

## **“MORE for MORE” as the EU’s Response to the Arab Spring**

### **A LETTER FROM CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS IN THE ARAB REGION TO EU OFFICIALS: “WHAT DOES ‘MORE’ STAND FOR AND HOW TO ENSURE ECONOMIC POLICY CONDITIONALITY IS NOT EXERCISED?”**

The undersigned civil society groups have positively received the announcement by the EU in regard to the SPRING programme (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) and the Civil Society Facility (CSF). Such initiatives, especially the strengthened EU discourse on support for political dialogue, human rights, and civil society, are welcome. However, the undersigned organizations highlight specific concerns in this area, seeking to ensure that rights-based and development rooted interests of the peoples of the region are indeed served. The points raised below are rooted in the understanding that the changes sweeping across the Arab countries necessitate a re-thinking of priorities and policy approaches in the cooperation and partnerships with the European Union, on various fronts whether political, economic, social, and cultural, and at the regional and national levels. These changes have included the whole Arab region, including the Maghreb, Mashreq, and Gulf countries, thus requiring a holistic approach in the revision of the relation between the EU and the various Arab countries. Moreover, stability, security, and peace remain an integral part to the success of any rights-based development process in the region and need to be central to any planning and evaluation of partnership with the region.

#### **(1) Concerning the SPRING programme**

##### ***Introduction:***

The EU declares avoiding conditionality in its new financial allocations towards the region, while focusing on a “More for More” approach (MfM). The EU bases such approach on the principles of enhanced differentiation among partner countries and in the EU's response to them. Under the SPRING program, the EU will allocate additional resources of up to EUR 350 million for “*partners engaged in deep democratisation and with strong and lasting commitment to reform*”<sup>1</sup>. This includes EUR 65 million committed in 2011 and EUR 285 million to be committed in 2012. Parts of these budgets are to be disseminated through the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

While acknowledging the double standards exercised with previous regimes, the EU discourse in the new initiative ranges between stressing the notion of dialogue and mutual accountability and taking a tougher position on specific assessments and compliance mechanisms to be administered by the Commission services and the European External Action Service and indicating several criteria<sup>2</sup>. The EU stresses the Communication of May 25<sup>th</sup> entitled “A new response to a changing Neighbourhood”<sup>3</sup> as the background document on which enhanced differentiation among partner countries and of the EU's response to them will be administered. Accordingly, allocations under SPRING will not be based on the

<sup>1</sup> Action Fiche for the southern Neighbourhood region programme Support for partnership, reforms and inclusive growth (SPRING).

<sup>2</sup> The information made available by the EU on SPRING notes the following criteria: free and fair elections; Freedom of association, expression and assembly and a free press and media; the rule of law administered by an independent judiciary and right to a fair trial; fighting against corruption; security and law enforcement sector reform (including the police) and the establishment of democratic control over armed and security forces.

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com\\_11\\_303\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf)

negotiated Action Plans or the country strategy papers (CSP) developed between the EU and the recipient national governments).

***Perspective from the Undersigned Civil Society Groups***

In this regard, the undersigned groups highlight and call for the following:

- While stressing that the democratic, consultative, and representative dimensions of the Action Plans and CSP need to be deepened, **there is a threat of overriding what have been achieved so far through reforming these processes by bypassing them in the process of allocations under the SPRING programme.**
- **More clarity is necessary from the EU in regard to the basis for selecting countries to receive additional funds and the basis for evaluating track record and performance of the recipients.** We reiterate a demand raised by groups of civil society organizations visiting Brussels during June 2011 noting the need to “stay cautious on the application of the proposed criteria for selection, avoiding policy conditionalities, and clarifying ways in which conditions based on the respect of human rights, democratic progress, and rule of law can be applied”<sup>4</sup>.
- **Benchmarking and budget allocations should not be rooted in a non-consensus document such as the EU communication (May 25th 2011) entitled "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood".** Moreover, there is a need for explicit indication that economic and social policy conditionality will not be used as criteria or benchmarks.
- **Any benchmarking should be the result of a well established participatory and open consultation process, undertaken both at the national as well as regional levels,** where civil society groups have adequate space to contribute to the process.
- While the economic situation in countries like Egypt and Tunisia might have witnessed certain set backs in the time of the transition, **there is a need to consider that the long term economic and development transition necessitate a vision for re-establishing the economic and development model in each of these countries in order to prioritize peoples’ right to development and justice.** The urgency of the current situation should not be a used as a reason to re-stabilize the model drawn by previous regimes, which clearly did not serve the development rights and needs of the people, and under which poverty, unemployment, and inequalities continued and deepened in many areas.
- **Support for economic growth should be rooted in support of people’s choices to a revised economic model,** where productive capacities, redistribution mechanisms, employment and wages take forefront. For such purposes, trade and investment deals established with the previous regimes need to be revised in order to serve a development vision and not concentration of economic powers in the hands of the few.
- The EU continues to push a trade and investment agenda that have proved unsupportive of development needs of its partner countries and that could override national democratic transition if maintained or deepened in Egypt and Tunisia as well

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<sup>4</sup> Please refer to the statement entitled: “Towards Policies that Serve Peace, Democracy, and Social Justice Between the EU and Arab Countries; Demand for an immediate change in the social and economic priorities between Europe and Arab Countries”; (Brussels, 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011), available at: <http://www.annd.org/userfiles/file/latestnews/Brussels%20Declaration.pdf>

as other Arab countries. **There is a need to stop the 'business as usual' approach to trade and investment and to resituate trade and investment policy and instruments to support a nationally nurtured development and economic policy.** The EU Foreign Affairs Council have indicated (Monday 26 September in Brussels) the acceleration of a number of on-going negotiations and preparation of "deep and comprehensive" free trade areas that will serve as the basis by which the EU will support the democratic and economic transition of those countries<sup>5</sup>. While the EU pushes for more of the same, civil society groups have been calling for an assessment if the benefits of ongoing trade and investment relation accrued on the development front. The undersigned groups call for re-establishing trade and investment policies to align with the development levels achieved by partner Arab countries and that is tailored and managed to serve the revised development paradigm called for by the peoples in the Arab region.

- While the mandate and financial intervention by the EIB and the EBRD will be expanded in the Arab region, the undersigned groups call for a transparent assessment of the previous interventions by the EIB and its implications on development processes, in order to inform its expanded mandate and that of the EBRD in the region. For those purposes, the EU Commission for Development and Cooperation, the European Investment Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have a responsibility of transparency regarding the amounts of the assigned aid and its nature (whether grants or loans), the related mechanisms of disbursement, the monitoring mechanisms and criteria (including clear measurement criteria of the interventions' added value in terms of poverty reduction, employment creation, and respect of democratic processes), and the beneficiaries in terms of sectors and entities (including disclosure of assessments undertaken in regard to the recipient countries)<sup>6</sup>.

- While the EU refers to a role for civil society organizations in the SPRING programme<sup>7</sup>, consultations with civil society have not yet taken place, and none are publically planned. **Civil society groups should be at the core of consultations around SPRING allocations, identification and use of benchmarks, which need to be undertaken in an institutionalized way, and on a country based case by case**, where the national delegations take active role in reaching out to civil society groups. Indeed, with the adequate partnership mechanisms set in place, the role of civil society is essential in any successful development and rights- based intervention, including at all stages of policy design, project and program identification, implementation, and evaluation.

## **(2) Concerning the Civil Society Facility (CSF)**

### ***Introduction:***

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<sup>5</sup> This will include launching of negotiations with individual countries once economic and political conditions are met (including market access for agricultural goods, accreditation and acceptance of industrial goods services and investment Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin and sufficiently ambitious to provide the prospect of progressive integration into the EU's single market (Commission is expected to present, possibly in November, draft mandates for the negotiation of agreements on deep and comprehensive free trade areas with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia).

<sup>6</sup> Please refer to the widely supported open letter entitled "A Call of Civil Society Organizations from the Arab Region and International Groups Against Diverting the Revolutions' Economic and Social Justice Goals through conditionalities imposed by the IMF, WB, EIB and EBRD" (June 2011), available at: <http://www.annd.org/userfiles/file/latestnews/Statement-EN.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> The EU document indicate "Consultations with civil society organisations, social partners and different community groups are envisaged as they are at the heart of a sustainable civil democratic modernisation path and may also benefit from the SPRING programme".

The CSF is designed to encompass and reinforce existing initiatives of support to non-state actors in the Neighbourhood, with no specific focus on Southern Mediterranean or Arab countries. The CSF is presented as an attempt for more structured engagement with non-state actors in the ENP region and increasing involvement in the policy dialogue at the country level. The specific objectives of the CSF are presented as follows (1) to strengthen non-state actors and contribute to promoting an enabling environment for their work; (2) to increase non-state actors' involvement in programming, implementation and monitoring of EU assistance and policies in the region; (3) to promote involvement of non-state actors in policy dialogue and increase interaction between non-state actors and authorities at the national level. A budget of €22 million has been allocated for the CSF for the year 2011. There is no clear publicly available identification of the areas where this support will go.

### ***Perspective from the Undersigned Civil Society Groups***

While welcoming more efforts to enhance the engagement with non-state actors, civil society groups note that:

- The process around designing the CSF thus far have lacked structured consultations that allowed civil society groups from the Southern Mediterranean countries to give input into what they perceive as added value and priorities in the role of the CSF and the mechanisms of work and engagement with the CSF. **It is essential that civil society groups take part in the thinking around the mandate, design, mechanisms, and policy approaches of the Civil Society Facility** (as well as the proposed Democracy Endowment).
- We recommend that a **structured clearly defined consultation be undertaken at both the regional level as well as national level (through the national delegations) around the mechanisms of work of the CSF and priority areas of intervention.**
- It is important to **clarify the spaces and the mechanisms for the engagement with civil society.** For example, when it comes to engagement around the SPRING programme, clarifications are needed whether consultations are to be undertaken at the national level through the delegations, or will it be directly with the SPRING programme; how will it be organized (as a continuous open consultation throughout the year or at certain moments of program planning, benchmark identification ...). Furthermore, there is a need for explicit indication that civil society groups will be engaged in the process of developing benchmarks/indicators as well as assessment of progress.
- Learning from experiences undertaken thus far, we stress the need for a **more structured and institutionalized dialogue with civil society groups, including engagement at all stages of policy design, project and program identification, implementation, and evaluation.** This necessitates adequate and timely flow of information about the programs/ plans being evaluated or consulted around and adequate span of time for groups to engage in consultations or to constructively contribute towards a specific meeting.
- One of the added value of an institutionalized process is the ability to **expand outreach and engagement to new groups over time and avoid limiting the process to the groups selected or outreached to by the EU institutions,** especially at the national level. Core considerations must therefore be transparency

and how programs and proposals are presented and negotiated in consultation with civil society groups.

- We propose considering the added value of **establishing an open and representative advisory group of civil society groups from Partner countries to assist and take part in the processes to be established as part of the EU response towards changes in the region, including the SPRING programme.** This advisory group could be part of the new mechanisms associated with the CSF.

**Undersigned organizations:**

- The Arab NGO Network for Development (including member groups in ten Arab countries); [www.annd.org](http://www.annd.org)
- The Palestinian NGO Network; [www.pngo.net](http://www.pngo.net)
- Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections; [www.ladeleb.org](http://www.ladeleb.org)
- Mossawa Center, The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens of Israel; [www.mossawacenter.org](http://www.mossawacenter.org)
- Bisan Center- Palestine; <http://www.bisan.org/>
- The Egyptian Association for Community Participation and Enhancement; <http://www.mosharka.org/>
- Bahraini Human Rights Society; [http://bhhs.org/en-US/Home\\_Page.aspx](http://bhhs.org/en-US/Home_Page.aspx)
- Bahrain Transparency Society
- Bahrain Sociologists Society
- Awal Women Society- Bahrain
- Bahrain Nahdah Women Society
- Bahrain Women Union

**General Contact: Arab NGO Network for Development/** Tel: +961 1 319 366/ Fax: +961 1 815 636; P.O.Box: 14/5792 Mazraa 1105 2070 ; Beirut- Lebanon/ Website: [www.annd.org/](http://www.annd.org/) Email: [annd@annd.org](mailto:annd@annd.org)