

Decentralized cooperation programme between the Region Lower-Normandy (France) and the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"

INTRODUCTION

16 years after the breakup of the former Yugoslav Republic, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" remains one of the least known countries of South East Europe. Despite the brief armed conflict of 2001, it is presented frequently as a model of overcoming crisis and interethnic tensions. As result, it was officially granted the status of candidate to EU membership. Being a rural region, Lower Normandy has the will as well as the need to open itself up to the world and to encourage its civil society in the endeavor of European integration and globalization.

This is the context in which the French Region Lower Normandy engaged in cooperation with the Macedonian state. This institutional cooperation is strongly supported by the French Ministry of foreign affairs. It is based on a program action between stakeholders from both territories that started in November 2007. Formally conceived as a three-year project (2007-2009), this cooperation is planned to extend beyond this period.

OBJECTIVES

This cooperation will be the product of a joint effort of the two partner entities to open themselves up to the world and to incite their population to engage in active citizenship at local and European levels in the spirit of reciprocity and change. The project leads the establishment of a platform for continuous change and will contribute to the creation of long-lasting relations among the populations of the two entities. It will strengthen the aspect of "francophonie" and local governance in all areas of co-operation, as each action will aim to develop the capacity of the local populations (in both Lower Normandy and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia") and disseminate good practices and values.

In terms of specific objectives, the project is highly ambitious, with the main objectives being to reinforce the capacity of local authorities to implement decentralisation, to mobilize citizens, to ensure that the development is sustainable; to exchange good practices (on managing public services, participation, sustainable development); to improve the use of ICTs and to use them to bring citizens and institutions closer together; to help Macedonia in preparing for EU accession by providing support in adopting the aquis communautaire; to promote francophonie and the francophone values, to open the Lower Normandy to the world, to give a new perspective to youth and to train them to become active European citizens; to contribute to the reduction of negative stereotypes, intolerance and racism; to improve the quality of the media and to facilitate the creation of public opinion based on the value of citizenship; to involve a variety of categories of individuals and organisations in the process, and to reinforce the links between the two territories on a long-lasting basis.

PARTNERS

The project unites a variety of partners - from the Lower Normandy Region and the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". The activities are implemented by the so-called tandems from France and Macedonia in each action of the project. They run this programme by leveraging support and interest in the local communities, trying to mobilize and involve citizens and organisations at various levels: public institutions, NGOs, professional bodies (such as Chambers of commerce), the media as well as other relevant parties.

The lead coordinator is the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), an international NGO coordinating a network of 11 Local Democracy Agencies in South East Europe and the Caucasus. With its headquarter being located in Strasbourg (France), ALDA gained extensive experience in managing complex multi-annual projects in South East Europe working with a variety of partners from both local authorities and civil society alike.

ACTIVITIES

The action plan designed by the project partners includes needs assessments, studies, exchanges of experience, training, promotional activities, media articles, publications, round tables, workshops, study visits, translations, traineeships, website, events etc. - all spread across 5 actions with several sub-actions. The project coordinators and partners are currently fundraising for additional funds to expand the activities in each action.

ACTION 1: Local governance and new information and communication technologies

- o Action 1.1: Active citizenship: partners for the development
- o Action 1.2: Internet access and open source software for the citizens

Coordination in France: Centre des Technologies Nouvelles (CTN)

Coordination in Macedonia: Metamorphosis

Partners in Macedonia: ZELS, Ministry of Local Government, FOSIM, public digital clubs

Partners in Lower Normandy: Espace publics numériques bas normands (EpnBN)

ACTION 2: Youth, education and local and European citizenship

- o Action 2.1: Support to local authorities for the definition and implementation of sustainable youth policies
- o Action 2.2: Youth in Europe: education, job opportunities and mobility
- o Action 2.3: Francophonie as a tool for the empowerment of humanist and universal values

Coordination in France: Maison de l'Europe Caen-Lower Normandy

Coordination in Macedonia: Coalition of youth organizations "SEGA"

Partners in Macedonia: bilingual classes from high schools, French Embassy in Skopje, French Cultural Centre, local authorities, SALTO Youth, , French alliance from Tetovo and Gostivar, Macedonian Agency for youth and sport, ZELS, local authorities

Partners in Lower Normandy: local authorities, University of Caen, French Ministry for youth

ACTION 3: Media and free access to information

- o Action 3.1: Local information close to the citizens
- o Action 3.2: Development of a Norman-Macedonian resources cluster

Coordination in France : Courrier des Balkans

Coordination in Macedonia: Courrier de la Macédoine

Partners in Macedonia: journalists' associations, Osservatorio sui Balcani, local newspapers Bitolski Vesnik and Monitor, local radios

Partners in Lower Normandy: regional newspaper Ouest-France, association Ouest-Fraternité,

ACTION 4 : Cultural Policy

- o Action 4.1: Support to local authorities for the definition and implementation of sustainable cultural policies
- o Action 4.2: Setting up of a platform for the dialogue, invention and artistic mobility

Coordination in France: Regional Center for Literature from Lower Normandy

Coordination Macedonia: Association Lokomotiva - Centre for New initiatives in Arts and culture

Partners in Macedonian: French Cultural Centre, Macedonian National Theatre, Skopje City Museum, Macedonian National Gallery, Nomad dense academy

Partners in Lower Normandy: Association Balkan Transit, Dense Center from Caen, local authorities

ACTION 5: Cultural Heritage and sustainable tourism

- o Action 5.1: Identification and protection of cultural heritage
- o Action 5.2: Support and promotion of sustainable tourism

Coordination in France: Savoir-Faire et Decouverte

Coordination in Macedonia: CIRa (Centre for institutional development)

Partners in Macedonia: local authorities, Ministry of economy (tourist section), Faculty of architecture, Chamber of tourism

Partners in Lower Normandy: Service for heritage inventory from the Regional Council of Lower Normandy