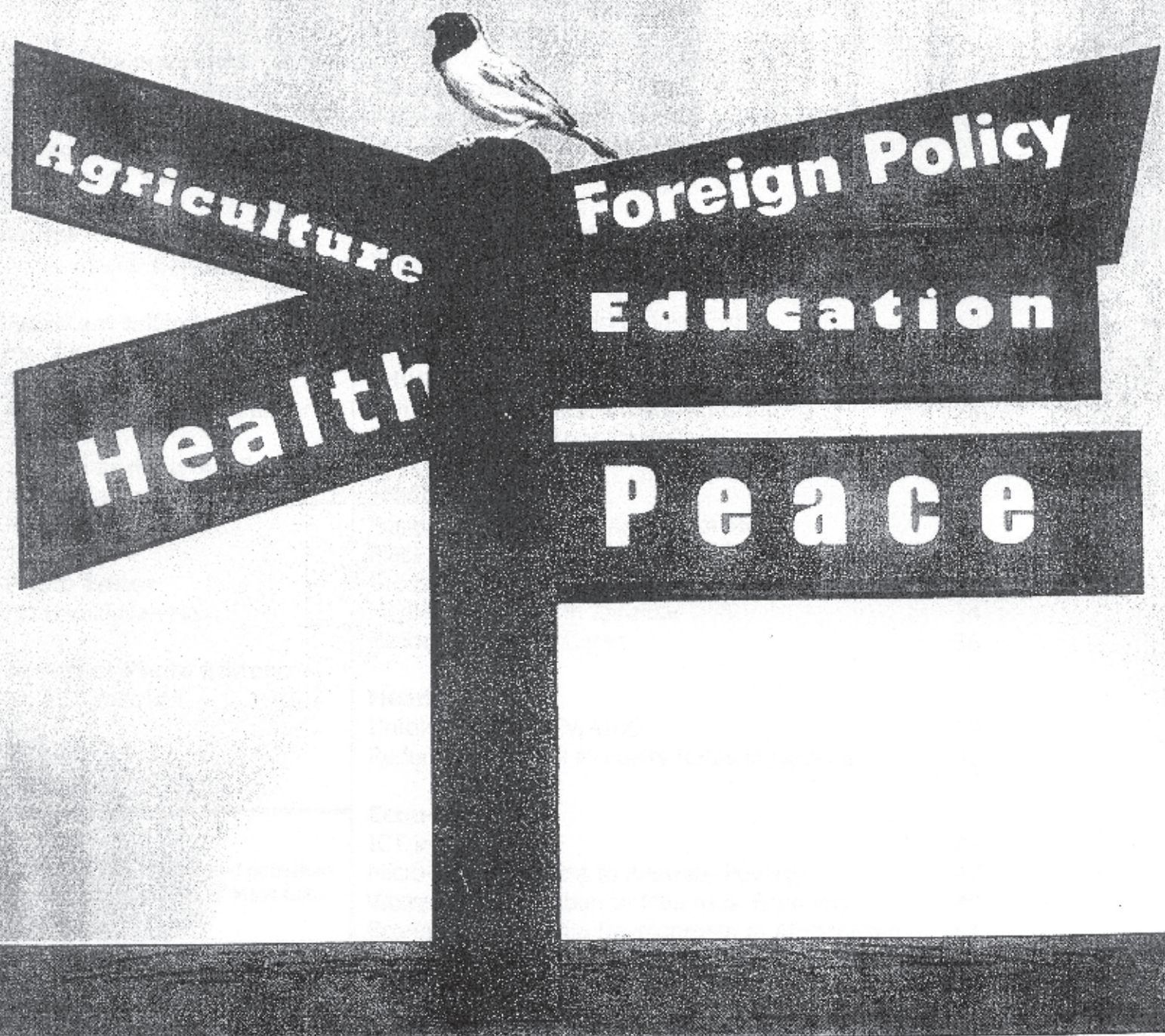


# ECHO 48th

Indian Institute of Mass Communication



**CROSSROAD MASS MEDIA & DEVELOPMENT**

# Nurturing Democracy Through J

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## Nurturing Democracy Through Education

Education and the right to be educated are essential for understanding among people. With the advent of globalisation and democratisation of societies, it should be recognized that in order to reach this understanding, the universality of human rights should be harmonized with the diversity of cultures. Human rights education must be rooted in the cultural traditions of societies and in accordance with the principles adopted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that: "Everyone has the right to education...and education shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups."

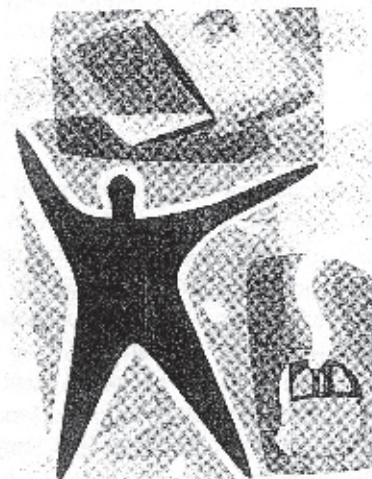
The main concept in the Declaration stipulates that education should not aim only at preparing professional workers, but also at contributing to development of individual communication skills in a just society. Education is seen as a means of empowering people, to improve the quality of their life, and to increase their capacity in the decision-making processes, thus leading to improvement of social, cultural, and economic policies. The third President of the United States and a powerful advocate of liberty and democracy, Thomas Jefferson was quoted to have said: "Enlighten the people generally and tyranny and oppression of both mind and body will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day." Is there any better way to enlighten people than offering them equal access to good and qualitative education? The answer is more than obvious!

### Macedonia: A case study

The Republic of Macedonia, located in the South Western part of Europe, is a multiethnic country. From the time of proclamation of independence in 1991 till now, all the government's efforts

have been aimed at meeting the criteria and standards of the European Union, with one goal in mind - faster integration of the country into a United Europe. In the past 16 years a number of reforms were undertaken in all spheres of life. Significant reforms were also carried out in the education sector.

Many subjects offered in primary and secondary schools have been revised. Last year, primary education was upgraded from grade eight to ninth grade. Emphasis has been placed on practical subjects in the secondary schools. At the University level, necessary steps



are being taken to ensure that by 2010 Macedonia will be part of the "European University Space". By then, degrees issued by universities in Macedonia will be recognised by all EU member-state. It is expected that this year the country's Constitution will be amended to make secondary education mandatory. Currently, only the primary school is compulsory.

In the past few years emphasis has been placed on three major issues: Citizens education, Information Communication

Technology and Lifelong learning.

The country is expected to benefit from the civic education and education in democracy as part of the curriculum at all levels of school system, especially at the tertiary level. The inclusion of these issues in the education system is aimed at strengthening the country's democracy. This will enable the permanent promotion of the democratic principles of mutual respect and recognition. Consequently, these values will become part of the life of the present and future generations.

ICT is playing an important role in these expected benefits. The country is fully utilizing ICT in a positive way. Today's world is rapidly becoming digitally accessible and with IT education there will be greater impact. The importance of "knowing how to acquire information" is prevailing over "knowing information". The IT revolution is well underway and is having an enormous social and economic impact on Macedonia.

The implementation of IT has the potential of accomplishing a better symmetry in information dissemination. This will reduce the risk of exclusivity of knowledge ownership, which can often deteriorate into unfair dissemination. This is of particular importance in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural society, such as Macedonia, where any misinterpretation can cause intolerance.

In the past, access to Internet in Macedonia was available only to a privileged group or individuals. Those individuals received huge performance improvement potential in their work place, particularly in the public sector, and in their everyday life as citizens. Unfortunately, the information gap was misused and



manipulated for a long time by the political elite, to nurture stereotypes and prejudices.

By making Internet service available the citizens now have access to "truth and exclusive historical facts" than previously made available by the political circles. In this way, it is hoped that stereotypes and misperceptions, will be eradicated.

About 5,500 computers have been installed in all primary and secondary schools in Macedonia and all of them are linked to wireless Internet service. This year, schools in Macedonia will start a project called "Computer for every child". Presently, universities are inter-connected with their ICT networks. This is aimed at facilitating the learning of languages and conducting joint research.

The installation of Internet in schools and universities has resulted in a fall in the price of Internet services in the country. As such there has been a great increase in the accessibility of Internet for the entire population. In this way, the benefits of available information from different sources are spread countrywide.

#### **Lifelong learning**

Developing lifelong learners is central to the mission of higher institutions in Macedonia. By ensuring that individuals have the intellectual ability to reason and think critically, and by helping them construct a framework to "learn how to learn", universities in Macedonia are laying a foundation for their students to be "informed citizens and members of communities".

The importance of quality education has been identified. In the context of higher education, the issue should be viewed in broader terms, or as a factor

that guarantees accurate capacities of the institutions that are to successfully carry out the burden of democratisation in a multi-ethnic society.

Universities are a public good and a public responsibility, and thus have the important obligation of nurturing students to be good citizens.

Universities must ensure that students are taught not only with the expertise from the specific field of study, but they should be equipped with the skills and ability to live according to democratic principles. As future leaders, students should be the leading force in adopting new societal values such as democracy and tolerance.

Therefore, it is recognize that with such capacities in place, the country can promote and be part of a unified Europe, not only from the economic, but also from the civilization and culture aspects. The university environment itself must promote a climate of human rights, understanding, and equality among students. In that respect, higher education must be provided in a way that respects the dignity of each student and enables them to express their views freely as well as participate fully in academic work.

Rethinking and revising tertiary education in Europe mainly involves a clear focus on the development of knowledge, skills, perspectives and values related to sustainability. The Bologna Process, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area dominate the agenda in European countries.

The Bologna Declaration states that a "Europe of Knowledge" is an important factor for social and human growth, an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competencies to the challenges

of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. The Bologna process is not only about structures, such as degree systems, recognition and quality assurance, but it also involves a social dimension.

Education and educational institutions have a role in the development of stable, peaceful and democratic societies. This process is therefore not only an academic, or only an economic issue, but it also has a very strong social and cultural dimension. It should be recognized that the political support and international recommendations are not sufficient for achieving this goal.

Among others, it requires the dedication of the academic elite, who should not only mainstream these norms in day-to-day activities, but also by providing personal example in their social life, since they are not only mentors, but role models for students.

Experts see the benefit of this from the perspective of building the capacity of the communities. Consequently, they perceive this as an opportunity to enhance the capacity of the state and in general its intellectual potentials. They recognize that this is the only way that guarantees sound foundation for sustainable development and the democratic progress of the society. According to them, it is only in these terms that Macedonia will be an equal part of the new system of values that guarantees economic development, harmony, and social cohesion.

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