

Contribution to the Joint Consultation Paper “Towards a New European Neighborhood Policy”

By Interkulturelles Zentrum Wien/Austria (IZ) and its' partners in the Caucasus Region: Caucasus Network for Children (CNC)

Background of the partnership: A group of 15 NGOs in the countries of the North and South Caucasus have been working towards the aim to enhance the inclusion of vulnerable children. Interkulturelles Zentrum (IZ) has been part of this process since the very beginning in 2008 and has worked in cooperation with different donors (Education Support Program of OSF, Austrian Development Agency) on the implementation of the Initiative “Education Cooperation across the Caucasus”. The tasks of IZ have been to support international project groups, the network development process and capacity building. Over the years the participating NGOs have been increasingly focusing on building cooperation and networking among themselves, which resulted in the launching of the “Caucasus Network for Children” (CNC) in January 2013, whose mission is “to advance and safeguard the rights of children from vulnerable groups and their inclusion into education and life of the community through mobilization the efforts and expertise among Civil Society institutions in the Caucasus Region and their networking”.

Comments: As it is not possible for the CNC network to hand in its own statement to the consultation paper, IZ takes this part over and hands the following jointly elaborated paper by CNC.

CNC sees it problematic for the network to participate in the process on its own because: 1. The contributions that can come from the civil society are supposed to be communicated through the country EU delegations, so a possible contribution by CNC as a regional actor without a place of residency or registration would need to find another way to do so. 2. Additional concern is the requirement that contributions cannot be anonymous which in such case as Azerbaijan or Russia might be problematic.

From the beginning the CNC was looking at the EU as a one of the levels of its future advocacy efforts as well as a possible source of funding. In relation to the consultation process which can be seen as an opportunity to bring up important issues to the attention of the EU and increase the visibility of the network, the challenge might be that this process does not offer a mechanism of addressing regional issues by regional players. This concern is also applicable to the grant-giving policies of the EU, and would be a general comment by the CNC towards this body.

Statements:

- *The current framework of the ENP covers **16 neighboring countries**. However, many of the challenges that need to be tackled by the EU and its neighbours together, cannot be adequately addressed without taking into account, or in some cases co-operating with, the **neighbours of the neighbours**. Should the current geographical scope be maintained?*

The CNC's fundraising experience has shown that the EU's approach to support changes in peripheral countries is highly politically sensitive. Despite declared support to regional cooperation and networking, the eligible country sets listed in calls for proposals avoid country combinations where there is lack of collaboration on governmental level. In reality it means that projects aimed at cultural understanding and professional cooperation on common issues are not targeting geographic configurations where it is needed the most. For instance the calls targeting countries in the Caucasus often exclude Azerbaijan or Russia. We believe that cooperation on the civil society level should be supported despite fluctuations of the political climate, as part of peace-building efforts.

- *What could be done better to ensure greater coherence between the ENP and the EU's relations with Russia, with partners in Central Asia, or in Africa, especially in the Sahel and in the Horn of Africa, and with the Gulf countries?*

In case of supporting regional initiatives for the Caucasus, while including Russia, priority should be given to the CSOs located in the North Caucasus region of the country.

At the same time, CNC members ask EU to take into consideration peculiarities of the legal environment in which local CSOs function when developing calls for proposals. The Russian partners note that sometimes the project announcements contain formulations related to the call for actions that can be difficult or even dangerous for the CSOs in the current climate.

The balance between two above mentioned approaches needs to be found to encourage local CSOs to cooperate to achieve common goal.

- *Which priorities do partners see in terms of their relations with the EU? Which sector or policy areas would they like to develop further? Which areas are less interesting for partners?*

An inclusive approach should be fundamental for a grant policy in the ENP countries. As a Network of CSOs working towards inclusion of vulnerable children in education and life of their community, CNC calls on EU to make inclusive approach to be fundamental for grant policy related to supporting reforms in the EN countries. Having noted that greater chances to advance inclusion had been missed because a concern for inclusion was not focal in previous efforts to support reforms of healthcare, education, social policies in the EN countries, CNC calls on EU to modify its grant-giving criteria in a way that the consideration of inclusion are reflected not only in listing among cross-cutting issues and emphasized as value-added elements, but are made prominent in overall requirements for the reform support.

- *The ENP works extensively with governments, but also seeks to engage with civil society, including enhancing its monitoring function, particularly in countries where civil society is free, or largely free, to operate. How should the ENP further develop engagement with civil society in its widest sense? Can more be done to network different parts of the partner populations?*

CSO is working in particular areas where EU support reforms should be involved more closely into the monitoring of the funded projects. This would be a powerful way of developing governmental accountability and involving civil society in the reform process.