



CARDS

Country

former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Implementation period

2003-2004

Funding

€199,830

Results

Greater cooperation between students on inter-ethnic relations

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Partners

The Institute for Social Studies
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Learning to live together

Troubled relations

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which became independent in 1991 following the break-up of Yugoslavia, is a parliamentary democracy with multi-ethnic representation. NATO intervention in an insurgency by Kosovar and indigenous ethnic Albanians in 2001 resulted in the signing of a Framework Agreement (facilitated by the EU and US) which provided for enhanced minority civil rights and devolution of power to local governments. In spite of this and the fact that the republic is a party to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, the government's record on the violation of human rights remains poor.

Equilateral approach

The 'Triangle' project, so-called because it is based on a partnership between three universities, two from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and one from the Netherlands, is being financially supported by the European Union and managed by the European Agency for Reconstruction. It involves 30 young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in a concerted effort to improve inter-ethnic relations, to understand and establish democratic stability in the country, and to initiate co-operation and respect among the students. This will be done by carrying out research into the existing judicial system and into ethnic relations, according to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and the European Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities.

Combined effort

The partnership is made up of law students from the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, and from the Department of Legal Studies at the University of South East Europe in Tetovo, working with the Institute for Social Studies in The Hague (the Netherlands). The group was tasked with four main objectives: 1) to improve co-operation, dialogue and tolerance among the students, 2) to set up an Academic Student Committee to monitor

and co-ordinate activities undertaken by the Student Working Groups, 3) to initiate an academic inter-relationship between the Macedonian and Dutch institutions, 4) to organise activities and publish an almanac to raise public awareness of inter-ethnic relations in an effort to find common solutions to improve them.

First-term report

By the end of the first six months of the project six Student Working Groups had been set up, each comprising five students from five ethnic groups – Macedonians, Albanians, Roma, Turks and Serbs. Under the guidance of academic co-ordinators from both universities, the students were researching such topics as non-discrimination, police treatment and detention. Their conclusions and recommendations are to be published in an almanac and distributed to relevant institutions, NGOs and other interested parties in an attempt to improve the country's legislation and its implementation in the human rights sector.

Taking care of coordination

The second stage of the project concentrates on five thematic seminars, two public forums and a study visit to the partners in The Hague. The first seminar, held in Tetovo, focused on groups discriminated against in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Academic Student Committee, set up to improve co-ordination between the various student groups and the Skopje-based NGO Care International Macedonia, is to choose the subjects for the four remaining seminars, edit and distribute the almanac, and ensure that the work done is geared towards opening up constructive dialogue.

The Triangle team hopes that the co-operation already established between the various ethnic groups, along with a high level of commitment, enthusiasm and motivation will encourage new projects to further the work on improving understanding and tolerance across the country. As many of the participants agree, learning to work together as colleagues and friends, to exchange experiences, and to be tolerant of individual beliefs is a major step towards enhancing inter-ethnic relations and helping to achieve democratic stabilisation throughout the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.