

In 1994, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) began to work in Macedonia to strengthen interethnic relations and help prevent violence. In 1999, our efforts were put to the test when war erupted in neighbouring Kosovo. Nearly 400,000 refugees poured across the border, magnifying ethnic tensions and threatening an already bad economy. Many observers have said that our programmes made an important contribution to weathering the crisis. After the tensions subsided, SFCG continued working toward cooperative solutions, resolving conflicts, preventing violence and expanding activities to regional cooperation. Today, 10 years later, our focus is on media, education, arts and culture.

MEDIA

SFCG designed the first regional media programme *Bridges for the New Balkans* in September 2000. Since then, the programme has been successfully implemented in Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro.



Ambassador Donato Chiarini, Special Representative of the European Commission in Macedonia giving speech at the public presentation of *Bridges for the New Balkans*, marking its third year anniversary

The main goal of the programme is to foster the process of creating a common vision for the future of the Balkan region. In order to reach that goal, SFCG committed to achieve the following objectives:

- To broaden and expand the impact of the media on social transformation in Southeast Europe;
- To strengthen communication links between different media and among media professionals, by undertaking wide conflict prevention activities through networks of media professionals.

During the first phase of *Bridges for the New Balkans*, SFCG conducted training sessions, facilitated contacts, and established cooperation among reporters, editors, journalists and other media professionals from different ethnic, cultural and national backgrounds. SFCG made it possible for these professionals to create joint media productions and networks of various media outlets. There are two circles of production: one in Macedonia and the regional one, covering six Balkan countries. In Macedonia, the programme includes *Local Television Exchange* programme, a quarterly magazine *Multiethnic Forum* and *Local Radio Exchange* programme. On the

regional level, the programme consists of the local television exchange programme *Balkan Kaleidoscope* and a periodic magazine *Karavan*.

In the second phase of *Bridges for the New Balkans*, SFCG intends to harness the power of the media and civil society to achieve more profound social transformation in the Balkan countries.

EDUCATION

In order to overcome cultural and linguistic segregation in the Macedonian educational system, SFCG designed a unique multi-cultural bi-lingual kindergarten model *Mozaik*. From the outset *Mozaik* had two primary objectives:

- To introduce children from different ethno-linguistic communities to an environment that fosters respect and understanding;
- To promote a child-centred pedagogical model of pre-school education for children.

Since 1997, *Mozaik* has operated in Macedonian and Albanian communities in Skopje, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Struga and Debar. Selected kindergartens had to meet pre-determined criteria, including a sufficient and balanced number of parents and children from each ethno-linguistic group interested in participating, availability of teachers from each community and their willingness to get the *Mozaik* training and finally formal support from local kindergarten staff.



Mozaik Group in Struga celebrating the end of the school year

Our objective for the period 2004-2006 is to formally integrate *Mozaik* into the Macedonian public education system. SFCG is also developing a strategy to ensure

long-term sustainability and broader dissemination of the *Mozaik* approach. In addition to five existing Macedonian-Albanian groups, we took the first steps towards expanding *Mozaik* to other ethno-linguistic communities. In February 2004 we formed the first Macedonian-Serbian group in Kumanovo and in December 2004 we started a third Macedonian-Albanian group in Skopje. Currently, SFCG is in the process of forming two new *Mozaik* groups: a Macedonian-Turkish group and an additional Macedonian-Albanian group in Gostivar.

ARTS & CULTURE

In 1997 SFCG started *Nashe Maalo (Our Neighbourhood)*, the first children's television series in Macedonia. *Nashe Maalo* was designed to encourage mutual respect and understanding among ethnic Macedonian, Albanian, Roma and Turkish youth between ages 7 and 12. It combines entertainment with education. Structured as an intended-outcomes programme, the series had three primary objectives:

- To model and promote intercultural understanding amongst ethnically diverse population in Macedonia;
- To model and teach conflict prevention through the promotion of greater cultural awareness;
- To model and teach age-appropriate skills in conflict resolution.

The series had a creative story line that followed the interconnected lives of a close-knit group of young people from four different ethnic groups: Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish and Roma. The show taught kids how to form friendships and how to cooperate, despite the prejudices and peer pressure that surrounded them. All four languages were used in the broadcast, which is highly unusual for this part of the world. *Lessons from Nashe Maalo*, a research study, measured positive

changes in children's attitudes triggered by watching the series. The last season of *Nashe Maalo* was broadcasted in late 2003, however several local television stations in Macedonia continued to show re-runs.

Nashe Maalo Outreach Activities

In order to deepen the impact of the *Nashe Maalo* television series, SFCG implemented several outreach activities such as a children's magazine, a parent-teacher guide, music CDs and various charity events. In addition, the *Nashe Maalo* cast is often invited to schools, institutions for children with special needs and orphanages, where they promote the values of *Nashe Maalo*.

Nashe Maalo Theatre

This theatre programme is based on the characters and principles of the *Nashe Maalo* series and has similar objectives: to increase tolerance among children in Macedonia, and to promote inter-cultural understanding. Two dramas have been produced for children between ages 11 and 15: *Love or Friendship* and *The New Neighbour*. After the premieres in Skopje, both shows toured around the country. Beyond simple dramatic performances, the plays involve direct communication between the audience and the cast. Following each show, children were led through a facilitated discussion about what they have seen.

Puppet Plays

Starting in spring 2003, SFCG has produced three puppet plays in partnership with the Children's Theatre Centre from Skopje: *Magic Horse*, *The Old House* and *The Giant Wheel*. All the plays were designed for children between ages 7 and 9, to convey messages about ethnic and cultural diversity in Macedonia. They were performed in twelve cities throughout the country.



Nashe Maalo children cast visiting SOS Children's Village in Macedonia

January 2005