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**COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION
of 3.11.2023**

**on the financing of the 2023 annual action plan part II in favour of the Regional South
Neighbourhood**

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COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION

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THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046¹ of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012, and in particular Article 110 thereof,

Having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/947² of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009, and in particular Article 23(2) and Article 43 thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) In order to ensure the implementation of the 2023 annual action plan part II in favour of the Regional South Neighbourhood, it is necessary to adopt an annual financing Decision, which constitutes the annual work programme, for 2023.
- (2) The envisaged assistance should comply with the conditions and procedures set out by the restrictive measures adopted pursuant to Article 215 TFEU³.
- (3) The eligibility criteria formulated in Commission Notice Nr. 2013/C-205/05 (OJEU C-205 of 19.07.2013) ‘Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards’ should apply to the implementing modalities linked to this annual action plan.
- (4) The action plan provided for in this Decision should contribute to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in line with Commission Communication ‘The European Green Deal’⁴ and in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on

¹ OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p.1.

² OJ L 209, 14.6.2021, p.1.

³ www.sanctionsmap.eu Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

⁴ COM(2019)640 final of 11 December 2019.

sound financial management, as well as on new own resources, including a roadmap towards the introduction of new own resources⁵.

- (5) The Commission has adopted the Multiannual Indicative Programme for the Southern Neighbourhood⁶ for the period 2021-2027, which sets out the following priorities Priority Area 1: Human development, good governance, and rule of law; Priority Area 2: Strengthen resilience, build prosperity and seize the digital transition; Priority Area 3: Peace and Security; Priority Area 4: Green Transition; Priority Area 5: Support to the main drivers of regional integration.
- (6) The objectives pursued by the annual action plan to be financed under the Neighbourhood geographic programme of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 should improve human development and the quality of life in the Southern Neighbourhood through culture; promote deep and sustainable democracy in Southern Neighbourhood countries; promote decent job creation through sustainable trade in the Southern Neighbourhood; support connectivity as a vector of human capacity development in the Southern Neighbourhood; make the Southern Neighbourhood safer, more secured, and better equipped to fight organised crime and related cyber threats; improve the protection and restoration of biodiversity and the environment, while enhancing the resilience to climate change in the Mediterranean region; and preserve the viability of a just and negotiated two-state solution in the context of the Middle East Peace Process.
- (7) The action entitled ‘Culture Package’ aims to improve human development and the quality of life in the Southern Neighbourhood region through culture. It seeks, in the first place, to strengthen cultural ecosystems and to enable cultural actors to address global issues, such as the green and digital transition. Moreover, it will foster, through culture, equitable social norms, attitudes, and behaviours promoting equal participation by women and men at community and individual levels.
- (8) The action entitled ‘Support to Democratisation in the Southern Neighbourhood’ aims to promote deep and sustainable democracy in Southern Neighbourhood countries. It seeks specifically to foster new pro-democratic actors and media and to preserve and strengthen existing ones through 1) financial support to new and existing prodemocracy actors and media and 2) coaching and capacity-building to existing prodemocracy actors and media.
- (9) The action entitled ‘Support to Sustainable Trade’ aims to promote decent job creation through sustainable trade in the Southern Neighbourhood. It seeks to support the development and implementation of trade and investment policies and measures that optimise the quality and quantity of employment created, particularly for women, youth and with Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. In addition, it aims to support e-commerce and digital trade in the Southern Neighbourhood region to enhance business opportunities and foster decent job creation, in cooperation with the public and the private sectors.
- (10) The action entitled ‘Enhanced Digital Connectivity in the Southern Neighbourhood’ aims to promote connectivity as a vector of human capacity development in the Southern Neighbourhood. It seeks to reinforce the role, capacities and deliverables of

⁵ OJ L 433I , 22.12.2020, p. 28.

⁶ Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)9399 of 16.12.2021 on a Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for the Southern Neighbourhood.

the Arab States Research and Education Network (ASREN) and national research and education networks, through specific actions that promote gender equality and to increase the access to high-speed digital technologies (including MEDUSA) by research and education institutions in the Southern Neighbourhood.

- (11) The action entitled ‘2023 Security Package’ aims to make the Southern Neighbourhood safer, more secured, and better equipped to fight organised crime and related cyber threats. Firstly, it seeks to enhance the strategic and operational capacities of Southern partner countries to protect their citizens against transnational serious and organised crime. Secondly, it aims to strengthen the capacities of criminal justice systems for an enhanced cooperation on cybercrime and disclosure of electronic evidence in the Southern Neighbourhood.
- (12) The action entitled ‘Fostering Biodiversity, Environment and Climate Action in the Mediterranean’ aims to improve the protection and restoration of biodiversity and the environment, while enhancing the resilience to climate change in the Mediterranean region. It seeks to promote an integrated approach to protection and restoration, pollution reduction and prevention, to ensure the efficient management of scarce water resources in the Southern Neighbourhood and to foster awareness, understanding and behavioural change by the general public towards improved climate action and environmental protection.
- (13) The action entitled ‘Civil Society’s Engagement in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) – EU Peacebuilding Initiative (EUPI) 2023’ aims to preserve the viability of a just and negotiated two-state solution in the context of the Middle East Peace Process. In that framework, it seeks to achieve greater public support for the two-state solution through: firstly, increasing civil society’s leverage on efforts to revive the Middle East Peace Process and seek support of a negotiated two-state solution in Israel and Palestine⁷; secondly, it plans to ensure the promotion by civil society of societal changes in Israel and Palestine towards a climate favourable to and supportive of a just and negotiated two-state solution.
- (14) In accordance with Article 43 of Regulation (EU) 2021/947, the actions set out in Annexes IV ‘Enhanced Digital Connectivity in the Southern Neighbourhood’, V ‘2023 Security Package’, VI ‘Fostering Biodiversity, Environment and Climate Action in the Mediterranean’ are of a trans-regional nature, fostering regional cooperation. Due to the actions’ nature and the importance to ensure complete regional coverage, the eligibility of the actions extends exceptionally to the countries identified in the action documents, as their participation constitutes a substantial element to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of Union financing or to foster regional or trans-regional cooperation.
- (15) The objective and design of all actions fulfil the criteria for Official Development Assistance established by the OECD/DAC, as per the requirements of Article 3(3) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947, contributing to the sustainable development of partner countries and the implementation of the 2030 agenda by contributing to gender equality, peace, justice and strong institutions, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, climate action and peaceful and inclusive societies. The countries benefiting from the action which are included in the list of ODA recipients, are identified in the respective action document.

⁷ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

- (16) It is appropriate to authorise the award of grants without a call for proposals and to provide for the conditions for awarding those grants.
- (17) Pursuant to Article 62(1), point (c) of the Financial Regulation, indirect management is to be used for the implementation of the action plan.
- (18) The Commission is to ensure a level of protection of the financial interests of the Union with regards to entities and persons entrusted with the implementation of Union funds by indirect management as provided for in Article 154(3) of the Financial Regulation. To that end, such entities and persons are to be subject to an assessment of their systems and procedures in accordance with Article 154(4) of the Financial Regulation⁸ and, if necessary, to appropriate supervisory measures in accordance with Article 154(5) of the Financial Regulation before a contribution agreement can be signed.
- (19) It is necessary to allow for the payment of interest due for late payment on the basis of Article 116(5) of the Financial Regulation.
- (20) In order to allow for flexibility in the implementation of the action plan, it is appropriate to determine the changes which should not be considered substantial for the purposes of Article 110(5) of the Financial Regulation.
- (21) The action plan provided for in this Decision is in accordance with the opinion of the NDICI Committee established under Article 45 of Regulation (EU) 2021/947.

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

*Article 1
The action plan*

The annual financing Decision, constituting the annual work programme for the implementation of the 2023 annual action plan part II in favour of the Regional South Neighbourhood, as set out in the annexes, is adopted.

The action plan shall include the following actions:

- Culture Package, set out in Annex I;
- Support to Democratisation in the Southern Neighbourhood, set out in Annex II;
- Support to Sustainable Trade, set out in Annex III;
- Enhanced Digital Connectivity in the Southern Neighbourhood, set out in Annex IV;
- 2023 Security Package, set out in Annex V;
- Fostering Biodiversity, Environment and Climate Action in the Mediterranean, set out in Annex VI;
- Civil Society’s Engagement in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) – EU Peacebuilding Initiative (EUPI) 2023, set out in Annex VII.

⁸ Except for the cases of Article 154(6) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046, where the Commission may decide not to require an ex-ante assessment.

Article 2
Union contribution

The maximum Union contribution for the implementation of the action plan for 2023 is set at EUR 61 500 000, and shall be financed from the appropriations entered in budget line 14.020110 of the general budget of the Union.

The appropriations provided for in the first paragraph may also cover interest due for late payment.

Article 3
Methods of implementation and entrusted entities or persons

The implementation of the actions carried out by way of indirect management, as set out in the Annexes, may be entrusted to the entities or persons referred to or selected in accordance with the criteria laid down in point 4.3.2 of Annex I, in point 4.3.1 of Annex III and in point 4.3.1 of Annex V.

Article 4
Flexibility clause

Increases⁹ or decreases of up to EUR 10 million and not exceeding 20% of the contribution set in Article 2, first paragraph, or cumulated changes to the allocations of specific actions not exceeding 20% of that contribution, as well as extensions of the implementation period shall not be considered substantial for the purposes of Article 110(5) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046, provided that these changes do not significantly affect the nature and objectives of the actions.

The authorising officer responsible may apply the changes referred to in the first paragraph. Those changes shall be applied in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and proportionality.

Article 5
Grants

Grants may be awarded without a call for proposals in accordance with the conditions set out in the Annexes. Grants may be awarded to the bodies referred to in point 4.3.1 of Annex II and point 4.3.1 of Annex IV.

⁹These changes can come from external assigned revenue made available after the adoption of the financing Decision.

Article 6
Eligibility for Union funding

The eligibility criteria formulated in Commission Notice Nr. 2013/C-205/05 (OJEU C-205 of 19.07.2013) shall apply to the implementing modalities linked to this annual action plan.

Done at Brussels, 3.11.2023

*For the Commission
Olivér VÁRHELYI
Member of the Commission*