

Dear High Representative Federica Mogherini,

Dear Commissioner Johannes Hahn,

Following the Southern Neighbourhood Regional Forum in Jordan on 26-27 April 2016, we, civil society members of the Core Advisory Group, wish to express our appreciation of the EU's initiative to take decisive steps forward towards a regional dialogue with civil society.

The Civil Society Forum - Neighbourhood South, initiated by Commissioner Füle in 2014, is an opportunity for civil society to air its concerns and ambitions, and to strengthen a much-needed process of dialogue since the space for civil society is shrinking in most countries of the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, which, for many organisations, constitutes not only a threat to their scope for activity but also to their mere existence. Moreover, the spaces for dialogue on equal terms between the civil society organisations in the whole of the EuroMed region need to be reinvigorated. The Forum can be a unique, crucial opportunity to address this situation, including the security of those being at risk.

The EU is founded on the basis of common values of respect for human rights and democratic principles and its foreign policy is guided by those values and the promotion of these. Furthermore, the EU is a leading global player on trade policies, policies related to economic and social development, mainly the newly adopted agenda 2030, aid paradigms, migration and refugees, climate change, security matters, etc. We also believe that the forthcoming forum is interested in debating "the EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy" to be presented to the parliament by June 2016. These policies have important impacts on the societies in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood and in the EU itself, and they are of primary concern to civil society organisations.

We hope Commissioner Hahn will share CSOs recommendations from Brussels forum with his peers at the upcoming UFM ministerial meeting on regional cooperation to be held on 3rd of June in Jordan.

We therefore look forward to a firm commitment by the EU at the upcoming 26-27 May 2016 Civil Society Forum - Neighbourhood South, that frank and open exchanges on policy matters such as those mentioned above, including youth inclusiveness, will be at the heart of the future regional dialogue between the EU and civil society.

We also look forward to a commitment by the EU to hand over, in the near future, the organisation of the civil society part of the dialogue to civil society actors, ensuring ownership to the South, that are selected according to their independence, their adherence to human rights values and democratic principles and to their track record in key policy areas in and for the region. A main task of these would be to establish clear, inclusive and transparent criteria for participation in the dialogue.

We are convinced that once these basic principles for the regional dialogue are confirmed, the process will take important steps forward. Hence, the crux of the matter at this stage is that priority is given to policy matters. Technical and administrative aspects should be addressed thereafter in a second stage in coordination with the EU Institutions' services, and aimed at closely supporting the policy dialogues.

We believe that this structured process of dialogue will serve as an example to national and local governments in the region which are often reluctant to engage with civil society. This can be the basis for a significant boost for the human rights and democracy agenda in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood.

We look forward to hearing from you, and meeting with you, at the Civil Society - Southern Neighbourhood Forum.

Yours sincerely,

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