

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIALOGUE PROJECT

Program on Peace-building and Rights

Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights

The Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights launched the Southeast Europe Dialogue Project (March 2015). The project has created a web of shared interests between civil society in Greece and Macedonia. It has also effectively catalyzed cooperation between local government officials. The project complements official Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). This report documents activities (as of October 2016).

Official CBMs

Greece's Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias visited Skopje (24 June 2015). A list of practical cooperation measures was agreed and endorsed by Kotzias and Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki. CBMs are "aimed at strengthening mutual confidence and advancing overall bilateral relations, thereby contributing to creating a favourable climate for settling the name difference." Poposki visited Athens (17 December 2015) where he met Kotzias and President Prokopis Pavlopoulos. Kotzias and Poposki met again in Brussels (18 January 2016) on the margins of meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council. During the meeting, they discussed the latest developments in the refugee/migration issue, recent developments within Macedonia, and the name issue. The CBM teams from Macedonia and Greece met in Thessaloniki to review progress (19 February 2016). Kotzias and Poposki had a bilateral meeting in Thessaloniki (22 April 2016) on the margins of the quadrilateral meeting on cross-border cooperation. They also met in Brussels (20 May 2016) within the framework of the NATO Ministerial and in Warsaw (9 July 2016) at the NATO Summit. Kotzias visited Skopje (25 August 2016) and addressed annual conference of the country's Ambassadors. Kotzias held bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Emil Dimitriev, President Gjeorge Ivanov, and Poposki.

Business Forum

Members of SEVE ("Chambers of Commerce of Northern Greece") and MCC ("Macedonia Chambers of Commerce") met in Thessaloniki (16-17 October 2015). A delegation from SEVE visited Skopje (20 November 2015), where its executive director presented a research report on "Trade and Investment Opportunities between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia.” The presentation was widely covered by Macedonia’s media. It was also reported in the Greek press.

SEVE President Kyriakos Loufakos and MCC Chair Danela Arsovska signed an MoU “for the purpose of expanding trade and investment opportunities through the exchange of information on commercial opportunities and institutionalizing cooperation beneficial to their members” (20 November 2015). Thessaloniki Mayor Ioannis Boutaris was present at the signing ceremony.

To expand cooperation, SEVE and MCC submitted a joint proposal to the EU INTERREG IPA CBC Programme for Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2014-2020. EU financing will support training of Macedonian business persons by EuroConsultants, a Greek company. It will also develop commercial opportunities for tourism, focusing on religion and culture. Columbia discussed the SEVE/MCC with senior Macedonian and Greek government and municipal officials who pledged to support their application.

Municipalities

Columbia University established close cooperation with Thessaloniki Mayor Ioannis Boutaris, resulting in his visit to Skopje (19-20 November 2015). Boutaris discussed bilateral issues with Ivanov, Poposki, and Skopje Mayor Koce Trajanovski. The meeting with Trajanovski was joined by 11 mayors on the board of ZELS (The Association of the Units of the Local Self-Government). In Skopje, Boutaris joined the SEVE/MCC MOU signing ceremony and briefed journalists from both countries participating in the media meeting (20 November 2015). Boutaris sent a written invitation to Trajanovski to visit Thessaloniki with ZELS members. Topics of mutual interest include garbage collection, recycling, energy production from waste, student and school exchanges, protection of cultural heritage (e.g. Byzantine churches), cultural and sports cooperation, as well as assistance with local administration.

Boutaris invited Ivanov to visit Thessaloniki to give the commencement address at Sheffield University, where the Government of Macedonia underwrites 20 student scholarships. Ivanov’s visit is pending an official invitation from the Greek MFA.

Boutaris responded to floods in Skopje (August 2016) by writing Ivanov and Trajanovski and offering assistance. As a result of their growing amity, Ivanov invited Boutaris to lecture on “Diplomacy of Cities” at his Academy: International Training for Young Leaders (21-22 August 2016). During the visit, Ivanov met Boutaris in Ohrid. Boutaris also visited Krushevo where he met the Mayor of Krushevo Gjorgi Damcheski and Mayor of Ohrid Nikola Bakracheski. They discussed regional water and environmental issues.

Media Meeting

Greek journalists from *Kathimerini*, *Imerissia*, and *Makedonia* joined local journalists from *Telma TV*, *Macedonian Information Agency*, *Alsat-MTV*, *Kanal 5*, *Nova Makedonija*, and

Utrinski Vesnik in Skopje (20-21 November 2016). They conducted joint interviews with Ivanov, Poposki, and Boutaris. Ivanov and Poposki discussed the refugee and migrant crisis with journalists, as well as opportunities for bilateral cooperation with Greece in field of humanitarian action, police interaction, and screening procedures complementing efforts by FRONTEX. They also discussed the “name issue” and the role of media in creating mutual perceptions. Journalists participated in a press conference at the SEVE/MCC MOU signing ceremony. More than a dozen articles were published as a result of the media meeting, which favorably portrayed “the other.” Poposki published an op-ed in *Kathimerini* (21 February 2016). Tasos Telloglu, Senior Correspondent of *Kathimerini*, made a return trip to Skopje to interview Ivanov.

Columbia arranged the visit by journalists from Skopje to Thessaloniki (20-21 June 2016). In addition to a dinner with Boutaris, they met officials from the Interior Ministry, National Police, and other Greek officials involved in refugee and migrant issues (21 June 2016). Accompanied by Greek journalists in the media working group, they visited Diavata Refugee Camp and published articles on camp conditions. Kotzias was interviewed on Telma TV (24 June 2016). The journalists are exploring a regular mechanism for exchanging information.

Water Issues

Hydrologists, scholars, and water officials from Greece and Macedonia met in Thessaloniki to consider areas for cooperation (18 October 2015). They agreed to formalize information exchange on (i) hydrological and meteorological monitoring, (ii) hazards prevention, flood management, and social/economic benefits, and (iii) sectoral water resource requirements at a workshop in Skopje where they signed an MoU pledging to “consider next steps towards establishment of a Vardar/Axios River Commission” (19 November 2015).

iBEC (a prominent Greek NGO with affiliations at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) and Ss. Cyril and Methodius University from Skopje organized a follow-up “Workshop on Sustainable Water and River Basin Resource Management: Towards a Vardar/Axios River Commission” (17 February 2016). The workshop included officials from Greece’s Ministry of Agriculture and Macedonia’s Meteorological Agency. The workshop considered the Sava River Basin Commission and lessons for cross-border river rehabilitation of the Jordan River Basin Commission.

Macedonian and Greek partners prepared a baseline study “Sustainable Water and River Basin Resources Management: Towards a Vardar/Axios River Commission”. This baseline study provides information on a mutual catchment plan, which focuses on the collection of hydrological and meteorological data. It considers sectoral water resources requirements and strategies for managing floods and droughts. The inception report takes into consideration experience of the Jordan River and Sava River commissions, and considers lessons learned for sustainable water resources management.

iBEC and Ss Cyril and Methodius University submitted a proposal for developing the Vardar/Axios River Commission to the EU INTERREG IPA CBC Programme for Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2014-2020. Plans are being developed with Boutaris for a meeting of mayors from both countries to discuss cross-border cooperation on water issues, which would be convened in cooperation with the Regional Governor. EcoPeace, a Tel Aviv based NGO, has proposed a joint delegation of mayors from Greece and Macedonia to visit Israel, Jordan, and Palestine for a study tour on regional cooperation in the water field.

Ombudsmen Partnership

Acting Greek Ombudsman Vassilis Karydis and Deputy Macedonian Ombudsman Vaska Bajramovska Mustafa met with their staff, advisers, and Thessaloniki Deputy Mayor Spiros Pengas in Thessaloniki (19 October 2015). As a result, Karydis and Ombudsmen Idzer Memeti undertook a joint fact-finding trip with their staff/experts to assess conditions for refugees/migrants on the Greece-Macedonia border (17-18 November 2015). They were joined by representatives from the UNHCR and the International Rescue Committee. A joint statement was issued (23 November 2015), which was presented at a regional meeting of ombudsmen in Belgrade (25 November 2016).

Columbia convened Karydis and Memeti in Thessaloniki (18 February 2016). The following day, they joined a multilateral meeting of ombudsmen from the region to discuss the refugee/migrant crisis. Columbia organized a press briefing for Memeti with Greek journalists.

Karydis and his team visited Thessaloniki (23 June 2016) to discuss future cooperation on Roma issues, policing, and environmental protection. However, Karydis mandate was not renewed. Discussions are underway between Lambros Baltiotis, a senior adviser to the Greek ombudsman, and Memeti on joint research and a bilateral conference on Roma issues.

University Partnership Program

Scholars from Pantheion University, Thessaloniki University, and Aristotle University met with counterparts from Ss. Cyril and Methodius University and Southeast European University/Tetovo in Thessaloniki (18-19 October 2015). They discussed joint research projects, as well as faculty and student exchanges.

Greek scholars visited Skopje (19-20 November 2015). They elaborated terms of reference for a joint research, publication, and dialogue project on the impact of the migration/refugee crisis on countries along the Balkan human corridor. Detailed terms of reference were finalized (18 February 2016).

In cooperation with the Foundation Alliance of Civilizations in Skopje, the Institute for Political Research Skopje, and Institute of International Relations at Pantheion University in Athens, Columbia University published *The Balkan Human Corridor: Essays on the Refugee and*

Migrant Crisis by Scholars and Opinion Leaders in Southeast Europe (21 June 2016). Some of the essays were co-authored by Greeks and Macedonians. Greek and Macedonian contributors also wrote parallel papers on the same topic. Dissemination events were organized for the public and media in Skopje (21 June 2016) and Athens (23 June 2016). Additional dissemination events are planned for fall 2016 (Brussels and Berlin). Dissemination partners include Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, University of Athens, Pantheon University, the Navarino Network, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy/ELIAMEP, Konrad Adenauer, Wissenschaft und Politik (Brussels).

The Navarino Network hosted Macedonian scholars for a public panel, “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: What Next” (17 February 2016). Chaired by Panteion Professor and television personality Dimitris Keridis, the panel was the first time that Macedonian scholars presented in a public forum to Greek counterparts, civil society and media representatives.

Scholars from Macedonia participated in a panel at Columbia's Association of National Minorities on “Nationalism, National Identity, and Public Opinion in Greece and Macedonia” (15-16 April 2016). ELIAMEP hosted Macedonian scholars Zoran Ilievski and Vladimir Bozinovski, director of the Institute for Political Analysis in Skopje, for a public panel “The Balkan History of Two Neighbors: Perceptions, Reality and Global Challenges.” (23 June 2016). *The Macedonian Political Science Journal* published a volume with a foreword from Dimitris Keridis.

Pantheon University and Ss. Cyril and Methodius University organized a shared history project, which resulted in a co-publication -- *Crossroads: Examining the Cultural, Historical and Political Heritage in South-Eastern Europe*. The steering committee included faculty from distinguished universities in Greece and Macedonia. Columbia convened meetings of faculty and students from both countries in Skopje and Athens (24 June 2016). Graduate students presented their papers at Panteion University (20-21 October 2016). A follow-up press conference is planned for Skopje to present the co-publication. Paper topics include minorities, migration, common cultural heritage, the construction of national identities, media relations, the name issue, and Greek-Macedonian issues in both parliaments.

Public Opinion Surveys

Iaonnis Armakolas (Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy/ELIAMEP) and Vladimir Bozinovski (Skopje Institute for Political Research) organized research teams to conduct sociological surveys on mutual perceptions covering a range of issues such as attitudes in Greece towards “Macedonia and Macedonians,” and vice-versa. Armakolas, Bozinovski, and their associates met to develop parallel questionnaires, coordinate sociological research methods, and develop a plan for dissemination using hard copy/electronic publications, print/television media, and social media. Survey results of Skopje Institute for Political Research were presented in Skopje (21 June 2016). ELIAMEP released its results (21 October 2016). Survey results on

both sides were generally negative, highlighting the deep divide between civil society in both countries. More work is needed to overcome stereotyping, distrust, and demonization. ELIAMEP and the Skopje Institute for Political Research are discussing another parallel public opinion survey on public attitudes of the migration/refugee crisis.

Analysis

The Southeast Europe Dialogue Project was launched with the hope of preparing the ground for constructive bilateral negotiations. However, the project was beset by crisis from day one. Greece's financial crisis, Macedonia's domestic political crisis, and the shared refugee/migrant crisis dominated dialogue in both countries. Rather than a springboard for bilateral rapprochement, the project became a safety net involving the web of partners with shared interests. However, the project has not advanced political rapprochement between the Greek and Macedonian governments. It will take time to realize this goal.