

**Statement of the Working Group on European Development Policy on the  
Communication from the Commission to the Council,  
the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on  
“Participation of Non-State Actors in EC Development Policy”  
(passed on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2002 – Com/2002) 598 final)**

## **1. Introduction**

In November 2002, the European Commission published the communication on “Participation of Non-State Actors in EC Development Policy”, which it had long before announced. VENRO explicitly welcomes that the communication attributes a special status to the enhancement and participation of civil society organisations in the formulation and implementation of the European Commission’s development policy.

However, it is disappointing that precisely this document, which defines ways and means of enhancing civil society, should have been prepared without consulting civil society in advance and that, also for this reason, it should bear severe shortcomings at different levels.

The following critical items relate to the development process of the document and to development practice.

## **2. Critical items**

### **2.1 Insufficient consultation of civil society organisations from the North and the South**

As already mentioned, it is deplorable that there was no dialogue with the NGOs on the communication’s contents during the two years it was being prepared in. The recommendations formulated in the June 2002 statement of the NGO Liaison Committee titled “The Role of Civil Society in the EU’s Development Policy” are not considered in the Commission’s communication.

It is equally deplorable that no consultation took place with civil society organisations from the South on this communication, which is, after all, aimed at ensuring “an adequate level of consultation and participation for all partner countries”.

A document or a strategy aiming at integrating civil society organisations into the European Commission’s development policy presupposes that they have already been involved in the development phase of the paper or strategy.

## **2.2 The need for a clear structure and legal foundations for the participation of civil society**

The NGOs are important partners in formulating and implementing the European Commission’s development policy and humanitarian aid. Given the large number of reforms that are currently underway concerning the management of the European Commission’s foreign aid, clear regulations are required for the involvement of civil society organisations in these different processes. The communication issued by the Commission lacks any details of the regulations. This could result in different standards of participation in the various processes.

For example, there was no consultation with civil society organisations on the Eligibility Criteria and financial requirements for the European Development Fund (EDF), which are going to have a considerable impact on the participation of civil society organisations in the South and their access to financial means.

## **2.3 The terminology has to be used consistently**

From VENRO’s angle, the use of the term “non-state actors” in the communication is confusing and misleading.

The term “non-state actors” is defined in a manner that encompasses a broad spectrum of the most different actors, such as NGOs, trade unions, universities and media as well as private-sector associations and company associations. The use of the term “non-state actors” represents a significant alteration in comparison to the use of the term “civil society organisations” in the Commission’s communication on the European Union’s development policy in 2002. There, private sector organisations were not covered. In the course of the text, the specifications given show that only non-profit organisations are meant; even so, the more general term “non-state actors” continues to be used in the text. This is inconsistent.

We therefore request that the term “non-state actors” be omitted in favour of the term “civil society organisation”, which previously met with wide acceptance.

## **2.4 The diversity of the NGOs and the current practices are not sufficiently considered**

The communication gives only insufficient consideration to the diversity within the civil society organisations and the current practices of co-operation between civil society organisations from

the North and the South.

The civil society organisations from the South are divided into the two categories “implementing partners” and “organisations with their own initiatives”. VENRO views this distinction as highly problematic and counterproductive since the exploitation of local Southern civil society organisations as pure “implementing aids” for priorities set by the Commission could be deduced from it.

In its introductory remarks, the communication correctly states that *ownership* of strategies by the partner countries is the key to the success of any development policy. In order to do justice to this basic principle, annual targets are required to constantly raise programme funding in connection with the NGOs’ own initiatives and promote the *capacity building* measures that are necessary to this end.

Furthermore, VENRO rejects the rigid distinctions made civil society organisations as implementing organisations of humanitarian aid and development co-operation on the one hand and operative and lobby NGOs on the other. This myopic approach clashes with the Commission’s valid policy of combining aid, reconstruction and development and with the approach of linking up political aims with practical implementation.

For some years, the civil society organisations of the North have been giving their own role a critical review, both with regard to the implementation of measures and the respective type of intervention. They emphatically advocate partnerships and the participation of local civil society organisations, and hence *capacity building* and organisational support. However, civil society organisations from the North will continue to play a direct role in implementation at operational level. In doing so, they are also supporting the readiness of EU citizens to do something for the development prospects and social justice for the people of the developing countries, thus forming the foundations for the political intentions EU development policy is based on.

## **2.5 Structures must not be detrimental to integration**

The communication places considerable emphasis on the structures of relations the EU Commission maintains with civil society organisations in the South. From the angle of the Commission, an effective structure will enable its delegations to engage in a dialogue with the entirety of the various actors rather than with each individual one.

However, such an approach results in the danger of these structures supporting the respective national government’s delegation and its objectives, and possibly also those of the better informed and better placed citizens, but not those of the majority of the poor, especially the marginalised poor.

This would call poverty alleviation strategies into question that are for the poor, structured bottom-up and aimed at ensuring *ownership* and participation of all civil society actors right from the onset.

The coherence of the procedures and the definition of the development priorities in EU delegation and civil society planning in the context of the country strategy programmes or other EU programmes with bilateral strategies and/or the PRSP of a country have to be ensured at any

time.

## **2.6 Access to funds ought to be addressed**

The communication does not give due consideration to the procedures that are necessary for civil society organisations to gain direct access to the Commission's financial support. Neither does it provide any framework for the Commission's various finance instruments in accordance with the rationalisation of the budget lines that are accessible to civil society organisations of the South.

The provision made in the Cotonou Agreement that up to 15% of the EDF be made available to *capacity building* of civil society actors has to be referred to in the communication.

## **3. VENRO's conclusions and demands**

VENRO urgently requests the Council and the European Parliament that this communication, which has far-reaching consequences, be thoroughly re-assessed with regard to the critical items referred to above since it is to serve as the backbone of future NGO involvement as well as the participation of civil society organisations in an improved development process.

In this context, the following detailed demands ought to be considered:

- ✦ The term “non-state actors” should be omitted in favour of the term “civil society organisations”, which previously met with wide acceptance.
- ✦ The Council and the European Parliament ought to request the Commission to develop an action plan in which, in particular, details are given on how NGO participation in the national strategies and the forthcoming half-time assessments of the country strategies is to be promoted.
- ✦ The role of the European organisations of civil society as partners of development co-operation has to be accepted and appropriately defined.
- ✦ The participation of grassroots-level organisations of civil society reaching the most needy and the marginalised groups in the societies of the South has to be ensured.
- ✦ The conclusions of the Council ought to set a clear structure so that civil society organisations can participate in the various development policy processes.
- ✦ Legal foundations ought to be adopted for participation in the new EU Constitutional Contract the draft version of which is being prepared in the framework of the Convention.
- ✦ The provision made in the Cotonou Agreement that up to 15% of the EDF be available to *capacity building* of civil society actors must be referred to in the communication.

- ↪ The implementation of the guidelines in the communication and the action plan for the integration of civil society has to be re-assessed in close co-operation with civil society organisations in the North and the South.

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VENRO is a voluntary association of around 100 German non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating as private or church executing agencies of development co-operation, emergency relief and development education, public relations and lobbying activities.