**CONCEPT NOTE: Civil Society Forum Neighbourhood South** (**4th Edition**)**:** **10-12 July 2017, Brussels**

**Background and previous editions of the Forum**

In response to the Arab uprisings and then to the various causes of instability in the region, EU institutions and Member States acknowledged the need to engage more strategically in dialogues with stakeholders in the Southern Neighbourhood (beyond and in complementarity with formal bilateral relations). This is also reflected in the recently adopted *EU Global Strategy* which calls for a stronger engagement with Civil Society in partner countries, the *revised European Neighbourhood Policy*, and the EU 2012 Communication ***The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations*.**

Since its launch in 2013, the **annual Forum**, as part of this consultative process aiming at creating mechanisms for dialogue between Civil Society and the EU in the Southern Neighbourhood, has been a central event. To date, three editions have taken place: in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The Fora provided opportunities for CSOs to present recommendations to the EU and to exchange ideas with political leaders such as Commissioner Hahn, and previously Füle, President Schulz (European Parliament), and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Mogherini.

**CS FORUM 2017**

Building on the dialogues and recommendations which emerged from the previous editions of the Forum, the 2017 Forum will look at progress made in the four areas identified (Migration and Mobility, Human Rights and Governance, Reducing Inequalities, Resilience and Security), and identify ways forward to tackle these and other emerging challenges and opportunities, under the umbrella theme of **“resilience and youth”**.

The 2017 edition of the Forum, planned in Brussels on 10 -12 July, will build on the regional preparatory seminars which took place in Tunis on 25-27 April; It will be attended by CSOs from the Southern Neighbourhood and the EU, as well as a wide range of actors from the EU institutions (European Commission: DG NEAR and DEVCO, EEAS, Economic and Social Committee, and Committee of the Regions), and other international organisations, regional entities, national and local authorities, academia, social actors, and media (about 160 participants in total).

**Objectives and issues at stake for the 2017 - Civil Society Forum South**

Consistent with the EU Global Strategy, the 2017 Forum will be shaped under the umbrella theme of **resilience** with sessions articulated around a number of key issues which have been identified by civil society: (1) **security and resilience**, (2) **human rights**, (3) **migration**, (4) **employability and social business.**

This space for dialogue should allow the exchange of views and sharing of experiences between stakeholders from the North and the South, and lead to an enhanced partnership between CSOs from the Southern Neighbourhood and the EU institutions.

The **preparatory meetings held in Tunis end of April** have allowed participants to discuss progress made against commitments and recommendations of the 2016 forum, and given space for civil society representatives to agree positions on the **priorities for discussion in Brussels**. The preparatory meetings have been prepared for, and facilitated by experts in each of the four priority areas, who will also ensure continuity with the main Forum in Brussels[[1]](#footnote-1).

The **2017 Civil Society South Forum** will revisit the four priorities and allow space for dialogue with political leadership, senior management and practitioners from the EU. As last year, the Forum will develop recommendations which will have mutual ownership by civil society and the EU, and which will form the basis for ongoing structured dialogue into 2018, facilitated by the new regional hub in preparation.

SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

Around 160 participants will be invited, amongst which **80 from the Southern Neighbourhood region**, distributed between the 4 thematic groups; a fair balance between the 10 countries from the South Neighbourhood will be searched for, as well as a fair representation of women and youth.

Propositions of participants will be made by: the 4 thematic experts, the members of the SAG and the IISG. The final selection of participants will be made by the organisational team, ensuring geographical, thematic, and gender balance. A first list of identified participants will be sent to EU Delegations[[2]](#footnote-2) from the South Neighbourhood (Task Managers in charge of Civil Society) for information/consultation and possible inputs[[3]](#footnote-3).

SELECTING THEMATICS / SUB-THEMATICS

On the ground of the discussions that took place in Tunis, the 4 thematic experts will identify a **set of priority recommendations/issues to be channelled to the EU representatives in Brussels** in July. These recommendations will cover both policy and operational levels; they will be addressed not only to the EU institutions, but also to CSOs. The interlocutors/key speakers to intervene in the Forum will be identified depending on the issues/recommendations to be raised; a balance should be looked for between stakeholders acting at policy/operational level[[4]](#footnote-4). CoTes will be involved in the identification of possible speakers/interlocutors for the dialogue, and consulted on the relevant issues to be raised.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE SESSIONS

In order to ensure an adequate/even level of information of the participants to the Forum, thematic sessions will start with a one hour plenary session by high level officials, focusing on EU policies in the relevant field – a short dialogue in plenary (30 minutes max.) will then follow; more technical issues will then be treated in working groups, involving the concerned stakeholders (CSOs from South and North, and EU officials: Task Managers and Geo Desks from the EC, EEAS and EU Delegations; EC line DGs and CoTes will be involved whenever relevant). The objectives of the working sessions will be to come up with relevant and concrete recommendations for an enhanced partnership between CSOs and the EU.

1. On the basis of the discussions held in Tunis, working documents will be elaborated by the thematic experts – in coordination with the SAG and the IISG. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Letter to be sent to HoD. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. N.B. The involvement of EUDs is crucial not only for the preparation of the Forum (identification and selection of participants), but also for its the follow-up, and the implementation of decisions taken at field level. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Also, a balance should be found between participants/CSOs acting mainly as advocacy leaders / CSOs/actors active at field level (interested by cooperation/operational aspects). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)