We already cover 12 years from the moment of the constitution of the MSF Greece. Within this period, more than 350 volunteers have joined missions through the Greek section. During the aforementioned period, MSF-Greece has been supported from an ever growing part of Greek society, which today has reached 115,000 donors. Moreover, the massive recognition of our organization meets the 75% of the population, according to a relevant research realized 3 years ago.

The course up to 1999, when our exclusion from the international movement took place due to the Kosovo crisis, was marked by events which, as proved, influenced our mutual relations to a considerable extent. We believe that the responsibility for the course of these relations weighs on both parties. For by no means could only one partner, whose capacity with regard to funds and human resources remained considerably limited when compared with the rest of the operational sections, assume total responsibility. The course of events that lead us to 1999 is presented below:

1st Fact:
In 1994, the issue of the recognition of the Greek section as the seventh operational center was discussed at the plenary session of IC (6 operational sections), since it was generally accepted that MSF GR had accomplished all the targets set four years ago by the IC itself. That decision was granting MSF GR the right to become the seventh member of the AC, according to a majority vote (4 in favor - 2 against), with full operational responsibility. However, that decision was never implemented due to the veto imposed by two sections, (MSF-H and MSF-B), a practice never before used in the history of the International Movement. The argument for the veto was the need for better coordination, through the implementation of a new policy that would see no increase in the number of the operational centers. In that way, the prior decision of the IC to offer, under preconditions, the possibility to MSF GR to become a full section was placed on the same ground with the later decision regarding the creation of the delegate offices. It is well known that the creation of delegate offices by the big sections had an altogether different objective, that of fund raising and human resources.

2nd Fact:
The IC decided that MSF GR should have an intermediate status, (between operational section and delegate office), with limited operationality through liaison with another section. That was the section of MSF-Spain, which had already voted in favour of MSF-GR becoming the seventh member of the IC in 1994. The connection of the two sections was actually to create difficulties since MSF Spain, due to facts, perceived MSF GR as operational according to its vote in the 1994 IC. In due course, it became apparent that MSF Spain curtailed the operational activities of MSF GR, by avoiding giving the green light for the establishment of new projects, regardless of the repeated proposals of MSF GR.
3rd Fact:
- The creation of Medeco by MSF-GR.
In 1996, after having communicated our worries to MSF-Sp, we founded Medeco, an NGO closely associated with MSF-Greece, which had as a main pivot of action our orientation towards programs of development. The implementation of these programs was to be realized by experienced MSF volunteers and with EU institutional funding. The main concept behind the creation of such an organization was the need for an alternative proposal to the weakness of the international movement to find an answer to our claims for institutional funding by the EU, when the following paradox was appearing: although MSF GR was the biggest organization in Greece with regard to reliability, programs and number of donors, it was the only one which had no right to claim institutional funding by the EU due to the specific policy of the international movement. The initialization of the program in Gaza, under the Medeco supervision, led to the intense reaction of the international movement, the decision of MSF GR to terminate Medeco and finally, following agreement of MSF-Gr and the other sections of the international movement, the move of the program under the responsibility of MSF-Gr with the coordination of MSF-F and MSF-Sp.

4th Fact:
In 1998, the creation of a common operational center with the Swiss section was decided and the decision for a common DIROPS was adopted. That decision was in accordance with the policy of the International Movement regarding the restriction of the number of operational centers for better coordination. The creation of this common operational center represented a creative challenge for the movement since a new "scenery" was being formulated and this new setting was close to the way MSF GR understood the definition of the operationality of sections, (for us the definition of operationality was the possibility of a continuous "pouvoir décisionel" regarding the missions). Of course, that challenge could have a positive evolution, provided that certain preconditions that could help to overcome prejudices and other problems were to be met (political will, trust, technical issues). Initially, our cooperation functioned on the level of equating our internal operation, in designing the organigram and the structure of our offices, in using common softwares and in formatting ACs with participants from both sections. But that collaboration did not proceed into the essentials of various important issues, as for example the lack of will for the gradual absorption of our indisposed funds (that were totally private) for the initialization of new programs, for which the Athens HQs would have the operational responsibility through the planning of the common operational center. In this way, an answer to the operational profile that the Greek section was seeking could have been given, under any pre-agreed umbrella. Besides, our course up to that point demonstrated that the final decisions of MSF Greece were characterized by acceptance of the international movement’s decisions and respect of the common principles, hoping that gradually realistic solutions could be devised.

5th Fact
During the 90's the Greek section, as far as fund raising, the number of volunteers and the organization’s weight in Greek society were concerned. On the other hand, and as far as our presence in the international movement is concerned, a good level of cooperation was developed among the communication departments, the human resources departments and even the operations department in both the operational and organizational level. However,
that collaboration did not reflect to the conflicts that arose among the sections on a political level. Everyone who was actively involved with them during the corresponding periods considered missions like Armenia, Georgia and Malawi as successes. The training session of SPPD held in Athens in 1998 was also as successful. Likewise, international meetings took place with the active participation of MSF GR staff and volunteers.

Still, the political decisions of the International Movement and the de facto tendency of the MSF GR AC to deal with the international issues through an approach of constant assertion, influenced the confidence in the relation amongst us and brought about fatigue in our communication. That climate was basically formulated between 1994-1999.

The events of the year 1999 - the crisis in Kosovo

Much has been said about that period. Prejudice and lack of information unfortunately lead with mathematical precision to wrong decisions, which can frequently be characterized by fanaticism and over-reaction.

The concern, false or not, excessive or not (further analysis will show), expressed by a part of the international movement, concerning the need for immediate intervention in Kosovo, which was being bombarded at the time, should have mobilized the common DIROPS to visit Athens and experience first-hand the situation before taking any decision. Except if the common operational center existed only on paper, for that was what we were made to perceive at the time. Moreover, we should not forget that this war had brought disruption to an entire European area (Balkans), that European was deeply divided on the issue and, thus, that it would be unconceivable for our volunteers, our members and our donors to remain indifferent, particularly as this crisis was unfolding on Greece's own doorstep. Furthermore, the need for advocacy was carried out with considerable difficulty towards a biased Greek Mass Media, but still, the MSF message with regard to the responsibilities of the Milosevic regime was put forward but at the same time so was the argument about NATO stopping the bombing (there are relative articles in our archives).

The decision to enter Kosovo, although discussions were indeed taking place on the MSF GR AC level and for which the president of that period should have informed MSF International, became a reality only after the sudden resignation of the common DIROPS and after we had tried to raise the need for the international movement's presence in Kosovo on numerous occasions, in the name of the common principles of the MSF movement, such as neutrality, proportionality of assistance and non-discrimination of victims. Moreover, the Greek section had already a proven presence in the wider area of crisis through cooperation with and support for the activities (financial support, cargo shipment, participation of volunteers), taken up by the other sections, which held the operational responsibility for the programs realized in Albania and Skopje in support of Kosovar refugees. At no instance, therefore, can this attitude of ours be characterized as biased. The Greek Government's initiative taken at that time could by no means be identified as identical nor cooperative towards our organization, as was the accusation levelled at us, but instead we thought that it was an opportunity to use realistically to our advantage the circumstances that were created, mindful of the international movement's
inability to approach the victims within Kosovo itself. In addition, the fact that the possibility of our intervention had already been communicated to the rest of the sections prior to the entry, asking for a common coordination, indicates that our initial target was a joint intervention and not a unilateral one.

Our mistakes:

1. We failed to distinguish the delicate phase that the negotiations with the rest of the sections had entered, when the sole representative on our behalf was the president of the AC. The possibilities of misunderstandings and probably even concealment of information are considerable and possibly took place during this critical period. Likewise, it is also possible that personal conflicts and confrontations also occurred.

2. After the sudden resignation of the DIROPS, we did not seek the reestablishment of our communication with the international movement, but instead, due to disappointment, we proceeded in an isolated manner.

3. The isolated manner of our mobilization, combined with the pressure of moral dilemmas regarding the discriminative or not provision of humanitarian assistance, the need for an urgent or not intervention in a suffering area, the lack of testimony from a "hot spot" in which not long ago the international movement was present led us to:  
   - Overlook the coherent stand that a humanitarian movement should adopt, especially during such a crisis, in order to avoid transmitting wrong messages but also the danger of being manipulated by local conflicts
   - Be over optimistic in believing that such an attempt would bring about the eventual positive response of the rest of the sections, when they would realize that the real motives of our action were indeed the very promotion of the humanitarian ideals and the principles of our movement, which laid much above any organigram and internal operational regulations.

4. The above mentioned belief was also shared by the majority of the MSF GR volunteers, who thought that in a possible intense reaction by the rest of the sections, eventually solidarity would prevail, just as it had done in many fierce conflicts amongst MSF sections in the past, especially once the real motives behind our choice were understood, (motives which by no means intended to disrespect the agreements reached with the IC). Of course, the events that followed demonstrated another dynamic altogether; that of confrontation and intense conflicts that led to rushed decisions and ruptures. We believe that within a movement, arguments and disagreements must be totally expressed. Moreover, the movement's maturity can be proved at any time when it is able to absorb every shock created by these disagreements through substantial and honest dialogue and not through rushed decisions. We take up our part of the responsibility but we believe that so must all other parties from other sections that were involved in this case, as for example the "facts finding team", whose condemning decision in its report demonstrated that neither solutions nor convergence was sought but rather an exemplary punishment.

Finally, in the aftermath of this major crisis and the levelling of values, it would be useful for answers to be provided to a series of questions, as shown below:
1. After the sudden resignation of the common DIROPS, was there any direct action from the international movement's side to seek any ad hoc solutions to the upcoming problem of the common operational center or not?
2. Was the action taken by MSF-GR in 1999 to our benefit or to the benefit of local populations?
3. Did that action emanate by institutional funding or exclusively by private funds?
4. Did the Greek government's policy and funding towards us change or did it remain the same during the following years?
5. Was the disagreement within the movement related to values or managerial strategy?
6. Is it possible that decisions were based on intense personal confrontations and not on an honest dialogue?
7. Is independence and neutrality judged according to results or do they remain merely theoretical ideas?
8. Was the successive course of MSF-Greece characterized by adherence to MSF common principles or divergence and in which way (and to what extent)?
9. Is the policy of re-approach offending the principles of MSF or is it empowering the international movement?
10. Which can be the initial commitments towards such an approach?

Finally, our history of interaction with the rest of the movement, although characterized by certain difficulties, had also some special moments that we should look at in a critical way: It is not merely a case of two partners who agree to break their collaboration or chose to split operations over a disagreement. On the contrary, it involves the dynamics of societies, who develop questions and queries and possible conflicts, but by functioning accordingly as concrete options within a movement have the ability and courage to reach new composition through any kind of disagreements. Which of the above occurred during the period of the crisis? The most powerful partner just attempted to repress the less powerful one, without taking into consideration the fact that the latter had already developed mechanisms that not only did not lead to its destruction but instead contributed to its empowerment within the local society. Moreover, it moved on without differentiating itself from the MSF values, found healthy solutions to its existing problems and remained active and efficient by following rules and patterns of action, in which formulation had taken part anyway in the past.

THE NEW DYNAMICS and PERSPECTIVES

Let's examine things in detail:
Immediately after our exclusion, feelings of disappointment and betrayal towards the principles and the aims of an international organization appeared amongst our members. Nobody can question the fact that all the people who decided to engage in the organization all these years had as their sole motives participation, solidarity and provision of aid to people.
However, the principles and the targets that we had all believed in helped us after the exclusion not to distort the operation of the organization, despite the difficulties faced and the feeling that America was being rediscovered over and over again. On the contrary, after recovering from the shock and the feeling of injustice, we turned to reorganization
and vision towards the future, leaning on all the positive elements that we had gained through our participation in an international movement. We wish to point out:

- The creation of a three year action plan, after a general conference meeting of all our members, regarding the development of our missions and not the incidental realization of them
- The definition of the number and size of our missions according to criteria set by rationalization, capacity and commitment to beneficiaries
- The respect of the clearly set separating lines from the market and state
- Our commitment to the principle of testimony
- The constant monitoring and evaluation of our aims up to the point of re-examining our capacities
- The adherence to the desirable ratio of institutional and private funds
- The persistence to opening up the dialogue with the international movement, regardless of our total independence as far as funding, operationality, communication and internal regulation were concerned.
- The evasion of clientele relations with institutional entities
- The respect of the international movement's action

In addition, nobody could doubt that:

- Our options during the recent crisis in Afghanistan were guided by our respect towards common coordination and preservation of the image of MSF in their common action,
- Publications concerning our relations with the international movement have lost the personal character they used to have during 1999 and 2000,
- Cooperation with other sections were sought on the field to the best interest of local populations,
- In spite of the negative lobbying within the EU, we were not carried away and we did not seek exclusive funding from other institutional sources but instead we reserved the ratio at 10-15%. Moreover, we sought alternative solutions in order to respect the principle of different sources of institutional funding by initializing an effort for fund raising within the local communities in which we intervene, which might be of less importance in financial terms, but of a great one as far as the communication of the message in concerned, (western countries embassies, international organizations),
- We hold a completely different course and image from other similar organizations that act in Greece (MDM), and
- Our approach towards the international movement is characterized by transparency and coherence

**Our intention is clear**: MSF in Greece, a country that stands between three continents and is part of the troubled area of the Balkan Peninsula, have taken deep roots into the consciousness of citizens and have gained the support of sensitized people, who do not distinguish the MSF. GR volunteers from the ones of any other MSF section.

MSF-GR believe that a contemporary movement can constantly develop given that its constitutional principles do not remain inscribed on paper, but instead are able to follow up current evolutions. Naturally, the above does not refer to fragmentation of
operationality but rather to the formulation of an operational consciousness within all structures, along the axis of: field work - social awareness - fund raising and volunteer recruitment - respect of constitutional values - efficient action and feedback to society. The operational models are the tools and we are able to seek them through substantial and honest dialogue, but the aim is the operational consciousness that will safeguard our values and will contribute to their universal communication.

The evolutions within the international movement are unknown to us, from the moment of our exclusion to the present, with regard to official communication and exchange of information. On the other hand, the evolutions within MSF GR possess their own dynamics as well. Currently, MSF-GR has reached a level of maturity regarding the limits of their action, continue to share the unimpeded belief in the common principles of the movement and plan enthusiastically their future based on their experience of over ten years of action. Our plan of action is characterized by realism, questioning regarding our field of intervention, as for example the turn toward more medical projects, the social and medical components of our intervention against STDs/ AIDS, the special population groups and their needs, the logistic support of the missions, but also by the need for a coherent pool of experienced volunteers, who will guarantee the quality of our interventions.

In addition, the freezing of the legal processes on both parts constitutes a hopeful indication which positively underpins this course.

Whether our activities can reach a common ground of convergence is a question that we need to ask ourselves individually and subsequently to elaborate together. We hope that the era of personal confrontations belongs to the past and that a period of maturity lies ahead. Without it, we can only continue to move in parallel ways and to project a fragmented image to the rest of the world.

Kind regards,

The AC of MSF-Greece