

ACCESS – Sofia Foundation

ACCESS – Sofia Foundation is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit organization, established in May 1992.

The Foundation's priority objective is to promote mutual tolerance and better understanding of the cultural diversity in Bulgaria and the Balkans. ACCESS consistently works for the development of a network facilitating free exchange of expertise and information, and establishment of contacts among Bulgarian and foreign NGOs, especially from the Balkan countries. The Foundation implements projects, conducts surveys and analyses, organizes courses, trains interns and publishes books and periodicals in four key areas:

- ❖ Balkan dialogue and regional cooperation;
- ❖ Intercultural dialogue and education;
- ❖ Civil society building;
- ❖ Freedom of speech and media.

ACCESS – Sofia Foundation has considerable experience in project promotion and realization:

- **Cross-Border Information Exchange on Balkan Ethnic and National Prejudices (1994–1996).** The image of "the neighbour" in the Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Serbian and Turkish press. *Balkan Neighbours*, biannual newsletter in English.
- **Together (1994–1995).** Three issues of *Together* magazine, disseminated among students aged 10 to 18 in schools in Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Sliven, Velingrad and other towns. Attractive and unconventional intercultural education aid, written and illustrated mainly by children.
- Assistance to Roma initiatives aiming to resolve the Roma community's socioeconomic problems in the period of transition (1994–1995). In 1994, ACCESS founded a **Roma Social Bureau**, offering information and consultations in social work, education and occupational training.
- Three-year project on **Strategies for Sustainable Development of the Region of the Rhodopi Mountains**, completed in 1996.
- Consultations and mediation in 1996 survey on **The Role of Local Elites in Community Life**, conducted by University of Hokkaido, Japan.
- **Principles, Parameters and Practices of Civic Control in the Republic of Bulgaria (1996–1997).** Generalization of Bulgarian NGO experience, and formulation of the principles of effective interaction with public institutions in the sphere of civic control.

In an address issued on the ACCESS's initiative, 33 NGOs appealed to the Delegation of the European Commission to Bulgaria and to the Bulgarian authorities for NGO participation in control over the distribution of EU humanitarian aid, for the purpose of guaranteeing publicity and transparency of the distribution procedure. Their position was taken into account in Council of Ministers Decree 42 dated 10 February 1997, and Ordinance 1 of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and civic boards were set up.

- **Balkan Neighbours (1996–2001)**, follow-up to Cross-Border Information Exchange on Balkan Ethnic and National Prejudices (1994-1996). Including "the image of minority groups" and another two Balkan countries, Albania and Romania. *Balkan Neighbours*, biannual newsletter in English, Bulgarian and Serbian.
 - **Assistance to Local Democracy Building in Albania, Bulgaria and Romania**, joint project with Est-Libertés, France. International observation missions for the parliamentary elections in Romania in November 1996, in Albania in June 1997, and in Bulgaria in April 1997.
- **Places of Worship: Centre of Ethnocultural Cohabitation (Kurdjali Region) (1997–1998)**. Promotion of tolerance and respect for the cultural specificity of "the others" in the perspective of common places of worship. In June 1998, photo exhibition and album for students, teachers, lecturers and experts in local history and ethnography.
 - **The Role of Local Elites in Community Life (1998)**, stage two of the survey conducted by the University of Hokkaido, Japan, in Bulgaria, Russia and Hungary. Field study on local councilors and mayors in Bulgaria. Final report 1998.

- **Women in the 21st Century: Transcending Boundaries to Sustainable Development in Southeastern Europe**, international conference held in Sofia in **October 1998**, co-organized by ACCESS – Sofia Foundation and other Bulgarian NGOs, and attended by NGOs from the region and prominent public figures from the whole world. Main subjects: democratic consolidation, the media, civil society, international and regional security, culture, education, economic development, ecology, crime and corruption, social security and health care. As a result a new network was established – SEELIDA (South-East Europe Women Leadership Initiative: A Dialogue for Action) – a regular forum held every year.

- **Civic Network for Cultural Pluralism and Intercultural Integration in Southeastern Europe (1997–1999)**, joint project with CCRIT, Romania, Society of Europeanists, Romania, IPIS, Belgium. Collection of information and creation of an electronic data base on the problems of interculturalism in South-East Europe, presenting organizations working in this sphere, various projects on interculturalism and a bibliography on the subject.

- **Media Freedom and Monitoring in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania (1997–1999)**, joint project with the Center for Liberal Strategies, Bulgaria, Free Speech Civic Forum, Bulgaria, and Article XIX, the UK. Promotion of public debate on the role of the media in a democratic society. Monitoring of representative radio and television programmes. *State Media & Democracy*, biannual newsletter in English. Drafting of *Charter of Journalistic Ethics* customized for each country in the project.
 - **Coalition 2000 (1998–2000)**, one of the first practical initiatives against corruption in Bulgaria, launched by NGOs, public institutions, international organizations, media and private citizens. Proposed solutions based on sociological surveys and media monitoring. ACCESS elaborated a

methodology for monitoring of the corruption topic in the media (print and electronic) and made regular daily monitoring of the media as well as monthly analyses based on this monitoring. Book *Counteraction to the Corruption in the Local Government*.

- **Social Behavior in the Multicultural Environment Project (1999–2000)**, joint project between ACCESS – Sofia Foundation and Independent Journalism Center – Moldavia. Reciprocal visits of journalists, media experts and NGO activists in Moldavia and Bulgaria to get the participants acquainted with the work of the state institutions, media and non-governmental organizations in the field of human and minority rights of the citizens in both countries. Several articles and analyses written by the participants published in the mainstream press of both countries. Book *The Bessarabian Bulgarians in Moldavia. An Attempt for a Portrait* prepared by the Bulgarian team.

- ACCESS, together with other civil organizations from the region, established closer cooperation within the **South-East European Policy Institute Network (SEEPIN)**, coordinated by FORUM – Center for Strategic Research and Documentation, Skopje, Macedonia. ACCESS made daily monitoring of Stability Pact image in the print media in Bulgaria and prepared monthly reports (1999–2000).

- **South-East European Media Association (SEEMA)** was established in **June 2000** as an initiative of the editors-in-chief of the mainstream Romanian and Bulgarian print media. This initiative goes under the project *Balkan Neighbors Club*. The main goals of SEEMA are to work for improving the free exchange of information and establishing closer cooperation between media and journalists from the countries in the region. SEEMA is an open structure to any print or electronic media, as well as to individual journalists from the other countries of South-Eastern Europe that

share the principles stated in the Founding Declaration. ACCESS – Sofia Foundation as (the Network’s coordinator tries to enlarge its scope through media cooperation with Greece and Turkey.

- Founding member of **South-East European Network for Professionalization of the Media (SEENPM)** – a network of 17 media NGOs targeting the regional media through educational and training activities addressing various topics – reporting diversity, investigative journalism, election reporting, reporting business and economy, media management and advertising, etc. ACCESS, one of the three Bulgarian organizations, recruiting journalists from Bulgaria for the network courses (since **2000**).

- **Summer internship program** and OJT training for students (started **2000**) – takes place every year in June and July. Interns are involved in activities including correspondence, texts editing, assistance in organizing of various meetings and workshops, preparation of conference materials, assistance in writing and reporting projects, assistance in project budgeting, media monitoring and writing reports, working translations, participation in meetings and conferences, etc. In the course of the internship the interns work with a personal supervisor, who prepares an evaluation report on the intern’s work upon the end of the internship. So far the program stirs up great interest among students in political science, South-East European Studies and humanities from Bulgaria and USA. (First ACCESS intern was the only one among the students in the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, USA to get a university award for her internship in ACCESS in 2000.)
 - **Non-Biased Journalism in a Multicultural Community. Training by Doing for Young Journalists (2001–2002)**, joint project with *The Novi Sad School of Journalism*, Yugoslavia including two training courses for students in journalism in Yugoslavia (Novi Sad, province of Vojvodina) and in Bulgaria (Sofia). Training on specific skills in tolerant and

non-discriminatory coverage of "the other" in the Balkans through analysis of the media in the two countries, including those published in the languages of the national minorities, identifying the mechanisms of discriminatory and biased reporting.

- **Us – Them (A Concise Ethnopolitical Dictionary)**, follow-up to the second edition (1997). The dictionary, an unconventional intercultural education aid that tries to step in the field of education without being didactic and provokes reflection on highly controversial "ethnic" issues, was translated in Roma and Turkish (2002).
- **Anti-Corruption Pressure Group (2001–2002)**. Notifying the judiciary on the basis of legal analysis of selected materials from print and electronic media. Legal protection and legal assistance to the media and investigative journalists; regular press conferences and publications in the media for developing further public opinion sensitivity on the topic.
- Founding member of the **National Organizational Committee Link Diversity** with the Link Diversity Council of Europe programme – responsible for international cooperation activities (2001).
- Member of **SEEMO (South-East Media Organization)**, affiliate of the International Press Institute, Vienna, Austria (since 2001). ACCESS in charge for media monitoring on image of Austria in the Bulgarian print media and monthly reports (2002–2003).
- **Access to Information and Media Legislation (2002-2003)**. The project is part of the cross-cutting activity of the South East European Network for Professionalization of the Media (SEENPM) and Balkan Human Rights Network (BHRN). It is

implemented jointly by ACCESS and the Belgrade Human Rights Center.

- **Media Landscapes (2002-2003)** - a project that contributes to the foundation's long track record in comparative media research in the South-Eastern European region. It is implemented within the SEENPM. It aims at offering comparative and compatible information in regional perspective, on the one hand, and providing possibility for presentation of the local peculiarities, on the other. The results will be summed up in a final publication in English, including data part and analytical part.
- **Voices of Exclusion – Minority Empowerment through Media (2002-2004)(ongoing)** – a project of the Centre for Social Practices, ACCESS plays the role of a partner organization. It aims at providing an opportunity for young representatives of the minorities to acquire skills and confidence to give publicity to their problems in the media, and stimulate public attention. Sixty young Bulgarian Muslims, Turks and Roma people attend a training course, organized in five training modules and designed to give both theoretical knowledge, and practical skills. The final project stage provides for publishing a book in Bulgarian and English to sum up the analysis results.
- **Electronic Database of Regulatory Municipal Property Transactions in the Sofia Municipality (2004)(ongoing)** - The main goal of the project is to create an electronic database of regulatory municipal property transactions and rented out municipal property within the Sofia Municipality. The database will contain systematic, detailed information about municipal property transactions. Additionally, a web-based application will be constructed to grant public access to the database.

- **Roma Mainstream Media Internship Program (2004)(ongoing)** - the project aims at training young Roma for career in the journalism field. Selected young Roma people will be initially trained in intensive 4-month journalism courses. Then they will be sent to professional media newsrooms to practice the acquired journalism skills and knowledge. By integrating young Roma in newsrooms, the awareness of the society on the challenges and problems of the Roma community will raise and the prejudices will lessen. The trained Roma journalists will become bridges of communication between the Roma minority and the Bulgarian society as a whole, thus creating a better dialogue between the different ethnic groups in Bulgaria.
- **Evaluation of the Efficacy and Transparency of the Process of Spending EU Money under PHARE Program for Supporting Civil Society Development in Bulgaria (2004)** – the project aim is to evaluate and analyze the transparency and efficacy of the PHARE funded programs and the procedures for their implementation on behalf of the institutions, experts and NGOs.

PUBLICATIONS

- **Aspekti na etnokulturnata situatsia v Balgaria.** [Aspects of the Ethno-Cultural Situation in Bulgaria]. Sofia, Vol.1, 2, 1994
- **Balkan Neighbours** Newsletter. Sofia, Vol. 1-11, 1994–2001
- Buletin **Balkanski sasedi.** [*Balkan Neighbours* Newsletter]. Sofia, No. 5–8, 1997–1999
- **Mahaloto na Dahrendorf: liavo i diasno v balgarskia politicheski jivot.** [Dahrendorf's pendulum: Left and Right in Bulgarian Politics]. Sofia, 1995
- Buletin **Zasto Ne?** [*Why Not* Newsletter]. Sofia, 1995
- Spisanie **Zaedno.** [*Together* Magazine]. Sofia, Pilot issue, 1993; Vol. 1, 2, 1995
- **Nie-Te. Kratak etnopoliticheski rechnik (Prednaznachen predimno za grazdani na Republika Balgaria, nenavarshili godini za pasport).** [Us-Them. A Concise Ethnopolitical Dictionary. Mostly for citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria under identity-card age]. Sofia, 1995; second revised edition. Sofia, 1997
- **Identities and Community: Lessons from the Balkans and Beyond.** ACCESS – Sofia Foundation/International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations. Sofia, 1997
- **Initiative for Civil Society Building in Bulgaria.** Sofia, 1997
- **Initsiativa za podkrepa na grazdanskoto obstestvo v Balgaria.** [Initiative for Civil Society Building in Bulgaria]. Sofia, 1997
- **Balkan Transition.** ACCESS/BCN. Sofia, 1997
- **State Media & Democracy** Newsletter. Sofia, Vol. 1–3, 1998–1999
- **Mesta na pametta (Kultovite mesta v Kardjaliiskia raion).** [Places of Memory. Places of Worship in the Region of Kurdjali]. Sofia, 1998
- **Balgaria i izborite v Makedonia** [Bulgaria and the Elections in Macedonia]. Sofia, 1999
- **Bulgaria and the Elections in Macedonia.** Sofia, 1999

- **Grazhdanskiat kontrol v Republika Balgaria. Printsipi, parametri, praktiki.** [Civic Control in the Republic of Bulgaria. Principles, Parameters, Practices]. Sofia, 1999
- **Bulgaria – Facing Cultural Diversity.** IPIS/ACCESS. Sofia, 1999
- **Interkulturnoto obrazovanie v Balgaria – ideal i realnost.** [Intercultural Education in Bulgaria – Ideal and Reality]. Sofia, 1999
- **Mezduetnicheskite otnoshenia v Balgaria i Rumania. Osnovni facti.** [Interethnic Relations in Bulgaria and Romania. Basic Facts]. Sofia, 1999
- **Aspekti na etnokulturnata situatsia v Balgaria – osem godini po-kasno.** [Aspects of the Ethno-Cultural Situation in Bulgaria – Eight Years Later]. Sofia, 2000
- **Protivodeistvie na koruptsiata v mestnata vlast** [Counteraction to the Corruption in the Local Government]. Coalition 2000/ACCESS. Sofia, 2000
- **Besarabskite balgari v Moldova. Opit za portret.** [Bessarabian Bulgarians in Moldavia. An Attempt for a Portrait.]. Sofia, 2001
- **Yanovski, R., Reporting Diversity.** Sofia, 2002
- **Biz – Onlar. Küçük Etnopolitik Sözlük.** [Us-Them. A Concise Ethnopolitical Dictionary. Mostly for citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria under identity-card age]. Sofya, 2002
- **Ame – Ol. Cıkno Etnopolitikano Alavari.** [Us-Them. A Concise Ethnopolitical Dictionary. Mostly for citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria under identity-card age]. Sofia, 2002
- **Bulgaria – Yugoslavia. Journalism in Intercultural Dialogue.** Sofia, 2002
- **The Image of the Other.** Sofia, 2002
- **Bulgaria – Serbia. Access to Information Issues.** Sofia, 2003
- **Media Landscape of South East Europe.** Sofia, 2003

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