

EUROPEAN CENTRE  
FOR  
MINORITY ISSUES

ECMI ADVANCES MAJORITY-MINORITY RELATIONS IN THE WIDER EUROPE THROUGH ACTION, RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION. IT SUPPORTS THE STABILIZATION OF AREAS OF ETHNOPOLITICAL TENSION AND CONFLICT,

CONTRIBUTES TO THE STRENGTHENING OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND BEST PRACTICES IN MINORITY GOVERNANCE, AND ENHANCES THE CAPACITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND GOVERNMENTS TO ENGAGE WITH ONE ANOTHER IN A CONSTRUCTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE WAY.

**R**OMANI EXPERT GROUPS FOR ROMANI INTEGRATION (REGRI) SEEKS TO INCREASE ROMS' LEVEL OF INTEGRATION INTO THE SOCIETY OF MACEDONIA AS A WHOLE BY EQUIPPING THEM WITH THE RESOURCES NEEDED FOR PLAYING AN EFFECTIVE ROLE IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY BASED ON THE RULE OF LAW AS WELL AS FOR PARTICIPATING SUCCESSFULLY IN A COMPETITIVE LABOUR MARKET

ECMI established Romani expert groups in order to increase Roms' level of integration into the society of Macedonia. Commissioned and financed by Sida in June 2003, ECMI conducted the first global assessment of the needs of Macedonia's Romani population.

Following on extensive background research and consultations with local stakeholders, the assessment was divided into four core areas: education, health, civil rights, and employment. For each core area, attention was given not only to the situation of the Romani population in general, but also to the position of Romani women in particular.

The Romani Expert Groups will design and conduct research which they deem important as a foundation for concrete policy measures to remedy Roms' comparative disadvantage in the core areas.

The four Expert Groups meet on a regular basis. In accordance with their individual priorities, the Expert Groups develop and implement projects for the purpose of generating and compiling in usable reports the data necessary to provide a basis for the design of policy designed not only for Roms, but also by Roms. For this purpose, each Expert Group has access to a small funding facility, the use of which is administered and monitored on an ongoing basis by a Programme Manager and a Project Manager.

Training sessions tailored to each Expert Group contribute to building the capacity of the Expert Groups as such and of their individual members, with cross-fertilization among the



four Expert Groups to be promoted by four joint meetings in the course of the project year.

The activities of the Expert Groups generate data useful for the design of policy aimed at remedying Roms' comparative disadvantage in the four core areas, with coordination among the Expert Groups facilitating both the prioritization of problem issues and the development of an action plan to address those issues.

Additionally, the activities of the Expert Groups promise to result in synergies with other initiatives (including the development of a government strategy supported by the Project on Ethnic Relations and the World Bank's Decade of Roma Inclusion) which will make the whole resulting from them jointly greater than the sum of its constituent parts.

The National Working Group met on December to discuss received suggestions for changes within the Strategy, with the recommendations offered by the ECMI Expert Groups occupying a prominent place. According to the first-hand information given by the Project Manager and the Governmental representative Mabera Kamberi, who is at the same time a member of an ECMI Expert Employment Group, more than 90% of the Expert Groups' recommendations were adopted by the National Working Group.

In the future, we will be conducting research projects based on the field-data and NGO relevant experiences and the results will respectively be presented to the international community, NGO sector representatives and Macedonian ministries.

## ECMI NGO NETWORK FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN MACEDONIA

WAS AIMED AT IMPROVING INTERETHNIC RELATIONS BY THE CONCEPTUALISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF JOINT PROJECTS, THE STRENGTHENING OF THE ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY OF THE MEMBER NGOs AND THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE CREDIBILITY OF NGOs AMONG THEIR MEMBER COMMUNITIES.



The ECMI NGO Network for the Improvement of Interethnic Relations in Macedonia came to a successful conclusion on the 31 December 2004. The aims of the network were threefold: to improve interethnic relations by the conceptualization and implementation of joint projects, to strengthen the organisational capacity of the member NGOs and to enhance the credibility of NGOs among their local communities. In December 2001, the project was launched with an initial membership of 43 NGOs, who developed a code of best practice to which other NGOs were subsequently invited to subscribe. By the end of 2004 the ECMI NGO Network had built up a membership of over 78 NGOs from all over Macedonia.

The ECMI and the member organisations together developed a detailed cohesive Memorandum of Cooperation, which outlined criteria for admission, code of acceptable conduct and an action plan for the NGO Network, in the year of the establishment. Since then, additional amendments have been included into the founding document that have over time mirrored the changing needs of the Network. As member NGOs were encouraged by ECMI to contribute towards this 'living document' and in turn to abide by the rules of the Memorandum of Cooperation every year, this cultivated a close relationship of cooperation among members, and instilled in them a strong yet naturally derived sense of ownership of the ECMI Network. Members worked together to ensure that individual needs were tailored to, while simultaneously reflecting and addressing the common interests of all members of the NGO Network.

In order to achieve the aims of the network six Regional Centres were established in Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Gostivar, Bitola and Shtip as 'neutral spaces' for all NGO members in developing, coordinating and implementing joint projects on issues that cut across ethnic ties. The Regional Resource Centres served both as a 'psychological' and also a 'physical' neutral space where NGOs could meet with local stakeholders, and utilise the equipment, facilities and technologies offered free of charge by ECMI. In addition, in order to further strengthen the capacity of the NGO members, the ECMI organised numerous workshops on strategic development, project development, networking and fundraising as well as computer courses and language courses in Albanian and English.

To ensure the longterm sustainability of the National Network, the Coordinative Body consisting of 13 representatives, was appointed by members of the Network. By the end of 2004 the Coordinative Body had elaborated a strategy in order to ensure the sustainability of the Network structures. The members of the ECMI NGO Network for the Improvement of Interethnic relations established regional NGO Coalitions in Bitola, Tetovo and Kumanovo as formal coalitions, which will primarily operate at the local level in the future. In addition, an independent NGO network – the Society Development Initiative – emerged from the ECMI NGO Network and will operate at a national level, with a new mandate focusing on economic development through participation, integration and equal opportunities.

Since the beginning of 2002 several informal issue networks have also been established within the ECMI NGO Network, focusing on the thematic areas of youth, education, environment and minority rights and which have also developed into independent and sustainable structures. The ECMI NGO Network for the Improvement of Interethnic Relations was supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the British Embassy Skopje, the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Royal Norwegian Foreign Ministry (ODIN).

### ECMI NGO NETWORK IN NUMBERS (BY THE END OF 2004)

- 6 REGIONAL CENTRES
- 78 NGO MEMBERS
- 112 JOINT PROJECT PROPOSALS
- 83 IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS
- 24 PUBLIC EVENTS IN 2004
- 36 CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOPS



**P**OLICY DIALOGUE INITIATIVE (PDI) SEEKS TO PROMOTE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT SIGNED IN OHRID 2001 IN AUGUST BY PROVIDING A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN INFLUENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS IN POLITICS, SOCIETY AND ACADEMIA.

In February 2004, the ECMI Regional Office Skopje officially launched the Policy Dialogue Initiative (PDI) in the Republic of Macedonia, generously supported by Department of Foreign Affairs, Government of Ireland.

This project aimed to support the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement by facilitating necessary dialogue between influential stakeholders in politics, society and academia. This strengthening of modes of communication has led to the development of a new, closer and more constructive cooperation and interaction among stakeholders from different parts of society centred on issues of common concern. For this purpose, four Working Groups each focused on a specific thematic area were established. The Working Groups aimed to identify problems and make recommendations designed to assist decision makers to formulate and implement fairer and more inclusive policies to enhance the quality of services, strengthen the rule of law, and provide better economic opportunities for people of all backgrounds living in the Republic of Macedonia.

This type of a 'civil participation' project which promotes the concept of constructive dialogue is an innovative concept has been warmly welcomed in the Republic of Macedonia and successful in its implementation and generated outcomes.

Throughout 2004, the ECMI has acted as mediator and facilitator ensuring that this project was truly driven from within rather than being imposed upon by external actors. Therefore, while participants met on a regular basis in the neutral space for dialogue provided by ECMI, identification of shortcomings in current government policy and consequently, recommendations generated to address these shortcomings have been the produce of the participants of working groups themselves, working in close cooperation and communication with one another. Throughout the final months of 2004, and the initial months of 2005, Representative members of each of the Working Groups have been actively engaged in discussions with members of Parliament, representatives in the Ministries and members of the international community on policy matters in the fields of education, health, economy and human rights.

In addition to individual presentations for specific target groups within the Macedonian Government and international community, a year-end press conference was held at the Holiday Inn Skopje on December 14th .

The Human Right Working Group has focused on identifying methods for strengthening the capacity of institutions responsible for human rights protection, as well as the issues of citizenship and the personal right to liberty. Aiming to develop sustainable strategies in the field of health, the working group for health recommended developing a national strategy for health care focusing on themes that have to be considered during the preparation of the new strategy as well as strategies for implementation. It is expected that once the new Government is voted, recommendations to be presented to the relevant Ministries and institutions.

The Working Group for Economy has adopted a dual approach toward issues in the economic sphere: macroeconomic and microeconomic policy problems. Recommendations were presented at the Economic Forum to members of the Macedonian Government, World Bank and other International Actors. Local Press coverage of the Economic Forum praised the recommendation as and overall achievements of the Economy Working Groups, whilst emphasizing the indifference and general apathy of the relevant institutions toward such important issues which are crucial for the future of Macedonia and eventual EU Rapprochement.

The recommendations of the Working Group for Education refer to introducing the value of multiculturalism, encouraging depoliticization in the education sector, infrastructure needs, and strengthening teacher training institutions. Separate presentations were organized for the international organisations and donors, and the Parliamentary Committee on Education, the Ministry of Education and the Bureau for the Development of Education. The success of each of the Working Group Recommendations is evidenced by continued requests from many government bodies for continued cooperation and presentation of information in 2005, particularly in the area of health and education, requests which have similarly been echoed by members of the international community in Macedonia



**O**MBUDSMAN PROJECT AIMS AT CREATING NEW SPECIALIST OMBUDSPERSON INSTITUTIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES AS WELL AS THE EFFECTIVE SUPPORT OF SUCH BODIES WHERE THEY ALREADY EXIST, INCLUDING SPECIALIZED SECTIONS DEVOTED TO MINORITY ISSUES WITHIN THE STRUCTURES OF EXISTING NATIONAL OMBUDSPERSON INSTITUTIONS.

Ombudsman Project supports the strengthening of minority protection through the use of specialized minority Ombuds-person institutions. It aims at creating new specialist Ombuds-person institutions for the protection of national minorities as well as the effective support of such bodies where they already exist, including specialized sections devoted to minority issues within the structures of existing national Ombuds-person institutions. As a key institution protecting human rights, proper administration and justice, ombudsman staff members are not only confronted daily with real issues faced by the public, but also have a significant role to play in minority issues, and in educating the administration and citizens about human and minority rights. ECMI's Ombudsman Network Project is based on the principle of information and experience sharing between institutions, exchanging good practice, meeting to discuss developments and methodology, and developing professional connections to support the important work that each institution carries out. Networking meetings are supported by a network website.

ECMI and the Ombudsman of Macedonia hosted Ombudsmen and legal experts from institutions in Macedonia, Kosovo, Vojvodina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania. The workshop was also attended by representatives of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Serbia & Montenegro, and the OSCE Spillover Mission to Skopje.

In 2004 three workshops held in Georgia, Macedonia and Germany. In September 2004, ECMI and the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia hosted a workshop for staff of the Georgian Public Defender, the Human Rights Defender of Armenia and the Ombudsman Office of Azerbaijan. The second workshop took place at Lake Ohrid, Macedonia in October 2004.

Presenters gave insights into practical experiences in their own countries, including representatives of the Norwegian Centre Combating Ethnic Discrimination and the Greek Ombudsman Office. This was accompanied by expert presentations on legal standards by the President of the Macedonian Helsinki Committee and ECMI researchers.

Look out for the Ombudsman Network Project publication appearing soon: "Ombudsman Institutions and Minority Issues – A Guide to Good Practice. Foundational Criteria, Strategic Development and Operational Issues" authored by the Project's team of experts. The Guide to Good Practice sets out international standards relevant to Ombudsman offices addressing minority protection issues and discusses the implementation of these standards in Europe.

The Ombudsman Network project is supported by a team of experts and generously funded by the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Ministry of the Interior, the Minister-President of the Land of Schleswig-Holstein and the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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