GREECE AND THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Despina Syrri

The signing of the Athens-Skopje Interim Agreement in 1995 provided a functional framework for the establishment of relations between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. However, one vital question remained unsolved, namely that of a solution to the problem of the official name of the neighbouring state.[1] The general spirit of the Interim Accord which regularised and regulated the relations between the two countries is governed by the basic principles of democracy as stipulated in international law. These include the free movement of persons, ideas and goods. This article intends to examine the role that the two countries' civil societies play in both the shaping of relations between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as between the peoples of the two countries. The article will also analyse the prospects for regional development within the broader context constituted by the

1. H. Rozakis, *Political and legal dimensions of the New York Interim Agreement between Greece and FYROM,* Athens, 1996 [in Greek].

Interim Accord, the more general state of transition and crisis in the Balkans, and the unfolding international experience and debate in the areas of development, economic prosperity, political stability and social cohesion.

It is widely accepted that the existence of a strong civil society significantly contributes to the strengthening of democracy, acting as a buffer mechanism against the pressures exerted by state bodies and institutions. Particularly in post-Cold War South Eastern Europe there is a broad consensus that a vibrant 'civil society' is an essential element of any robust 'democratic infrastructure'. Moreover, value is added to approaches and perspectives which focus on the citizen as the most effective way of avoiding the traditional Balkan stereotypes of ethnic conflict, weak state and corruption. Democracy is, thus, defined not only as an institutional framework, but as the relationship between governments and citizens.[2] Thus, the role of civil society – not only on the economic, but also on the political and social levels – becomes crucial. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) whose mission is to safeguard human rights, to promote changes in the law and to champion the basic needs of the population, constitute a vital part of civil society.

This paper does not intend to examine the civil society of Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Yugoslavia in terms of the present debate on whether and how civil society networks meet the criteria of transnational cosmopolitan/ or transnational nationalist groups.[3] Local civil society actors in the two countries

2. Ivan Krastev, "The Inflexibility Trap", *UNDP Issues Paper*, Bratislava, August 2002.

3. Mary Kaldor, "Cosmopolitanism versus Nationalism: the New Divide?" in Richard Caplan and John Feffer (eds.), *Europe's New Nationalism: States and Minorities in Conflict,* London, Oxford University Press, 1996. The author argues that both post-industrial cosmopolitanism and nationalism are characterized by non-territoriality. Cosmopolitan elites fill the ranks of international govern-

often find themselves in an in-between, sometimes difficult situation. Internationally, they are connected in their outlook and fund raising practices, yet they are often small and with a weak grassroots base. Moreover, when speaking at home, they are often either nationalist or apolitical. Insufficient research on the features of civil society prior to the signing of the Interim Accord has possibly contributed to an overestimation of the effect that internationally proposed projects would have on civil societies characterised by transforming identities. The analysis of whether international involvement and expectations from civil society, especially when it comes to cross-border projects, does take into consideration local society perceptions on needs and priorities could be of great interest. Everyday practices of inter-ethnic relations among different people living as neighbours for centuries, often migrating and in constant communication and exchange through trade, are often ignored when inter-ethnic relations on the ground, among ordinary people, are framed exclusively as a "problem to be treated".

The question, therefore, is posed as to whether efforts to formulate and build systematic attempts relating to the experiences and challenges of everyday life in both countries would not be a better point of departure. When prominent international donors and governments appear to lend legitimacy to the monopolising of identities and unilateral solutions to bilateral issues, it seems sometimes unreasonable to charge relatively weak civil society groups with the task of building sound cross-border cooperation.

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mental and non-governmental organizations, financial and academic institutions, while the new nationalists are also increasingly grouped as transnational networks, exemplified by diaspora groups lobbying for the establishment of their "old countries".

The Interim Agreement

Articles 8, 9 and 10 of the Interim Accord lay the foundations for the development of friendly relations, the building of confidence and respect for human and cultural rights between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The articles in the Interim Accord relating to NGO activity are the following. Article 14 of the Agreement encourages the development of good relations of neighbourliness and economic cooperation, especially in the management of water resources and ecological protection. Article 15 supports the development of cooperation, particularly among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and private initiatives. Article 16 focuses on the development, improvement, and exchange of scientific and educational collaboration. Article 17 focuses on environmental protection, and Article 18 defines the cooperation of the contracting parties when responding to natural_disasters. Article 19 is concerned with the development of business activities and public-private partnerships, tourism and easily issued visas, as well as the facilitation of individual travel. Finally, Article 20 is centered on NGOs which are active in issues of crime prevention and the protection of human trafficking victims.[4]

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Greek society went through a period of intense debate over two issues which were centred on the question of Greek national identity and its historical definition. The first issue regarded the name of Greece's northern neighbouring state and the symbols it was using. The second was the mass entry of hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants

4. The full text of the Accord is to be found in the collection of articles by G.Valinakis-S. Dalis, *The Skopje question – Attempts at recognition and the Greek stance, Official texts 1990-1996*, Athens, Sideris, 1996 [in Greek].

from neighbouring states into Greece. The undertaking of initiatives to foster relations between the two sides was therefore hindered.[5] Contacts in the border regions of Macedonia were few and strained; there were no initiatives, either by local government, or by business or cultural organisations. Up until 1995 the adverse political climate between the governments of Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the confrontational spirit of the mass rallies in both countries and the indeterminate legal framework, led to the undertaking of isolated initiatives by individual citizens and organisations. These activities were mainly intended to express opposition to the embargo policy. Attempts to organise events which brought together in joint fora representatives of the civil societies from the two countries encountered serious difficulties and obstacles from both sides. An important example is the case of the NGO Helsinki Citizens Assembly[6] which, throughout the duration of the embargo, organised a series of conferences involving individuals from all sides on the various issues where differences of opinions were noted. The NGO also organised delegations to both countries for the first time, bringing into contact representatives from various agencies, chambers of industry and commerce, municipal authorities, ministries and organisations. The attainment of consensus on issues concerning the use of symbols and the lifting of the embargo, even before the official acceptance of similar positions in the framework of the Interim Accord, was also significant.

5. Panayiotis Kafetzis, 'A theoretical approach to xenophobia', *Macedonia and the Balkans,* Athens, EKKE and Alexandria Publishers, May 1998 [in Greek].

6. Interview with Polina Lampsa, member of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, Athens, March 2003.

Following the signing of the Accord and the rapid growth in relations, mainly at the economic level,[7] and given that both civil society itself as well as the relevant legislative framework were developed rapidly in both Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, intense activity was noted at this level too. The movement of ordinary people was facilitated, with some 500,000 visas being issued between October 1995 and November 1996, thereby permitting travel from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Greece. After 1995 an explosion in the number of initiatives was noted, yet all too often these foundered on the inertia of the public administration or individual officials on both sides, on the lack of trust and on the overall oppressive weight of past relations between the countries.

Just a few months after the signing of the Interim Accord in March 1996, the NGO Association for Democracy in the Balkans organised a conference on Democracy and Civil Society in the Balkans,[8] in Thessaloniki with three speakers coming from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Moreover, in June 1997 another conference on Culture and Reconciliation in South-Eastern Europe[9] took place. After 1997, and especially after the crisis in former Yugoslavia, Greek NGOs undertook dynamic initiatives and cross-border collaborations. These were initially in the area of humanitarian aid, and more recently in the area of development, with an emphasis on issues of education, health, the environment and young people. These programmes were usually

7. See contribution by Christos Nikas in this volume.

8. *Proceedings of International Conference on Democracy and Civil Society in the Balkans, Thessaloniki, March 29-31, 1996*, Thessaloniki, Association for Democracy in the Balkans-Paratiritis, 1997.

9. *Proceedings of International Conference on Culture and Reconciliation in South-Eastern Europe, Thessaloniki, June 26-29, 1997,* Thessaloniki, Association for Democracy in the Balkans-Paratiritis, 1998.

inspired by the European directives, provisions, legislation and practices, and often enjoyed the support of the Greek state. A number of international initiatives laid emphasis on the role of civil society in the region, sometimes in a rather unsystematic way, often overlooking real needs and acting as a meagre substitute for a serious endeavour to develop local structures. Given the need to coordinate their activities, in recent years the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe has supported the strengthening of NGOs, recognising their role in the processes of democratisation, the establishment of peace, the promotion and protection of human rights and the strengthening of cross-border cooperation in South Eastern Europe.[10] Meetings of NGO representatives were organised, under the aegis of the Stability Pact, in 2000 in Thessaloniki and in 2001 in Slovenia, and were attended by representatives from Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.[11]

Civil Society

The context in which cooperation between the civil societies of Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has developed is influenced both by bilateral relations, but also by the institutional status and maturity of the NGOs in both countries. The – initially – impressive development of civil society in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia began in the early

10. Haralambos Kondonis, "Civil Society and Multilateral Cooperative Models: The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe", *Journal of South-Eastern European and Black Sea Studies*, 2/1, January 2002.

11. Martina Fisher & Giovanni Sotto, "Southeast European NGOs for the Stability Pact", Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, *Occasional Paper* No. 17, September 2000.

1990s. As in other parts of South Eastern Europe undergoing a process of transition from socialism, the international actors were convinced that civil society needed to be consolidated based on private initiative and the free market, and avoiding to the extent possible state intervention. The results, however, were contradictory, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia proved to be no exception.

The main parameters for development are the stabilisation of the political climate, economic growth and the strengthening of social cohesion. In the Balkans, however, economic reform programmes, usually managed directly or indirectly by western financial organisations, did not always lead to a strengthening of democratic institutions. Likewise, the NGOs dependence on the educational and funding programmes of the western actors often hindered their long-term efficacy and sustainable development.[12] Economic restructuring to create a free market based on private entrepreneurship led to an initially serious decline in industrial production and, therefore, in living standards. This, in turn, had conspicuous social consequences, such as the wave of emigration, demographic decline and increasing poverty. Moreover, privatisations led, in some cases, to the creation of new uncontrolled elements – often enjoying close ties with the governing parties and, subsequently, not fostering the development of an independent class of private entrepreneurs, but merely reproducing the old relations between economy and politics. In some instances the supporters of the old regime became the new administrators and proprietors of businesses, and even of NGOs, operating free of any public control.

12. Christos Frangonikolopoulos, 'An evaluation of the action of NGOs in the Balkans', in Pantelis Sklias and Asteris Houliaras (eds.) *The Diplomacy of the Civil Society,* Athens, Papazisis, 2002, pp. 111-126 [in Greek].

These conditions hampered the strengthening of a middle class which is vital to civil society. Most of the transition societies were divided into a large class of people living in poverty, such as public sector employees, pensioners, unemployed, ethnic minorities, and a thin layer of *nouveaux riches*, whose wealth was often derived from questionable sources. The main contribution of civil society, namely involvement in public affairs, was rendered almost impossible by the absence of social cohesion. The transition of economies and political systems, economic instability, the rise of nationalist movements, ethnic tensions and social conflict all brought significant changes in to the previous concepts of belonging,[13] national sovereignty and security, and ethnic groups, with important consequences for the activities of the NGOs.

While approximately four thousand NGOs have been identified in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, only 10% of them remained subsequently active, suffering from problems of funding and uncertainty of purpose. These problems were due to the development of civil society under conditions of economic hardship and instability, the absence of a middle class, as well as dependency on aid from the western international community. This aid dependency syndrome is a problem since responsibilities for the development of human infrastructures ultimately rests on the international community.

The statutory framework, the legislation on Civil Organisations and Foundations, was passed by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Parliament in June 1998. The implementation of the new legislation did much to improve the environment in which these organisations operate. Although this legislation is regarded as being among the best in the countries of former Yugoslavia, it

13. Basil Gounaris, «Introduction», in Basil Gounaris et al. (eds.) *Identities in Macedonia,* Athens, Papazisis, 1997, pp. 30-35 [in Greek].

still bars the direct involvement of NGOs in economic activities and does not allow legal entities to found organisations. Furthermore, the tax system is a deterrent as it grants no tax relief for NGOs. Given that the country had no tradition of active civil involvement, except in areas strictly controlled by the state, the role of NGOs in society remains unclear both to the government and to the organisations. The government tolerates NGOs under pressure from the international donors and many European organisations which the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia aspires to join.[14]

Civil society is weak in the areas of strategic planning, management, staffing, technical infrastructure and relations with local communities. Given that many NGOs are individual initiatives and have no stable administrative structure, the personnel of several NGOs are usually recruited and paid on the basis of specific programmes. The best NGO model usually takes the form of small, functional teams which address the needs of local communities. International funding remains the main source of income, since the dire state of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's economy (official government figures put unemployment at 36%) leaves businesses and individuals with little spare cash for charitable contributions. Moreover, fund-raising techniques are still little known or understood.

One particular weakness of civil society in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is the absence of intermediate support organisations, which have so far responded to a fraction of the needs for education and assistance. The Centre for

14. Interesting sources of information on NGOs in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia can be found on the Internet at www.mango.org.mk, www.c4c.org.mk, www.ecmi.de/doc/projects, mk.oneworld.net, www.worldbank.org.mk/ngo-mk.html, 2002.

International Cooperation (MCIC) offers support, information and technical assistance.[15] The local branch of the Regional Environmental Centre, located in Skopje, serves the environmental community.[16] The Foundation Open Society Institute – Macedonia (FOSIM) implements a programme to promote the statutory, institutional development of NGOs, with co-funding from the Swiss Development and Cooperation Service.[17] Networking of NGOs is difficult, mainly because of the ethnic tensions within the country. The most successful examples of NGO collaboration to end ethnic divisions in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are programmes seeking to combat family violence, to support legislative change to promote greater political involvement by women, and to monitor and safeguard fair systems for holding elections.

Since the early 1990s the role of NGOs in Greece has begun to move away from the traditional framework, in which they were seen as groups whose activities should be in step with the broader functions of the state and in harmony with official government policy. Greek society is changing, as are attitudes, thereby opening up a new field of activity for Greek NGOs. For example, the number of immigrants is rising and their contribution to the economy is becoming obvious. As Greek society and its economy adjust to European models, the number of NGOs with the aim of resolving social problems is increasing too, sources of funding are multiplying, activities are being expanded into a number of new areas, and NGO personnel are acquiring experience. Once a beneficiary country (i.e. a country recipient of aid), Greece has become a donor country. NGOs are acquiring know-how in the

15. See www.mcms.org.mk, 2002.
16. See www.rec.org/REC/Publications, 2002.
17. See www.soros.org, 2002.

submission of proposals and the implementation of European programmes, voluntary action is becoming more common, and NGOs are even engaging in action beyond the country's borders.

Statutory changes followed suite. Since 1996, Greece has taken significant steps in framing a suitable functional and organisational structure for the management of bilateral development cooperation. Law 2297/95, which set out the Ministry of National Economy's programme of development aid, paved the way for Law 2731/99, in which the Greek Development Assistance Programme was introduced. A unified procedure is being put into place to cover similar programmes run by all ministries and organisations involved in Greece's five-year programme (1997-2001) for partner countries. The new legislation provides for the role of NGOs in development assistance programmes which fall within the sphere of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and for the establishment of a National Advisory Council for NGOs.[18] In 1999 the Foreign Ministry created a

18. Quoted from the *"Annual Report of the Greek Bilateral and Multilateral Official Development Co-operation and Assistance - Year 1999",* YDAS:

"Measures to strengthen aid management

Since the mid 1990s Greece has taken various initiatives in order to establish an appropriate organisational structure to manage its bilateral development co-operation granted to developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

In July 1999 new legislation was voted by the Parliament on the Greek Development Assistance Programme (Law No. 2731/99, Official Gazette No.138/A/5-7-1999). This is a comprehensive legal text based in its first part on existing legislation regulating the development assistance programme of the Ministry of National Economy. The provisions of the existing law were extended to cover the development assistance activities of all actors (Ministries and Legal Entities) participating in the Five -Year Development Assistance Programmes of Greece to partner countries. In its second part, specific provisions regulate issues concerning NGOs which fall within the competence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The objective of the Law is to establish a uniform procedure for implementing

register of NGOs, applying the same criteria for registration as

development co-operation activities by all relevant Ministries. It provides guidelines for the strategy, co-ordination, planning, implementation, monitoring, administration, evaluation and control of Greek aid projects, including technical co-operation, financial assistance, food aid and emergency assistance.

The Law in particular:

i. Sets out project implementation procedures and priority sectors and specifies eligible expenses according to DAC/OECD directives. It, thus, enables implementing agencies to make proper and effective use of available funds.

ii. Covers the former legal gap as regards the implementation of aid projects by various Agencies (Ministries and Legal Entities).

iii., Bearing in mind the specific character of the Development Assistance Programme, it establishes standards of responsibility, legitimacy, transparency and flexibility.

iv. Defines responsibilities in relation to aid project contracting both in Greece and abroad. Moreover, it regulates the process of procurement assignment, provision of services and project implementation, according to the existing provisions of both national and E.U legislation.

The second part of the Law:

v. Provides for the establishment of the "Hellenic International Development Co-operation Department" (Y.D.A.S – "HELLENIC AID"), of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its main responsibility is to co-ordinate, supervise and promote projects of emergency-humanitarian aid, food aid, development assistance or of other forms, implemented by NGOs.

vi. Establishes legally the role of NGOs in the development process as well as the sectors and objectives of their activities. It provides for the establishment and upkeep of a "Special NGO Register" within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and sets out the procedure and requirements for registration.

vii. Provides for the possibility of financing aid projects implemented by NGOs from the State Budget, under specified conditions.

viii. Provides for incentives to those wishing or are requested to participate in aid projects implemented by Greek NGOs in developing countries.

ix. Provides for regulations regarding educational issues, with a view to promoting the spirit of voluntary work among young people, especially students. In addition, it provides for the granting of (non-monetary) awards to young people for their participation in missions or humanitarian projects implemented by Greek NGOs.

those used by international agencies.[19] During the Kosovo crisis the Foreign Ministry played a coordinating role, especially after the first phase of the conflict, frequently supporting NGO action with technical and logistic assistance. A Humanitarian Aid Association Office was set up in Skopje by the Greek state, which facilitated communication with local communities and authorities, such as the customs service, as well as with international organisations. This Office provided Greek NGOs with valuable information, such as figures on refugee movements, camps, etc. Estimates from the International Development Cooperation Department-Hellenic Aid indicate that financial assistance was provided in the financial year 1998 to the NGO European Perspective, for co-funding of an NGO programme in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in the financial year 2000, for development assistance to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, while the European Centre for Public Law received funds for implementation of a programme of scientific cooperation between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the area of institutional reform. In 2000 the NGOs Hellenic Red Cross, Doctors of the World, European Perspective, the Institute of International Social Affairs and the Society for Social and Humanitarian Aid received 165,000,000[20]

x. Provides also for the establishment of the "National Advisory Committee on NGOs", the purpose of which is to examine problems faced by NGOs and other bodies during the period of implementation of aid projects...".

19. According to data from the Greek International Development Cooperation Department 4, since 1999 Greece has been a member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD. See relevant publication by the General Secretariat for International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

20. Approximately 484,000 Euros.

drachmas to fund direct humanitarian aid programmes for refugees from Kosovo entering the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and for stabilisation programmes.

Co-operation between Non Governmental Organisations

In general terms, issues affecting NGOs are not determined by bilateral agreements. Certain NGOs from Greece, usually engaged in EU funded development programmes in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, have signed agreements with relevant ministries in the country. For example, European Perspective has signed contracts with the Ministries of Education as well as Labour, in order to ensure the smooth progress of the programmes being implemented with ECHO funding.[21] The Greek National Plan for the Reconstruction of the Balkans[22] intends to allocate 10% of its budget to NGO activities in the Balkan countries. However, although bilateral agreements have been signed for the implementation of specific initiatives, no civil society programme has yet been launched and there is no special planning for the specific countries.

It is evident that when discussing civil society cooperation between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia we are looking at it from a particular angle. For the most part, since the Interim Accord was signed, it is Greek NGOs which have developed activities in the Former Yugoslav Republic of

21. See Appendix (p. 348).

22. In accordance with the legislation on the National Plan for the Reconstruction of the Balkans passed by the Greek Parliament on 28th March 2002 (Law 2996/Gov. Gaz. 62 issue I).

Macedonia. These initiatives were initially of a humanitarian character and, after 2000, were aligned to development objectives. During the Kosovo conflict the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and particularly the city of Skopje, became the centre for the activities of many Greek NGOs which were mainly engaged in providing humanitarian aid to refugees. Funded by the Greek state, by international organisations, and by the European Union, NGOs implemented projects in refugee camps and informal settlements, and distributed aid to refugees housed with families. To attain this objective they made use of local community archives, as well as their facilities. This cooperation also gradually fostered relations of trust. Reference is made here to about ten of the larger NGOs such as the Doctors of the World and European Perspective which enjoy a stable and viable organisational structure and a substantial record of activities over a sustained period.

At the same time there was rapid growth in the number of initiatives undertaken by individual citizens, local governments and municipalities, associations and bodies, often from neighbouring and cross border areas, who undertook brief visits in order to distribute food and clothing. To date, there has been no inter-ministerial coordination in drawing up a comprehensive inventory and delineation of NGO activities funded by the Greek state. There are other NGOs as well, funded by the EU and UNESCO, or cooperating with international NGOs in broader networks. Moreover, the International Development Cooperation Department in 2001-2002 funded two programmes. The first one is an educational project run by the NGO Humanitarian Defence, based in Thessaloniki, and the second a medical project, run by the Haematology Clinic of the Papanikolaou Hospital in Thessaloniki.

In January 2002 the NGO Humanitarian Defence, in association with a local partner in Prilep, the Foundation Horizont, started an educational project in the city of Prilep. This

programme aimed at renovating and equipping with the very latest technology a Youth Learning Centre for Education and Training[23]. Some 300 students, aged 14 to 25, attended three-month courses in the use of computers according to EU specifications. There were also seminars on NGO work and management, human rights, issues of development and reconciliation. All of the seminars were intended to promote cooperation between non-profit civil society organisations. During the summer, Greek classes were arranged at the request of the local partner, as a number of Greek companies have invested in Prilep. The classes were run in collaboration with final-year students of the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies of the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, with the added value that Greek students could practice their Balkan languages as volunteers. In 2003 another programme, intended to extend the Network of Youth Education and Training Centres, was launched. It was funded also by the International Development Cooperation Department, in the multi-ethnic city of Tetovo, with the aim of promoting reconciliation and joint development.

As NGOs work outside the constraints of the public sector, they are able to apply various much more flexible methods and approaches in planning, communication and management. This is especially the case with those which are robust in organisational and financial matters. An excellent example is the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in South-Eastern Europe.[24] An NGO based in Thessaloniki but international in terms of Board members composition, began groundbreaking work in the field of historical research and history teaching in Southeast Europe in

23. Interview with Stelios Nestoras, founding member of the NGO Humanitarian Defence, December 2002.

24. Interview with Nenad Sebek, Director of CDRSEE, November 2002.

1998. These initiatives fall under the umbrella of the Southeastern European Joint History project. This project is an on-going and open-ended educational, social and political programme with the goal of bringing about informed, significant and realistic change in historical research and education in the countries of Southeast Europe. Its importance is that it is carried forward by scholars from the region itself, who recognize an urgent need to critically examine their own national histories and how these are taught in schools.[25] This is an NGO initiative during which teachers and historians from Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have found a forum for open communication on one of the most sensitive issues concerning the two peoples.[26]

Arkturos, a Thessaloniki-based environmental NGO, realized the importance and necessity for the cooperation of environmental organizations for the protection and conservation of wildlife in the Balkans.[27] As many animal populations move through the transborder areas between Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece and since animals do not recognize national boundaries, it was considered necessary to approach the National Authorities and the relevant non-governmental organizations of the neighboring countries. Thus, in 1994 a bilateral cooperation with the Bulgarian NGO Wilderness Fund begun, in order to monitor by radio-tracking a bear moving in Rhodopi Mountain, over the Greek-Bulgarian border. Soon after, investigatory visits to

25. A result of this effort are the publications Christina Koulouri (ed.), *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*, Thessaloniki, Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, 2001, and Christina Koulouri (ed.), *Clio in the Balkans: The Politics of History Education*, Thessaloniki, 2002.

26. Book review by Evangelos Kofos, *To Vima* 15.9.2002

27. Interview with Spyros Psaroudas, member of the NGO Arktouros Board of Directors, November 2002.

Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia followed, and the first contacts with NGOs and National Authorities were made.

The implementation of the first awareness-raising project started in 1996 and the Balkan Bear Conservation Network was formed. The same year, a multi-lateral meeting was held in Nymfaio, Greece with the participation of representatives from NGOs, ministries and local authorities. During the years that followed, the network expanded with the participation of additional organizations and two more projects were implemented. Moreover, a large number of common actions are being implemented in all countries.[28] In 1998 it was decided to rename the network "Balkan Large Carnivore Conservation Network". Its main activities including networking, scientific surveys and fieldwork, environmental education and public awareness. Most of these common actions are implemented simultaneously in all the Balkan countries and complement existing conservation projects.

Cross-border cooperation and civil society

NGOs have played an important part in issues of cross-border cooperation. While the border regions in South-Eastern Europe have been breeding grounds of tension and friction, they are also among the most neglected and under-developed areas in their respective countries. Cross-border cooperation is a valuable means of averting conflict and fostering post-conflict reconciliation. It also encourages regional and community

28. A compendium of legislation was published: Eleni Vraka, Despina Syrri (eds.), *Study of the Legislation regarding the Natural Environment and the Brown Bear in the South Balkans*, Thessaloniki, Arktouros, 1997.

development, promotes decentralisation and the strengthening of local democracy, as well as promoting active civil societies. In the case of relations between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the purpose of transfrontier cooperation is to implement closer local collaborations and relations of good neighbourliness in regions where there is a potential for problems to arise. The basic principle is the achievement of practical and direct results, as stressed at the meeting of Mayors from Gevgeli, Aridaia and Bitola with the Minister for Macedonia and Thrace, Mr. Paschalidis, in 2000. Those attending the meeting mainly discussed issues of water resources management in Lake Doirani.

Of equal importance is the direct identification of areas of common interest at the local level and the display of the mutual benefit derived from efficient cross-border cooperation serving business, civil society and government. A useful illustration of this is the signing of the agreement with the Council of Europe to establish the Euroregion of Belasica – the municipalities of Kilkis, Strumica and Prilep. Also significant is the fact that of the Greek companies which have invested in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, none to date has made any move towards accepting social responsibilities towards the communities in which they invest, and whose workforce it employs.

A significant case of cooperation between an international NGO and local partners in Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania is the programme of the EastWest Institute,[29] "Fostering Stability and Sustainable

29. The EastWest Institute (EWI), an independent, international, non-governmental organization founded in 1981, responds to problems threatening peace and security, informing public policy while promoting confidence and cooperation. The Board of Directors, funding and staff come from the United States, Europe and Eurasia.

Development via Institutional Transfrontier Cooperation in the Prespa/Ohrid Region".[30] The programme began in the second half of 2000 with the cooperation of the local partner organizations, the Center for Inter-Balkan Cooperation, Kozani, the Regional Enterprise Support Center, Bitola, and the Regional Development Agency, Korce. The first stage in the programme involved the founding of the Steering Committee of the Prespa Economic Task Force, which acts as a functional, cross-border body aiming to promote the economic development of the broader region. To complement the work of the Economic Task Force, a series of meetings were arranged to create closer links between communities by exploring other areas for cooperation such as the media, higher education and NGOs. This endeavour enjoyed the support of the regional and local government, the national authorities of the three states, the Council of Europe and the Stability Pact for SEE. The first phase culminated in an Inter-Ministerial Conference[31] on 14-16 March 2003 in Thessaloniki. The conference brought together mayors, prefects and regional governors, as well as representatives of business, educational and social institutions in the whole Prespa cross-border region.

The meeting of NGOs from Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, held in Laimos, Prespa, in December 2002, brought together about forty local NGOs from the towns of Florina, Kozani, Kastoria, Bitola, Ohrid, Prilep and Resen.

30. Interview with Sasha Havlicek, East West Deputy Director for SEE, and Silvena Nikolova, Project Manager for SEE, December 2002.

31. The meeting was organised in the spirit of the Declaration of the Prime Ministers: Costas Simitis, Ljubco Georgievski and Ilir Meta, of 2 February, 2000; the joint message was delivered on 29 September 2000 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs Aleksandar Dimitrov, Paskal Milo, and George Papandreou at the Otesevo Conference (co-organised by the EastWest Institute, the Council of the Europe and the OSCE)

Collaborative ventures and joint activities were presented and discussed, actions focusing on the encouragement of business activity in parallel to the training of managers in Small and Medium Enterprises, facilitating communication, combating violence and trafficking of women, and the promotion of cultural exchanges. The most important example of the real opportunities now opening up is the founding of the Prespa Transboundary Park.[32] It is worth adding here that, following the prompting of two NGOs, the Prespa Protection Society and the Greek branch of the major international NGO World Wildlife Fund, the three Prime Ministers (Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Albania) proceeded to sign the relevant agreement. It was the first time that such an influential and financially robust international NGO had become actively engaged in the region. The strategic study for the Park has now been completed with financial assistance from the Greek Environment Ministry, and constitutes an example of effective cooperation between civil society and the governments of bordering countries, where NGOs have played a vital role in promoting the programme through the undertaking of initiatives.

Best practices of cross-border co-operation between NGOs

The Bitola Regional Enterprise Support Centre (Foundation for the Development of SMEs, RESC) is one of five Regional Centres established in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia during the implementation of the Phare programme for integrated development of SMEs and the local economy,

32. See article by H. Kondonis in this volume.

offering a series of advisory services and information.[33] Operating so close to the border, the RESC is particularly active in issues of cross-border cooperation in the areas of tourism and the environment, the creation of links between local NGOs, the development and cooperation of SMEs and the development of the local labour force.

In the summer of 1999 the Prespa Protection Society[34] and the Greek WWF proposed to the Greek Ministries of the Environment and Foreign Affairs that a Park be established at Prespa. This would be the first protected nature reserve in the border region. The idea was accepted.[35] The ultimate objectives of this cross-border collaboration at the Prespa area are to improve the living standards of the local population and to promote model development in the area by preserving its unique natural and cultural values. At the same time, it will promote peace, friendship and cooperation among the three peoples, ultimately setting a model for the development of similar mountain regions in the Balkans and elsewhere.

The NGO Cultural Triangle of Prespa[36] was established with the aim of promoting the cultural, educational and social development of the area and improving collaboration between the neighbouring states of Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece. One of the first initiatives of the NGO was the founding of a lending library at Agios Germanos, which

33. Interview with Dragan Damjanovski, Director of the Regional Enterprise Support Center, Bitola, December 2002.

34. Interview with Miltos Gletsos, Director of the Prespa Cross-Border Park, December 2002.

35. Joint Declaration of the Prime Ministers of Greece, Albania, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2 February 2000.

36. Interview with Gabriela Schneider, Director of the Prespa Cultural Triangle, December 2002.

was inaugurated during the Festival of Prespes 2000 by the Greek Minister for Culture. The current program is based on a) events and meetings for young people from the three neighbouring countries, and the annual Cultural Caravan, b) exchanges of people and information, and cooperation towards shared objectives with other countries of South-Eastern Europe, c) participation in the cultural network of countries of South-Eastern Europe, the Cultural Exchanges for Women network, d) research into and preservation of local cultural traditions, and e) educational and informational programmes and seminars.

In the year 2000 the Bitola Youth Cultural Association implemented a programme of 'Cross-Border Cultural Exchanges' with the Inter-Balkan Cooperation Centre, Kozani, in order to promote communication between the two cities; musicians and other artists took part in the project.[37] It was followed by a project which addressed young people and the development of entrepreneurship, involving joint seminars and visits to family businesses in Kozani and Ptolemaida, and to educational institutions. A programme of summer camps in the region of Prespa is still running.

The programme 'Eradicating violence against women' was prepared by the Bitola women's NGO Prestige, with finance from the German GTZ over a period of twelve months. It consisted of three phases which involved participation of NGOs from the cities of Bitola, Florina and Kastoria.[38]

The programmes proposed and funded by the EU[39] and the

37. Interview with Violeta Nalevska, Official in charge of NGO affairs in Bitola Municipal Council, December 2002.

38. *Ibid.*

39. SEE Cross-border Cooperation Projects at http://www.see-educoop.net/cooperations/text/232/htm, 2002.

Stability Pact for SEE,[40] with the assistance of the local authorities, can generate positive results only insofar as the local NGOs really do represent the needs of their communities.

Education and civil society

Most of the countries in South-Eastern Europe had well-organised education systems, so problems which have arisen since the changes should be seen as a regression from what was essentially a sound starting point.[41] In most cases there is still a traditional model of university education. The existing universities, confronting grave financial problems, are all too often a place of last resort for the young unemployed. This merely exacerbates problems of equality, access and quality in education. In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the process of change was characterised by an interim period - from 1992 to 1996 - when the Yugoslav academic tradition continued to exist while a new future course was being charted.[42] Up until 2000 higher education in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was regulated by the 1985 Law of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on Vocational Education, which covered both vocational secondary and all tertiary education. Article 46 of the 1991 Constitution introduced important changes, giving autonomy to the universities and establishing a requirement for separate

40. Stability Pact. Local Democracy and Cross-Border Cooperation. 1/19/2003, http://www.stabilitypact.org/stabilitypactcgi/http.

41. Thematic Review of National Policies for Education – Stability Pact.

42. Snezana Koren, "Yugoslavia: A Look at the Broken Mirror, Who is the Other?", in Christina Coulouri (ed.), *Clio in the Balkans: The Politics of History Education,* Thessaloniki, 2002, pp. 193-194.

legislation on higher education. This new Law on Higher Education (2000) also applies to private higher education institutions (HEIs); requires equal opportunities for access to higher education; and also allows financing from sources other than the state budget.

The Stability Pact for SEE has set up a Task Force on issues of Youth and Education which is encouraging regional and cross-border cooperation.[43] In the case of Greece and the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, cross-border cooperation among institutions of higher education has already begun, although the pace is slow owing to the absence of bilateral agreements between the countries. Any collaborative ventures must be developed within the context of the Interim Agreement, and in accordance with the commitments of the Greek government deriving from the European Declaration of Bologna on regularising specificities in European education.

The departments of Aristotle University that are located in Florina had contacts with the St. Kliment Ohridski University in Bitola in 1999.[44] With the backing of the local authority three professors from Bitola went to Florina to be trained in the teaching of Greek language. Their number has now risen to twenty. In the same year the IT Department of the St. Kliment University also entered in a collaboration with the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, funded by the EU CARDS programme.[45] In 2000 a Balkan Cooperation in technical areas initiative was launched with the Aristotle University and funded

43. Concept Paper for a South-East Europe Education Cooperation Network, Terrice Bassler and Slavko Gaber.

44. Interview with Kostas Fotiadis, Dean of School of Pedagogy, Aristotle University, Florina, November 2002.

45. Interview with Igor Nedelkovski, St. Kliment Ohridski University, November 2002.

by the Greek Ministry of Development and USAID. Members of the Kozani Technical Institute[46] began contacts with the University of Bitola during a conference at Kozani in September 2002 on the subject 'The Balkans – Our neighbourhood', co-organised by the Municipal Council of Kozani, the Commercial Chamber and the NGO Centre for Inter-Balkan Business Cooperation. Shared interests centred on the possibilities of joint education through the Internet, specifically using the Notebook University programme developed by the Kozani Technical College.

In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the Perikle programme of the Ministry of Education and Science organised in 2001-2002 a series of cross-border meetings funded by UNESCO and the EU Phare programme. In November 2002 the programme 'Let's learn Greek, the language of our neighbours' was launched. The programme's duration being two years, it targets young businessmen, representatives of NGOs and schoolchildren of up to 14 years old in the cities of Resen, Ohrid, Bitola and Prilep. There is wider agreement that the greater part of civil society is ready and willing to cooperate with EU programmes, such as Interreg III.[47]

During planning meetings for the Prespa Euroregion initiative, a series of problems were identified. First, the absence of a common language or adequate knowledge of a lingua franca like English. Second, the ad hoc or haphazard gathering of information and the absence of cooperative networks and structures. Third, economic and technological obstacles, and

46. Interview with Chancellor Vasilios Kikis, Kozani Technical College, November 2002.

47. Interview with Zoran Spaseski, President of Horizont Foundation, the NGO implementing the programme in Prilep, December 2002.

fourth, political barriers, specifically the issue of visas and the commitments entailed by the Schengen agreement. Cooperation cannot thrive when it takes the form of charity, since it will almost invariably be the donor who defines the terms of the relationship. It is vital to strengthen the principle of reciprocity and mutual common interest, in order for the importance of the common heritage and the possibilities of a shared future to be perceived and appreciated.

Prospects and Development

"Instead of seeing the Balkans as a series of zero-sum contests in which only one or the other side could win, Greece's foreign ministry has been leading efforts in the region to promote cross-border co-operation and create so much mutual dependence that a return to war would be inconceivable ... the very fact that Greek aspirations in the Balkans these days are more commercial than strategic is a change for the better. We have discovered the virtues of soft power", is the position supported by Theodore Couloumbis, Professor of International Relations at the University of Athens.[48] The urgent need for 'preventive development' in the Balkans and the shaping of a credible national policy for the development and reconstruction of the region are not new positions. It has already been observed that "it is also necessary to enlist the active involvement of Greek NGOs and encourage the creation of networks of cooperation with corresponding international and regional organisations from South-Eastern Europe. It is true that in the past the Greek state considered with scepticism the civil society actors, yet in recent years there has indisputably been a trend towards change. Since

48. *Economist Survey on Greece,* 30.1.2003.

1999 the relevant funding for actions by Greek NGOs in the Balkans has increased by 300%".[49] Although problems have been identified- namely the lack of long-term planning, fragmented policy decisions and choices, lack of experienced managing - the institutional changes of October 2001, the restructuring of the whole system of design and implementation of the Greek development policy and the transfer of the relevant authority from the Ministry of National Economy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are all evidence of change.

A team of officials under the leadership of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs is coordinating, planning and evaluating the relevant development programmes. The staffing of Offices for Development Cooperation in the embassies of the most important countries could also contribute. This is even more important as the integration of NGO funding into the Greek National Plan for Balkan Reconstruction through the embassies will have positive results only insofar as it is preceded by an inventory and evaluation of the previous activities, and provided that clear and transparent criteria are laid down for the selection of programmes. The process of evaluation of results in the Balkans had already begun back in March 2003.[50] The sum available for allocation from the embassy of each country is dependent on the total amount determined in the bilateral agreements under the Greek National Plan for Balkan Reconstruction – that with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has still to be ratified by Parliament. In the case of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, if the development

49. Haralambos Kondonis, 'Urgent need for "preventive" development policy in Balkans', *Kathimerini* 6.8.2002.

50. Interview with the Greek Liaison Office in Skopje, March 2003.

programmes of the Greek NGOs are to yield worthwhile results, there is now an urgent need to create multilateral cooperation structures in the context of European and international programmes, and to find other sources of funding. Already the invitation by the International Development Cooperation Department to submit proposals in January 2003 is encouraging NGOs to also turn their attention elsewhere, outside the Balkans.

A meaningful contribution, in the spirit of the Interim Accord, would be the strengthening of solid and stable structures for cooperation between the civil society of Greece and that of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in the direction of EU institutions. The prospects are even more interesting, especially if we take into account recent observations that new policies are necessary for the post-conflict development of the Balkans towards the European direction, policies which will focus on confronting the profound economic and social dislocations which lie at the root of the instability in the Balkans today.[51] In the contemporary world, where complementarity is supposed to prevail over confrontation, the role of the development NGOs in the context of the European social model is of special importance.[52] The civil society in Greece has the potential of contributing to economic and social development towards democracy and stability, following the spirit of the Interim Accord. According to the European Stability Initiative (ESI) report in February 2003, "The EU is urged to sustain its current financial contribution to the region and include the Balkan

51. Gergana Noutcheva, *EU Western Balkans Policy: The State of the Debate*, CEPS Europa South-East Monitor, 2003.

52. Athanasios Theodorakis, 'The European Social Model and the Civil Society', in Pantelis Sklias and Asteris Houliaras (eds.), *The Diplomacy of the Civil Society,* Athens, Papazisis, 2002, pp. 149-162 [in Greek].

countries in the overall framework of EU cohesion policies. Such an approach would not only help alleviate the economic and social vulnerability but would also be a factor in reducing the structural deficit of weak states in the region. Extending the principle of additionality to the Balkans (co-financing from national sources of EU structural funds), it is argued, will strengthen the administrative capacity of these countries and diffuse certain standards of governance to their domestic authority structures".[53] Greek NGOs could facilitate this process, as well as address the tensions in the current EU approach, between bilateral conditionality (the Stabilization and Association process) and the emphasis on regional co-operation (the Stability Pact for SEE) which calls for the re-conceptualisation of strategic goals and the reinforcement of their complementarily.[54]

53. *Western Balkans 2004: Assistance, Cohesion and the New Boundaries of Europe, A Call for Policy Reform*, Executive Summary, European Stability Initiative, Berlin-Brussels-Sarajevo, 2003.

54. *The European Union and the Balkans: From Stabilisation Process to Southeastern Enlargement*, Executive *Summary and Recommendations*, Wim van Meurs, Center for Applied Policy Research, Munich, Alexandros Yannis, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, Athens, 2003.

APPENDIX I*

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. THE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION CENTER EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE (DECEP)

PREAMBLE

Today, 19th of July 1999 in Skopje, between the Ministry of Education, legally represented by Minister Nenad Novkovski, and the Development and Education Center, European Perspective (DECEP), legally represented by Dr. Pantelis Sklias, Director, based in Athens, 3, Kimoloy str., 113 62 Athens, Greece the following have been commonly agreed:

Article 1

DECEP is a Greek Non-Government, non-profit organisation which is active in the field of humanitarian assistance. DECEP is an implementing partner for the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) with the objective to provide food to the social institutions of the country (contract number ECHO/TPS/214/1999/06044). For the purposes of this project DECEP has realized an extensive needs assessment whose results have been attached in the application for funding to ECHO.

Article 1

2.1 DECEP will provide each of the social institution concer-

* An identical agreement was signed between DECEP and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, represented by Minister Bedradin Ibraimi (Skopje, 19 July 1999).

ned the quantity of food which is mentioned in Annex 1 of the present agreement. In any case the total quantities of food delivered to all social institutions wil not exceed the quantity approved by ECHO.

2.2. DECEP will proved the necessary administrative and human resources for the monitoring, the evaluation, the loading of the food on the trucks and the transportation of the food to the social institutions.

2.3. DECEP will assign monitor(s) who will be able to visit the institution, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the project. The name(s) of the monitor(s) will be announced in writing to the institution 3 days after the signature of the present agreement. DECEP has the right to change the monitors. Such a change will be presented to the institutions in writing 3 days.

Article 3

Obligations of the institutions

3.1. The institutions must provide the necessary administrative and human resources for the support of the activities and the purposes of the project.

3.2. The institutions must provide the necessary warehouses for the food storage.

3.3. The institutions must provide the human resources for the unloading of the trucks during the dates of deliveries.

3.4. The institutions must provide the necessary human resources for the watching, the storage and the security of the food delivered by DECEP under the ECHO project.

3.5. The institutions must provide access to DECEP monitors to all places it is necessary in order to evaluate and monitor the implementation of the project, the stock, make interviews with the personnel and the beneficiaries of the project.

3.6. The institutions must keep separate bookkeeping system

for the food delivered and consumed under the ECHO funding. More particularly, both the Directors and the monitors will have to sigh a Delivery Certificate in the date of delivery of the goods (annex 2). Additionally, the Directors should keep records of the daily spending of food, which should be done on a separate form (annex 3).

3.7. The institutions are obliged to provide free access to ECHO and all the other European Commission institutions to control and monitor the proper implementation of the project.

3.8. The institutions are obliged to permit the necessary steps in order to ensure the visibility of ECHO and DECEP (such as posters, signs, etc.).

3.9. Ministry is obliged to appoint the responsible persons or to appoint the Directories of the Institutions to work for the purposes of this project.

Article 4
Annexes

Annexes 1, 2, 3 are integral part of this agreement.

Article 5
Solution of differences between the parties

DECEP and ECHO have the right to take all necessary legal actions in the case of the misure of aid.

This agreement has been signed in Macedonian and English languages, with two copies for each version.

The following having been read and agreed by the two parties are signed as follows:

European Perspective	Ministry of Education
Dr. Pantelis Sklias (Director)	Minister Nenad Novkonski