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The Multiannual Programming of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights 2014-2020

February 2014

The Regulation establishing the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) for the period 2014-2020 is about to be published in the Official Journal of the EU and the preparation of the programmatic documents for its implementation is entering its final stages. At this time, the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) would like to present its views on two key issues regarding the EU's main external financing instrument for supporting human rights and democracy.

We believe that the draft multiannual indicative programme (MIP), which was discussed with representatives of European civil society organisations (CSOs) in December 2013 in Brussels, is a sound articulation of the EIDHR's five overall objectives. Together with other CSOs, HRDN member organisations were given the chance to provide written inputs on its wording. We very much appreciated the manner in which the consultation was held and we hope that the various inputs are fully reflected in the final text.

In advance of the strategic dialogue with the European Parliament (EP), which will take place on 10 March 2014, we would like to highlight the importance of the timely finalisation of the programming process in order to allow the EIDHR to become operational as soon as possible. We fear that any delays will have knock-on effects on the implementation of the new Instrument's operations which, in turn, may adversely affect the functioning of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the EU's partner countries and disrupt the continuity of funding.

We urge the EU institutions to be mindful of the need for a swift conclusion of the programming process and we are looking forward to the finalisation of the 2014 Annual Action Programme (AAP) so that the funding which has been earmarked for this year can be released and made available to beneficiaries.

As stated above, we are particularly concerned that any delays may be detrimental to the work of NGOs working on human rights, democracy and peace – particularly the smallest ones, in the EU's partner countries, and that this could add to the already considerable challenges of operating in difficult environments.

We are also very keen to know how the resources allocated for EIDHR Objective 2 (Support to other EU Human Right Priorities) will be divided between the different issues in order to ensure that all of the equally important aspects of the EU's human rights policy will be adequately covered during the next programming period.

The Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) is an informal grouping of NGOs operating at the EU level in the broader areas of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention. Participation in the network is open to non-governmental organisations which engage at the EU level in the promotion of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention in and outside the EU.

The vision of the HRDN is that human rights and democracy are placed at the heart of the EU's internal and external policy agenda. This vision should manifest itself in an EU that effectively protects human rights at home and is a force for positive change in the world. In pursuit of this vision, the Network aims to influence EU and Member State human rights policies and the programming of their funding instruments to promote democracy, human rights and sustainable peace.

Secondly, the HRDN is also concerned about the possible negative impacts of the principle of 'differentiation' which will apply to the EU's development assistance 2014-2020. As stated in the Agenda for Change¹, the EU's bilateral aid will be phased out in 19 upper and middle income countries². As a result, the sizes of the operations sections in the EU delegations in those countries are being adjusted to correspond with the reduced volumes of EU aid which they will manage.

We are concerned that this may have the unintended consequence of undermining the worldwide coverage of the EIDHR, in particular by significantly reducing the capacities of numerous EU delegations to run operations and to manage calls for proposals in countries where differentiation applies.

Convinced as we are that progress in the level of income of a country does not automatically bring about improvement in the civil and political rights of its population, and that often economic growth often benefits populations unevenly and may have negative impacts on the social and economic rights of vulnerable groups, the HRDN is concerned that reductions in the size of the operations sections of the EU delegations in the abovementioned countries may affect the levels of EU funding directed to local NGOs.

The European Commission (EC) acknowledged the existence of this type of risk during the consultation on the MIP in December 2013 and announced that solutions would be found on a case-by-case basis, in order to ensure that support and funding to human rights and democracy would not be affected by staff changes within EU delegations.

In this regard, **the HRDN calls on the EP to fulfil its watchdog role by ensuring that the EC upholds its commitments, and that *ad hoc* solutions are indeed effective and do not result in a reduction in the levels of support to beneficiaries of the EIDHR in those countries where human rights and democracy remain issues of serious international concern.**

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¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change*, 13.10.2011

² 17 Upper Middle Income Countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Iran, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Thailand, Uruguay and Venezuela; and two large Lower Middle Income Countries whose GDP is larger than 1% of global GDP: India and Indonesia.