefit foundation, based in Brussels. It was established in 1976 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the reign of late King Baudouin with the aim of improving people's living conditions. The Foundation has total annual expenditures of € 38 million.

Four main themes are currently central to its work:

- The 'Social Justice' programme seeks out new forms of social inequality and supports initiatives to give greater autonomy to vulnerable people.
- The 'Civil Society' programme aims to stimulate civic engagement and strengthen the NGO sector.
- The 'Governance' programme aims to involve citizens more closely in the decision-making that determines how goods and services are produced and consumed, and in developments in medical science.
- Through the 'Funds & Contemporary Philanthropy' programme, the Foundation wishes to encourage modern forms of generosity.

The Foundation is active at local, regional and federal level in Belgium, as well as at European and international level. It has had a special focus on Southeast Europe since 1999.

www.kbs-frb.be

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is an endowed, non-profit, private grant making foundation based in Flint, Michigan, U.S.A. Charles Stewart Mott was an automotive pioneer in the General Motors Corporation and he established the Foundation in 1926.

Through its Civil Society programme, the Foundation awards grants to non-profit, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Russia. The mission of the Foundation's Civil Society programme is to support efforts to assist in building democratic institutions, to strengthen local communities, promote equitable access to resources and to ensure respect of rights and diversity.

The Foundation has been making grants to benefit the CEE and Russia since 1989. In 2003, the Foundation awarded more than \$13 million to organisations active in the CEE and Russia. The Foundation also works in South Africa and has other programme areas that make international grants.

Through all of its programmes, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation seeks to fulfil its mission of supporting efforts that promote a just, equitable, and sustainable society.

www.mott.org

The OSI and the Soros Foundations Network

The Open Society Institute (OSI) is a private operating and grant making foundation based in New York City that serves as the hub of the Soros Foundations Network, a group of autonomous foundations and organisations operating in more than 50 countries.

OSI and the network implement a range of initiatives that aim to promote open societies by shaping government policy and supporting education, media, public health and human and women's rights, as well as social, legal, and economic reform. To diminish and prevent the negative consequences of globalisation, OSI seeks to foster an open society globally by increasing collaboration with other nongovernmental organisations, governments and international institutions.

OSI was founded in 1993 by investor and philanthropist George Soros to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Those foundations were established, starting in 1984, to help former communist countries in their transition to democracy.

The Soros Foundations Network has expanded its geographic reach to include foundations and initiatives in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Mongolia, Southeast Asia, Turkey, and the United States. OSI also supports selective projects in other parts of the world.

www.soros.org

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

1. The *Improving Ethnic Relations Programme* in Central and Eastern Europe began in 1996 (9 countries) and was subsequently extended in 1998 to cover 16 countries.

In 1999, based on the regional situation of the time and the experience acquired, the programme was re-designed to focus on countries estimated to be particularly vulnerable to ethnic tensions. Five countries were selected: Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. This report covers the programme implemented in these five countries over a three-year period from 2001-2004.

2. This phase of the programme involved a major innovation, designed to tackle the problem of local organisations being asked to participate in international programmes *after* strategic decisions have already been taken. Our programme began with a consultation process that involved all the actors, at local, national and regional level.

3. The resulting strategic guidelines combined development grants, capacity building and ongoing learning for all those involved, built on 3 levels of engagement:

- Community-based initiatives to establish dialogue between minorities and the majority;
- NGOs and community groups brought together to create networks that could share values and experiences and educate the media and public; and
- The dissemination of good practice at regional level, designed to enhance links and communication. The choice of national coordinating partner was crucial to this.

4. We believe that the strength of the new programme lay in approaching interethnic relations in an *integrated* way. Improving interethnic relations became an integral part of work in civil society and developing *local capacity* of minorities *and* the majority was placed at the centre of the programme, providing for ongoing *bottom up participation* in strategic development.

5. Elements in the programme that have been defined as having made a significant contribution to improving ethnic relations are as follows:

- Opening up dialogue across the ethnic divide from the very beginning;
- Creating understanding through the joint identification and solution of problems of *common* concern;

- Careful and constant facilitation of joint community initiatives;
- Working with children and young people can be particularly effective in improving interethnic relations;
- Creating civic interethnic structures is key to stimulating local engagement;
- Involving local government and institutions can make the difference to the success or otherwise of a project;
- Building awareness of projects and successes across ethnicity plays an important role.

6. Evaluating the progress and results of the various projects has shown that there is more than one route to achieve success. Nevertheless, particular lessons that can be drawn from good practice are:

- Local and national levels are inter-connected. Local success can influence national policies;
- Good local case histories provide excellent evidence to make a case for national change;
- The creation of interethnic networks of local activists is the most important asset to changing policies, practices and public opinion;
- Effective work with the media is beneficial to ethnic relations *and* to the third sector;
- Work at local and national level in the media is interconnected;
- Good working practices that have been developed are an investment and should be disseminated at local, national and regional levels.

7. The main achievement of community initiatives lies in their having created a common and democratic space of interethnic civic action, with a new type of dialogue between all the groups, institutions and the media.

8. Other indications of progress include:

- An increase in self-recognition, self-esteem and willingness to engage in the wider community;
- Greater interest in the languages, cultures and religions of other groups;
- New friendships, especially among children and young people;
- Interethnic teams who have shared values and a desire to work together (on an ongoing basis) to bring about change in their communities;
- Greater willingness of local institutions to consider and use the input of all ethnic groups in policy development;

- Greater understanding and fairness in media reporting about ethnic and minority issues;
- A feeling of optimism beginning to emerge in communities that they have the capacity to change relationships, situations and, above all, the future, thanks to positive examples of interethnic cooperation;
- The establishment of well-functioning operational networks of active people from various communities and ethnic groups across the countries, with shared values and commitment;
- New models of facilitating interaction between different sectors and groups.

9. There have been many positive results in the five countries covered by our programme, resulting from the efforts of the international community, national governments and civil society in this region, as well as from our own programme. Nevertheless, the region remains fragile and there remain huge problems in every field and in every geographic area, exacerbated by poverty, unemployment and a generally unfavourable economic situation.

10. We should like to make a number of suggestions for practical approaches and working practices for the future:

- The region and its countries are ethnically diverse by default. Ethnic relations are thus an issue for the countries and region as a whole, not just local problems for mixed and minority communities. *Any* programme undertaken in the region should address ethnic relations;
- Help should be provided *inside* the minorities and projects work *across* ethnicity;
- Consultation with all of the local stakeholders as an integral part of the programme from its very beginning is an excellent investment in sustainability of effort, as well as reducing the likelihood of "imposed" outside approaches;
- The implementing partner(s) in each country is crucial to the success of a programme. Such partners should ideally have clear long-term strategies and the technical skills to provide outreach, facilitation and capacity building, as well as commitment and real values;
- Integral to sustainability in overcoming ethnic tensions is the need for a new type of local leadership that is interethnic and interactive across sectors and the media;
- Programmes such as that reported here require huge efforts to raise

awareness and self-esteem and to create trust. Small but continuous steps are needed to replace defeatism and fear with motivation and hope. Mediators and facilitators are essential catalysts for this, especially where there are no NGOs or civic structures.

- Successful practices and models of development should be systematised and disseminated to institutions and local authorities working with disadvantaged communities as well as to NGOs and others participating in a given programme.

11. We also have a number of key issues of concern for the future. Several of these articulate around the need to ensure the continued interaction and involvement of in-country NGOs (and the communities themselves) when the funds are for larger scale programmes (e.g. EU funds), when those funds are increasingly channelled through national government and when applicants for these funds are becoming increasingly "technocratic" consultants. The particular areas of apprehension we have relate to:

- Increasing competition for funds between international NGOs and in-country NGOs;
- The extent of interaction between NGOs and national government in the design and implementation of programmes;
- The extent to which vulnerable and remote communities would continue to have access to funds (conditioned by their need to have access to information, the need to understand increasingly sophisticated processes of application and the need for development and capacity-building phases in such communities);
- The method to be applied for future programme monitoring (especially with regard to involving beneficiaries);
- The need to ensure that feedback from every level reaches donors and in-country partners about factors that help or hinder implementation and the effectiveness of international funds for development.

12. The nature of the funding in troubled areas of the world is undergoing change. Many organisations have short-term commitments and leave for other crisis areas. The pressure for maximum results in minimum time is on the increase.

13. Our experience in the area of interethnic relations has indicated quite precisely the need for a long-term commitment to certain considerations:

- Sustained efforts to increase awareness and competence of politicians and those in all levels of governance about the democratic concepts of human rights and the need to adopt a policy of inclusion (especially important because governments are increasingly becoming the channels for development assistance);
- The need to increase capacity and knowledge of minority communities, to enable them to participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of projects;
- Long-term programmes to improve situations in marginalized communities must be a priority and form an integral part of local strategies for sustainable development;
- Systematic policies for changing attitudes must include developing media policies and standards for journalists;
- Working with children and young people is so crucial (and rewarding in terms of change) that changes must be introduced in the education system. Teaching civic awareness and respect for difference will provide the basis for sustaining democracy in the region.

