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FOLLOW UP MEETING ON IPA 2008 SERBIA FUNDING PLAN

Following the conference CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE: BUILDING EUROPE TOGETHER, held in Brussels on April 17&18, 2008, the EC Delegation to the Republic of Serbia organized June 12, 2008 a consultation on IPA 2008 Program with the Civil Society Organizations in Belgrade.

Representatives of a wide range of Nongovernmental (NGO) and other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) assembled on the EC Delegation's premises to hear EC representatives who had come to Belgrade to present the civil society segment of the IPA scheme and discuss it with prospective beneficiaries in Serbia. The ***List of Multi-beneficiary projects under the IPA-Transition Assistance and Institution Building Component for 2008***, presented at the Brussels Conference, served as the framework for the discussion.

Following is an overview of remarks and comments made during the Belgrade consultation:

1. The participating NGOs underlined that they have not had any substantial contact and communication (meetings, discussions, sustained correspondence) with the EC Delegation in Belgrade or any other EC representative body, that could lead to the definition and priority setting regarding the funding plan for 2008. NGOs openly asked whether it is possible that future communication be upgraded to a level that would lead to more informed and better focused policy decisions and priorities setting for future (2009-2012) IPA plans. They presented proposals regarding new channels of communication to be established between EC Delegation Belgrade and EC representatives and representatives of Serbian civil society, and human rights organizations in particular. (especially emphasized by: YUCOM, YIHR, EPUS)
2. Serbian NGOs expressed the view that the civil sector should be widely consulted in setting the IPA priorities in different areas of interest, not just in CS related areas. It is well known that NGOs have highly skilled professionals in different areas. These experts, who





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also have ample experience in their own country and other transition societies, are highly motivated and daily involved in different issues of IPA interest, and could be of help in defining future general strategies, policies, and assessments. (YUCOM, FOS)

3. Serbian CSOs expressed comments on the plans to distribute IPA funds through a decentralized system, that is, through government agencies and bodies. They are concerned that the political arbitrariness and the high level of corruption in government structures do not represent a good environment for this way of distributing and handling the funds. This is especially important having in mind the past experience with IPA 2007 handling by the agencies of the past government, both in terms of finances and its politics: NGOs that were politically close to governmental parties were favored in the process, while NGOs critical toward the government policies had not even been invited to participate in the grant proposal contests. The NGOs propose that a new system of wide public control, or internal control by the EC should be installed if decentralization of the distribution of funds is to be continued. (YUCOM, YIHR, EPUS)
4. The insistence on a "partnership" between government and governmental agencies with *selected* NGOs in realization of proposed projects has proved to be inefficient and not beneficiary in Serbia during the past two governments' tenures. Government bodies have either refused to cooperate with NGOs critical toward them (such as human rights defenders or NGOs dealing with transitional justice), or favored and insisted on cooperation and funding of their own (governmental) NGOs, or have, even if open to cooperation on politically insensitive issues (like rights of the handicapped), been utterly inefficient. (YUCOM, EPUS, FOS, Center for Independent Living Serbia)
5. There is a belief that is discussed frequently – including at the Brussels Conference - that, in an environment of undeveloped relations between the government and the CS, as is in the case of Serbia, a category of NGOs dealing with politically sensitive issues (transitional justice, human and minority rights) should be treated differently by the EC and EC representatives on the ground. Being targeted by official structures hostile to modernization and accelerated democratization of the society, these organizations deserve a different approach and additional support. The belief was expressed that they should also be consulted separately and taken into special account in the process of policy planning. Such human rights NGOs, human rights defenders (HRDs) and advocates of more consequent policies on transitional justice in general and war crimes in particular, should be made eligible for institutional support, it was argued on this occasion, too.

