



CONCORD EPAN and FDR Statement on the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility

EPAN and FDR are working groups of CONCORD, the European Confederation of Development and Relief NGOs. EPAN works on issues related to enlargement, pre-accession and neighbourhood policy; and FDR works on European funding for development and relief.

EPAN and FDR welcome the announcement by the European Commission on 27 September relating to the new package of support for the European Neighbourhood. CONCORD members are grounded in civil society so this statement is in response to the fourth decision within the package: the **Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility**.

EPAN has long advocated for a civil society facility (CSF) to be established in the neighbourhood¹ to complement and counterbalance assistance to governments and has been working with the so-called quintet, an informal group of Brussels-based cross-sector NGOs² to reinforce this message within the EC.

FDR follows and analyses all European Commission funding for CSOs in development, with a special focus on Thematic Programmes, mainly "Non-State Actors and Local Authorities".

The statement below reflects the opinions of the members of both working groups (hereafter referred to as CONCORD) concerning the content of the Action Fiche for **Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility 2011**³ and is structured according to the sections included in the fiche.

Rationale

Sector context

CONCORD welcomes the recognition afforded to civil society within the European Commission Communication on "A new response to a changing neighbourhood"⁴, which acknowledges 'civil society's role to contribute to policy-making and hold governments to account'; and the commitment to 'supporting a greater role for non-state actors through a partnership with societies, helping non-state actors develop their advocacy capacity, the ability to monitor reform and their role in implementing, monitoring and evaluating EU programmes'. The intent to engage more intensively with stakeholders in the Eastern Partnership, specifically the EaP Civil Society Forum, is also welcome.

→ CONCORD encourages the European Commission to pay attention to the terminology used. This is a *Civil Society* facility, and although we agree that civil society has a broader definition than simply NGOs, we feel that the term clearly excludes the private sector. The term 'non-state actors', which is used in several parts of the document, is not so clear. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) is the term that is used

1 See EPAN position papers on The role of EU and its Neighbourhood Policy in changing societies in North Africa, available at http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/epan_statement_10_03_11.pdf; and with regards to the communication on ENP review, 25.05.2011 and the proposal of establishing an ENPI Civil Society Initiative, available at http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/enp_south_response_epan_30may2011.pdf and http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/enp_east_response_epan_30may2011.pdf

2 The 'Quintet' includes CONCORD, EMHRN, HBF, OSI, WWF and others.

3 Available at http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/aap/2011/af_aap-spe_2011_enpi.pdf

4 COM(2011)303

in the majority of modern development discourse and internationally accepted terminology. The facility **must** be used to support real civil society in the Neighbourhood.

CONCORD agrees that the facility should complement existing civil society support initiatives in the Neighbourhood and underlines the importance of aligning assistance and policy dialogue between the EU and partner countries. An enabling environment for civil society and an inclusive approach to civil society in national reform processes will only be possible if this is made clear at the political level.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum will be an important partner in the development of the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility programme. Efforts must be taken to ensure thorough consultation with this body, which represents civil society both in the EU and Neighbourhood countries. It must be ensured that there is balanced representation of all independent stakeholders within the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

The common challenges identified in the fiche are accurate. Low capacity to engage in policy dialogue; restrictions on fundamental rights; multi-layered and parallel consultations; and lack of funding opportunities for advocacy are all evident in countries of the Neighbourhood.

→ CONCORD stresses the need to ensure the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility is flexible enough to take local situations into account. There are significant cultural, political and economic differences between the countries in North Africa and Eastern Europe which cannot be overlooked.

Lessons learnt

It is encouraging that lessons learnt from other processes are being reviewed and taken into account with the design of this new facility. Existing programmes, as well as evaluations and recent processes have a lot to offer in terms of recommendations of how to engage with civil society.

The Structured Dialogue was an inclusive process, initiated by the European Commission, which sought to bring on board all relevant stakeholders involved in EC development cooperation (EC, [EU Delegations](#), European Parliament, Member States, [Civil Society](#) and [Local and Regional Authorities](#) from the EU and partner countries). This initiative aimed at **increasing** effectiveness of all stakeholders involved cooperation with CSOs in development. CONCORD was an active participant in the Structured Dialogue process and the principles agreed here should be used as a base on which to build the Civil Society Facility.⁵

→ As well as learning from the support mechanisms that already exist for civil society in the neighbourhood however, it is also important for this facility to learn from the Civil Society Facility that was established within the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance⁶ (IPA). This is not mentioned in the fiche, but a number of important concerns have been raised during its existence. Here are some of the recommendations that were made in the context of the IPA Civil Society Facility:

⁵ See the concluding paper on CISOCH: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/aidco/images/e/ea/FINAL_CONCLUDING_PAPER.pdf

⁶ See The Successes and Failures of EU Pre-accession Policy in the Balkans: Support to Civil Society, available at http://www.balkancsd.net/images/stories/docs/The_successes_and_failures_of_EU_pre-accession_policy_in_the_Balkans-Support_to_Civil_Society-ENG.pdf

- Ensure thorough consultations and participation of local and EU civil society in the design and implementation of the programme;
- Use successful models such as the Local Advisory Groups, complemented by an EU-level programming committee, while acknowledging the components that make these models successful – broad partnerships, overcoming divisions in civil society, identifying genuine representatives of civil society and fostering ownership.
- Enable grants to support large and small projects on flexible rules (such as introducing pre-financing) that take account of the situation of national CSOs.
- Strengthen support for community-based initiatives and activities to tackle exclusion from economic life, exclusion from social services and exclusion from social networks and civic participation.

Component 1: Strengthen non-state actors' capacities to promote reforms and increase public accountability

→ The comprehensive analysis of needs and capacities in each ENP country must be exactly that. Identifying the target group is also identifying the partners with which the EC must work to develop the tailor-made capacity development activities.

→ The capacity development offered should build on the IPA experience, where TACSO (Technical Assistance for CSOs) offices were criticised for not involving local civil society in the development of the activities. Other lessons learnt from this experience should be thoroughly examined and taken into account.

→ Consultations must be inclusive and promoted widely within the societies

→ Visibility will be a critical issue. As well as ensuring the information about the facility is available and accessible to the civil society it is designed to support, a balance needs to be found concerning the sensitive issue of CSO work in countries that hinder civil society's activity.

→ CONCORD stresses the importance of involving local expertise in the implementation of the technical assistance and development of the capacity building activities.

Component 2: Strengthening non-state actors through support to regional or country projects

→ Reinforcing EIDHR and NSA-LA funds with the aim of strengthening activities that support an enabling environment and enable the contribution of civil society to the political priorities are the Neighbourhood Policy is a welcome step, as long as this does nothing to undermine civil society's right of initiative.

Stakeholders

→ As explained above, as its name indicates, the Civil Society Facility should primarily support civil society. Civil society does not include the private sector.

Procurement and Grant award procedures/ Budget

Although the amount attributed to the CSF is small in comparison with the overall budget for ENPI countries, CONCORD acknowledges the need to avoid overwhelming local CSOs with large amounts of funding that will be difficult to absorb. The budget should increase in future years in line with the capacities of local CSOs.

It is unclear how the funding will be distributed among countries in the region and according to which criteria.

- Will approval from the government be required for CSOs to access funding under the CSF?
- Will civil society in neighbourhood countries where action plans do not exist (Algeria, Belarus, Libya and Syria) still be eligible to apply for funding under the CSF?
- It will be important for local CSOs to be able to prepare fully for calls for proposals under the CSF, since they may be accessing this type of grant for the first time. How will the predictability of the calls be ensured?

European Endowment for Democracy

It is not clear from the documents presented by the Commission how the proposed CSF is going to be coordinated with another instrument-in-the-making, the European Endowment for Democracy. Both tools have broadly similar end-goals; more democratic and pluralist societies, but at the moment, few know how the EED is supposed to work. There is a need for clear coordination and complementarity with the EED.

European Transition Compendium

The European Commission has been developing the ETC over the last couple of years, and it is soon to be re-launched as an interactive database. This database contains information from the twelve newest EU member states on the reforms that took place in the period leading up to their membership of the EU. It could be interesting to make this information available to other countries that might benefit from the EU-12 experiences and support reforms in other areas of the world, such as the Neighbourhood.

- How will the ETC be promoted in the Neighbourhood?