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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Civil Society Dialogue between the EU and Candidate Countries**

{SEC(2005) 891}

## 1. WHY A “CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE” BETWEEN THE EU AND CANDIDATE COUNTRIES?

### 1.1. Introduction

The enlargement of the European Union to ten new member States on 1 May 2004 further strengthened the unity of the European continent and enhanced peace, stability and security. However, one of the lessons that can be drawn from the previous enlargement is that citizens in EU Member States were not sufficiently informed nor prepared. Any future enlargement of the EU needs to be supported by a strong, deep and sustained dialogue between the societies of the candidate countries and in the EU member States, as well as with the EU institutions. This would help to bridge the information gap, achieve better mutual knowledge and bring citizens and different cultures, political and economic systems closer together, thus ensuring a stronger awareness of the opportunities as well as the challenges of future accessions.

### 1.2. The dialogue relating to future enlargement

In this context, in October 2004, the Commission’s recommendation on Turkey’s progress towards accession<sup>1</sup> proposed the development of a dialogue between EU Member States and Turkey, “*where concerns and perceptions can be discussed in a frank and open manner. It noted that “Civil society should play the most important role in this dialogue, which should be facilitated by the EU.”*

The Commission recognised that in the case of Turkey, a dialogue aiming at improving mutual knowledge and encouraging a debate on perceptions regarding society and political issues on both sides is particularly necessary. Public opinion in Turkey is strongly supportive of EU membership, but information on the history, the functioning, rules and policies of the European Union remains poor. Within the EU, public opinion is divided on the issue, with differences of opinion within and between Member States. The lively debate that has been ongoing in this respect focuses on a number of different themes, ranging from questions concerning culture and religion to those of a more practical nature. On the one hand it has been argued that the Turkish State and society have values and practices incompatible with EU standards. On the other hand Turkey has been described as a country with a different cultural background adhering to democratic principles in the same manner as EU Member States. The expected impact of Turkish accession related to the country’s size, income, and geographical location is also widely debated<sup>2</sup>.

On 17 December 2004 the European Council endorsed the European Commission recommendation and broadened its scope by stipulating that “*parallel to accession negotiations, the Union will engage with every candidate state in an intensive political and*

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Recommendation of the European Commission on Turkey’s progress towards accession - COM(2004) 656. As concluded by the 17 December 2004 European Council, accession negotiations with Turkey will start on 3 October 2005, once it has signed the protocol on the adaptation of the Ankara agreement and provided that it brings into force six pieces of legislation identified by the Commission (Brussels European Council, 16/17 December 2004. Presidency Conclusions 17/12/2004 Nr: 16238/1/04 Rev1).

<sup>2</sup> On this aspect, see also Commission Staff Working Document, Issues arising from Turkey’s Membership perspective - SEC(2004) 1202.

*cultural dialogue*<sup>3</sup>. *With the aim of enhancing mutual understanding by bringing people together, this inclusive dialogue also will involve civil society.*”

The civil society dialogue<sup>4</sup> will thus concern Croatia as well<sup>5</sup>, although the dialogue with regard to Croatia may be of a somewhat different nature from that on Turkey. The dialogue with Croatia aims more towards enhancing public debate in Croatia on EU membership, especially leading to a deeper understanding and acceptance of EU values and standards. In addition to more general political issues, this dialogue is particularly important in certain areas of the EU acquis such as, for example, the environment, food safety and consumer protection, as well as the obligations in the field of external assistance.

In the Thessalonica European Council in June 2003, the EU has emphasised that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union. Depending on each country’s progress in complying with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the stabilisation and association process, the European Council might decide, on the basis of an opinion of the Commission, on the opening of accession negotiations. In that context, a number of the ongoing and future activities envisaged for current candidate countries may also be introduced for other Western Balkan countries as appropriate.

The main objective of the civil society dialogue to be developed with Turkey and Croatia is to better inform public opinions from the EU and candidate countries, by addressing the opportunities as well as the challenges posed by future enlargement. With reference to Turkey, the dialogue will encourage a discussion on perceptions regarding everyday culture and values expressed by the society and the State on both sides. To achieve these objectives, the dialogue will increase bilateral exchanges, thereby contributing to the increased participation of civil society in the political, cultural and economic development of the candidate countries concerned. It will thus support the further development of a lively and vibrant civil society in the candidate countries, which is key to the consolidation of human rights and democracy, in line with the political criteria for accession.

In short, the objectives of the civil society dialogue can be summarised as follows:

- strengthen contacts and mutual exchange of experience between all sectors of civil society in the member States and Candidate countries;

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<sup>3</sup> A political dialogue with Turkey takes place in the framework of the regular monitoring of the political criteria, consisting in the permanent follow up of Turkey’s progress towards compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria related to democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and minorities. The Commission has regular meetings with the Turkish authorities on this subject.

<sup>4</sup> In the Commission’s recommendation what will be referred to as the “civil society dialogue” in this document was in fact the third pillar of a three-pillar policy vis-à-vis Turkey. The first pillar focused on reinforcing the political reform process in Turkey, the second pillar consisted of conducting negotiations under a revised methodological approach and the third pillar was about a EU-Turkey dialogue.

<sup>5</sup> Following the decision of the European Council of 17 and 18 June 2004 that Croatia was a candidate country, the European Council of 16 and 17 December 2004 decided that accession negotiations would be opened on 17 March 2005 provided that there was full cooperation with the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (ICTY). However, in the absence of full cooperation, the start of negotiations was postponed by the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 16 March 2005 until the Council can confirm that Croatia is fully cooperating with ICTY.

- ensure a better knowledge and understanding of the candidate countries concerned within the European Union, including their history and their culture, thus allowing for a better awareness of the opportunities and challenges of future enlargement;
- ensure a better knowledge and understanding of the European Union within the candidate countries, including the values on which it is founded, its functioning and its policies.

### **1.3. Definition of civil society**

Although the concept of civil society can be defined in many ways, the broadest and the most inclusive definition possible will be employed by the civil society dialogue<sup>6</sup>. Civil society would thus include: the labour-market actors, i.e. the social partners (trade unions and employers federations); organisations representing social and economic players at large (consumer organisations for instance.); non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations, i.e. organisations at grassroots level through which citizens participate in local and municipal life (e.g. youth or family associations); religious communities and media.

All society structures outside of government and public administration, whether based on a voluntary or mandatory membership (this is the case for Chambers of Commerce in certain countries, for instance) are encouraged to participate in the dialogue. Local communities and municipalities will be included in the dialogue, while the education, media and culture sectors are also expected to play a key role. Finally, as explained below, the dialogue includes exchanges between opinion leaders from national and European institutions.

This Communication sets out a policy framework as regards the development of a civil society dialogue between the EU and candidate countries. It will first focus on strengthening some ongoing activities, carried out both at national and EU level. It will then propose new activities aimed at developing the dialogue further.

## **2. STRENGTHENING ONGOING ACTIVITIES**

### **2.1. Croatia**

Civil society in Croatia has, naturally, developed within its own particular context. The EU has been working with Croatian civil society in the context of its specific policy towards the Western Balkans - the Stabilisation and Association process. This civil society dialogue involves several actors including the parliament, media, educational institutions, minorities, professional organisations and various other NGOs. This dialogue has been reinforced following the entry into force of the EU-Croatia Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) on 1 February 2005. For example, the first EU-Croatia Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting took place in Zagreb on 3-4 March 2005.

Furthermore, the civil society dialogue benefits from the increasing participation of Croatia in Community programmes, such as such as the 6th Framework Programme for RTD, Youth, Gender Equality, Tempus, Employment, Life-Third Countries programme, which are

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<sup>6</sup> The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) defines civil society organisations as “*all organisational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens*”.

facilitated by the SAA as well as pre-accession assistance. Moreover, with the full association of Croatia to the 6th Framework Programme as of 1 January 2006 (together with an initial action plan), Croatia will have the same status as Member States in the field of Research and Technological Development. This will represent a unique opportunity to develop the integration of the Croatian scientific civil society in the EU's Research Area. Under the Tempus programme the Commission makes available an annual budget of € 4 million to encourage projects between EU and Croatian higher education institutions which also reach out to civil society actors. Additionally, a number of Member States are also engaging in and promoting bilateral cultural and educational contacts and activities as well as other forms of cooperation between themselves and Croatia.

## **2.2. Turkey**

Turkey has a history of close political and economic ties with the European institutions dating back to the signature of an Association Agreement in 1963, which subsequently led to the establishment of a Customs Union in 1995. Close bilateral interaction, at institutional but also at grass-root level, has taken place since the early sixties and has intensified since the official recognition of Turkey as a candidate country in 1999. As shown below, national and European institutions have developed a number of bilateral activities with Turkey which fall under the scope of the civil society dialogue. These activities will need to be continued, strengthened, and in some cases streamlined and better promoted.

### **2.2.1. National public institutions**

#### *2.2.1.1. Bilateral relations*

Member States are quite active in promoting mutual exchanges, including mobility programmes, scholarships, media development, financial support to NGO development, exchanges between professional organisations, school links and so on. In addition, cultural relations between Member States and Turkey are particularly intense and in some cases benefit from the establishment in Turkey of cultural institutes linked to Member States. The Turkish government has also been active in promoting cultural events, public relations activities and parliamentary contacts. It is expected that all these activities will continue, intensify and diversify in the future, thus furthering the development of the civil society dialogue.

#### *2.2.1.2. Turkish communities in Members States*

Member States and the Turkish authorities, in co-operation with NGOs and civil society organisations, have also been active in facilitating the integration of Turkish communities in their host countries. Turkish nationals constitute by far the largest group of third-country nationals in the EU, and the presence of such communities helps shape Turkey's image in the EU<sup>7</sup>. Activities should be further reinforced in this area, to encourage the Turkish communities living in Member States to participate more actively in the EU-Turkey dialogue. Member States should continue to have a leading role in implementing projects, in co-

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<sup>7</sup> Commission Staff Working Document, Issues arising from Turkey's Membership perspective, cited: "a total of about 3 million Turkish nationals officially registered in the EU-15 in 2002. The main recipient countries are Germany (77.8% of those migrant workers, or 2.3 million persons), France (7.9%, or 230 000 persons), Austria (4.7%, 135 000 persons) and the Netherlands (4.4%, or 128 000 persons)".

operation with the broadest array of partners ranging from local associations to prominent figures of Turkish origin in host countries, to academic experts.

### **2.2.2. Parliaments, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Committee of the Regions (CoR)**

Inter-parliamentary relations, contacts involving political parties and sustained personal contacts between members of parliaments contribute to promoting mutual understanding, and will represent a key dimension of the civil society dialogue. The European Parliament and its Turkish counterpart have had a crucial role in developing a dialogue. In particular, the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee has offered for many years a platform for exchanges between elected members of both sides. Fruitful exchanges have also taken place between national parliaments. It is expected that activities of this kind will increase. Moreover, an enhanced programme of internships of Turkish parliamentary assistants in the parliaments of the Member States and in the European Parliament should be envisaged. Finally, exchanges between youth and women branches of Turkish and EU political parties should be encouraged.

EU institutions such as the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) have been active in establishing links with Turkey. Already ten years ago the EESC set up a Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Turkey, with the aim of promoting dialogue and co-operation between economic and social interest groups from both sides. The JCC clearly contributes to the dialogue between civil societies, and envisages organising specific initiatives to develop this further. A similar role should be played by the Committee of the Regions, in particular as concerns the promotion of a dialogue between local communities in Turkey and in Member States.

### **2.2.3. EU-Funded ongoing activities**

#### *2.2.3.1. Development of civil society*

In the past few years, Turkey has experienced an impressive development of civil society. NGOs covering a broad range of issues have grown increasingly vocal and have been struggling to become social and political centres of influence. Since 2001, the EU has implemented a Civil Society Development Programme, a sizeable component of which is aimed at strengthening the development of NGOs in Turkey<sup>8</sup>. In addition, the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights has focused on Turkey and supported NGOs through micro and macro-projects. The pre-accession financial assistance programme for Turkey provided by the EU will continue to make the strengthening of freedom of association and the development of civil society a priority in the future programming exercises. For 2005 € 8 million are earmarked in this area.

#### *2.2.3.2. Social dialogue, employment and social affairs*

Social partners and social NGOs play a key role in the elaboration and implementation of EU legislation in the areas of labour law, health and safety at work, gender equality and non-

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<sup>8</sup> In this framework, for example, a civil society development centre (CSDC) was set up to provide support and assistance to NGOs, and several micro-project programmes were funded, such as the Local Civic Initiative and the Greek-Turkish Civic Dialogue.

discrimination<sup>9</sup>. They are also active in designing, implementing and monitoring employment, social inclusion and social protection strategies and policies. The Commission has as a result always paid great attention to developing contacts with social partners and civil society organisations involved in social fields in Turkey, in particular with a view to bringing them closer to EU standards and ensuring full respect for trade union rights as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The Commission will continue its policy of establishing close links and networking activities with such organisations in Turkey. Furthermore, it will strengthen Turkish participation in Community programmes in this area. Turkey already participates in the Community programmes dedicated to gender equality, anti-discrimination, combating social exclusion and Employment Incentive Measures. In this context Turkey should fully participate in all areas of transnational co-operation, thereby allowing Turkish entities to respond directly to open calls for proposals and fostering the civil society dialogue potential of the programmes. Pre-accession funds should be allocated to finance the related increase of Turkey's financial contribution.

#### 2.2.3.3. *Community programmes Socrates, Youth, Leonardo da Vinci*

Activities carried out in the area of training and education are probably the most suitable to enhance citizens' links and increase mutual knowledge and understanding. Since April 2004 Turkey has participated as full member in Community programmes *Socrates*, *Youth* and *Leonardo da Vinci*. The *Socrates* programme strengthens the European dimension in education through transnational projects and promotion of staff and learner mobility throughout the participating countries at all levels of education (school, higher and adult education). The *Youth* programme gives the opportunity to young people, youth workers and youth organisations to develop transnational exchanges and non-formal educational activities. Finally, the *Leonardo da Vinci* vocational training programme promotes transnational co-operation between institutional players in vocational training, in an effort to increase mobility, to foster innovation and to improve the quality of training.

The significant number of applications and participants during 2004 and the considerable increase of applications further to the 2005 call for proposals show that the Turkish public has great expectations as regards these programmes. It was estimated that a total number of 9 000 participants took part in the three programmes during the first year. The National Turkish Agency expects these figures to double by 2006. These programmes have great relevance and potential in Turkey, a country of 17 million students. Furthermore, a lot remains to be done to ensure reciprocity, as in 2004 visiting students to Turkey from other countries remained limited in number. The overall budget allocation for Turkey's participation in the three programmes amounts to approximately € 30 million in 2005 (almost 2/3 of which provided as pre-accession Community support and 1/3 by the Turkish national budget). The Commission will encourage an enhanced Turkish participation in the programmes for example by examining the possibility to provide additional funding from the pre-accession funds to complement the programme grants.

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<sup>9</sup> Social dialogue is an integral part of the EU acquis in the social area and social partners have a privileged role in the legislative process at EU level through the compulsory consultation process foreseen in Article 138 of the Treaty and the possibility of concluding agreements which can be implemented through Council Directives. Moreover, social partners and civil society organisations are also key actors in the co-ordination of policies in the areas of employment, social inclusion and social protection.

#### *2.2.3.4. Other ongoing activities in the academic area*

The Jean Monnet Scholarship programme, managed by the EC delegation in Ankara, funds post-graduate scholarships aimed at improving the expertise of Turkish young people in the area of European integration and at strengthening bonds between Turkish and EU citizens. The programme has been running for approximately 15 years and has allowed several hundred Turkish scholars to get acquainted with issues related to European integration and civilization. It also has played a role in strengthening the links between EU and Turkish academic institutions. In the future the Commission will strengthen the programme by increasing its budget allocation. Other related initiatives will be considered, such as the establishment of a Jean Monnet Alumni Association and the extension of the programme to EU applications for study in Turkey.

The Jean Monnet Action “European Integration in University Studies”, managed by the European Commission (DG Education and Culture), is an initiative open to Member and non Member States. It aims to stimulate academic excellence in the field of European integration studies and foster academic reflection on current European integration policy priorities. The initiative supports high-level conferences and thematic groups by bringing together Jean Monnet professors, policy-makers and civil society. Currently, there are 7 Jean Monnet Chairs and 26 Jean Monnet Modules or Courses at Turkish universities. As a way to enhance the dialogue on issues concerning European integration between the Turkish academic world and the academics of the European Union, the European Commission invites further participation of Turkish universities.

#### *2.2.3.5. Human Resources and Mobility Actions in Research (Marie Curie Actions)*

Within the framework of Turkey's full association with the Framework Programmes for Research, Technological development and demonstration, the Marie Curie Actions offer a coherent set of structured mobility schemes for researchers geared to the development and transfer of research competencies, the consolidation and widening of career prospects for researchers at all stages and the promotion of excellence in European research.

### **3. INTRODUCING NEW ACTIVITIES**

The new activities outlined below are aimed at complementing the ongoing ones. However, the development of the civil society dialogue is a long term process which will accompany accession negotiations in the future. Consequently its precise scope cannot be entirely defined in advance, as it is bound to evolve in line with to the needs and suggestions expressed by civil society.

In all activities, the European Commission will play a role by facilitating and supporting projects taking place within the framework of the civil society dialogue. It will also help promote the results of the projects. However, it will be up to the actors of civil society to take the initiative, select specific themes to be developed and play an active role in conducting the dialogue.

#### **3.1. Croatia**

Civil society dialogue with Croatia will evolve in light of a number of factors, for example as EU-Croatia relations deepen, as regional co-operation increases and as reconciliation with the

region further develops. A number of the ongoing and future activities, outlined in more detail for Turkey, may also be introduced or further developed with Croatia, as appropriate. For example, it would be of benefit if the civil society dialogue with Croatia further develops in fields related more directly to the practical impact of the EU accession process. This should generate greater understanding of the benefits and challenges of EU integration, as well as encourage a debate on the EU's fundamental values. To this end, contacts between economic and social partners, NGOs, professional and business organisations and the media in the EU and in Croatia should be encouraged, as well as the involvement of other important civil society actors such as religious communities.

## **3.2. Turkey**

### **3.2.1. NGOs, social partners and professional organisations**

#### *3.2.1.1. Long-term partnerships*

Building on the experience acquired to help develop civil society in Turkey, the Commission will establish a dedicated civil society dialogue grant scheme, with the objective of providing NGOs and other civil society organisations with the necessary assistance to co-finance bilateral exchange projects with EU counterparts aimed at improving mutual knowledge and ensuring collaboration, namely through exchanges of best practices.

Such increased international exposure should also be aimed at helping Turkish NGOs grow stronger and participate more actively in EU debates. Organisations active in such crucial areas as youth, gender-equality, environment, consumer rights, cultural rights, civil and human rights, and combating social exclusion and discrimination of all kinds, should be particularly encouraged to establish a dialogue with their EU counterparts. Priority will be given to projects aimed at establishing long-term, sustainable relations between EU and Turkish NGO groupings, where applicable. Furthermore, efforts will be made to have the circle of project developers and partners include those NGOs based in remote areas, or that have been scarcely involved in EU-funded projects thus far.

The civil society dialogue will also extensively involve the business community, professional organisations and social partners from both sides. In this regard, the Commission will support long-term partnerships between Turkish organisations and their EU counterparts. Partnerships will also be encouraged between sectoral organisations from both sides and between Turkish national organisations and their partners based in EU Member States. Exchanges between EU and Turkish counterparts should particularly be developed in areas such as the agriculture sector, the judiciary, lawyers and their respective associations, as well as equality bodies.

#### *3.2.1.2. Gender-equality*

Through close links between women's rights and equal opportunities organisations in the EU and in Turkey, the civil society dialogue will contribute to the objectives of strengthening the position and participation of women in all aspects of Turkish society, as well as tackling other problems, such as domestic violence, as highlighted in the recommendations of the recent European Parliament report on the role of women in Turkey in social, economic and political activities<sup>10</sup>. Particular consideration will have to be given to women's representation in the

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<sup>10</sup> European Parliament Draft Report (A6-0175/2005) final.

labour market, their representation in political decision making, whether on national level or on regional and local level. The Commission will seek to include gender equality and the equal opportunity dimension in all activities covered in this communication.

### **3.2.2. Business Council EU-Turkey**

During past negotiations, the business sector has played a crucial role, by developing bilateral trade and investment flows, facilitating exchanges and increasing mutual knowledge. The possibility will be investigated of setting up a Euro-Turkey Business Council, with comparison made to similar successful projects carried out in Central European candidate countries during accession negotiations. This Council could operate as a forum of the main EU companies active in Turkey and their Turkish counterparts, with a view to acting as a link between European institutions and the local business associations in the interest of further developing trade and investments.

### **3.2.3. Local communities and town-twinning**

Transnational co-operation between local communities is a major factor to strengthen peace, stability and democracy. The concept of twinning between local municipalities has strongly developed in Europe since the end of the Second World War, as means of overcoming past grievances between neighbouring countries, bringing people together and strengthening mutual ties. Almost 13 000 municipalities in the EU, including in new Member States, have established twinning arrangements so far.

As far as Turkey is concerned, while a number of town-twinning arrangements with EU cities have come about in recent years, a general framework to boost the opportunities to develop further such a fruitful tool of co-operation is lacking. Under the civil society dialogue, the Commission will examine how to support twinning between EU and Turkish cities, with a view to improving their mutual knowledge, developing common projects, organising seminars on topics of common interest, and encouraging participation at grass-roots level. As for other activities covered by this communication, particular efforts will be made to involve local communities from remote and disadvantaged regions.

In particular, the Commission has proposed for the period 2007-2013 a Community programme called "Citizens for Europe", aimed at promoting active European citizenship. It will encourage cooperation between citizens and civil society organisations from different countries. It will emphasise trans-national exchanges, especially between citizens and organisations from current and future Members States. Approximately 40 % of this programme will be devoted to town twinning and citizens projects. Turkey could participate in this programme, in accordance with the general terms and conditions set out in the framework agreement concerning its participation in the Community programmes, its participation being partly financed by the pre-accession funds.

### **3.2.4. Youth, University and professional exchanges**

The Commission will put a strong emphasis on developing exchanges between EU and candidate countries in this area, by strengthening their participation in the relevant ongoing EU exchange programmes, as described above. Furthermore, in view of starting new initiatives in this area, the Commission will open a broad consultation with the University and education sectors both in the EU and Turkey.

In the area of education, the Commission will assess whether the existing mechanisms are sufficient to reach all target groups. For example increased support may be provided to encourage exchange of secondary school pupils, or projects aimed at encouraging the knowledge of mutual history. Other projects to be discussed may include online activities for under 18-year-old pupils, such as participating in on-line EU accession negotiation debates.

The Commission intends to encourage a closer institutional co-operation among Universities based in the EU and in Turkey, in view not only of exchange of experience and development of curricula, but also of setting up common independent academic institutions open to students from both sides. Such institutions should carry out research and teaching activities on EU and Turkish identity, history, culture and civilisation, as well as develop teaching programmes on EU integration. In this respect, the Commission may support the setting up of local branches of graduate and postgraduate highly reputed EU and Turkish academic institutions. Alternatively, the Commission may support increased links of Turkey-based academic institutions focusing on EU studies with similar graduate and postgraduate EU-based similar institutions, in view of creating common Departments or Institutes.

Furthermore, the Commission will encourage direct co-operation between academic institutions in the EU and in Turkey in particular as concerns the subjects of law, economy, social science and history which are relevant to the EU-Turkey dialogue. Academic research and publications carried out jointly by Turkish and EU academics will be supported in all these areas. Organisation of intellectual debates such as seminars, conferences, and workshops will also be supported. Awareness-raising activities aimed at wide dissemination of the research results will be encouraged. Finally, the Commission will assess the possibility of developing a programme of short internships for the exchange of young professionals in various areas.

### **3.2.5. Cultural exchanges**

The development of intercultural exchanges plays a crucial role within the civil society dialogue and will be given priority. Under the new generation of European Horizons and Mosaic programmes, now merged under one single programme and managed by the EC Delegation in Ankara, the Commission will enable cross-border cooperation between Turkish NGOs and their EU partners operating in the cultural and arts sector. This will include for example financing joint workshops and on-line cultural forums. Two different sets of activities can be envisaged: one that is open to children (such as the Turkish-European Children's orchestra already receiving support) and a broader one aimed at adults, ranging from visual arts to the training of the culture sector, from heritage to popular culture.

Furthermore, the Commission will support regular cultural events such as exhibitions, festivals, conferences, exchanges of artists in order to spread knowledge of Turkish arts in the EU and vice versa. In addition, a Euro-Turkey cultural award for the arts will be introduced, and the participation of the Turkish cultural sectors in existing European Community awards will be encouraged. Finally, the Commission will actively encourage Turkish cultural NGOs to access the EU networks and partners and inform them on existing possibilities for crossborder co-operation.

### **3.2.6. Participation in Community Culture and Media programmes**

Turkey does not currently participate in two Community programmes which could provide a key contribution in promoting EU-Turkey mutual relations in two key areas: the Culture 2000

and the MEDIA Plus programmes. Culture 2000 provides grants to co-operation projects in all artistic and cultural fields (performing arts, plastic and visual arts, literature, heritage, cultural history, etc.). MEDIA Plus aims at strengthening the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry with a series of support measures including training initiatives for audiovisual industry professionals, the development of production projects (feature films, television drama, documentaries, animation and new media), as well as the distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works.

The Commission would welcome Turkish participation in the Culture 2000 and its successor programmes, in particular with a view to spurring EU-Turkey intercultural dialogue and mutual knowledge. The Commission also encourages Turkish participation in MEDIA Plus, in particular with a view to catalysing production of television and cinema products with European content. However, the participation by candidate countries in the MEDIA programme is subject, according to its legal basis, to a prior examination of the compatibility of the candidates' national legislation with the Community audiovisual acquis. The Commission has encouraged the Turkish authorities to align its legislation as soon possible, so that it may benefit from the possibilities offered by the MEDIA programme.

### **3.2.7. Language training**

A major hurdle on the way of increased cooperation between Turkish civil society organisations and their EU counterparts, particularly as concerns organisations based in the furthest Turkish provinces, is the lack of knowledge of foreign languages. This problem affects most NGOs, not least in the cultural field, and cuts across all areas covered by this communication. The Commission will therefore support activities aimed at language learning and at the promotion of interpretation and translation into and from Turkish. The Commission will work with Member States' cultural organizations to enable language training, and will identify priority sectors.

### **3.2.8. Encouraging public debates, including on-line**

The Commission will do its utmost to encourage an open public debate with the participation of actors from both sides on the enlargement process, Turkish prospects of accession and all other cultural, political and institutional themes related to the civil society dialogue, with the aim of improving mutual understanding. Key opinion leaders from accession countries and the EU will be invited to take part in multi-media debates taking place in EU Member States. Debates should also involve NGO and grass-roots participants and stimulate wider public interest and dialogue.

The creation of Internet-supported platforms for the development of a virtual debate on topics related to the civil society dialogue will also be encouraged. A Web site providing information on Turkey and the enlargement process, as well as civil society dialogue activities, with links to NGOs, schools, universities, research centres will be set up. Regular "chats" on accession-related topics, with the participation of key actors and other interested parties will be organised regularly.

### **3.2.9. Media**

The continuous work on EU information and communication concerning Turkey will be strengthened and intensified, in particular to raise awareness on the activities of the civil society dialogue carried out in other areas, with priority given to an audio-visual component.

The Commission will support and part finance television programmes introducing various aspects of life and society in Turkey and in EU countries, as well as informing Turkish audiences about the EU, its rules and its policies, aimed at the general public both in the EU and in Turkey, including the Turkish migrant communities in the European Union. Special attention will be devoted to programmes produced by regional and local media groups. Partnership projects between television companies from both sides aimed at producing joint programmes will also be supported.

### **3.2.10. Exchange and awareness-raising of journalists**

A programme of seminars involving EU and Turkish journalists will be established, with a view to giving the opportunity to Turkish and EU journalists to learn more about issues related to Turkish accession, develop an improved mutual understanding, and to provide opportunities for the exchange of best practices.

The programme may be developed with the support of organisations representative of journalists and other non-profit organisations at EU level. However, in order for the training programme to have an increased impact in Member States, the Commission will give priority to the development of direct contacts between professional organisations of journalists from Turkey and from EU Member States, in particular through mutual visits and joint seminars. Two components of this programme may be envisaged, i.e. one aiming at young journalists, and one more focused on high-level regular encounters between leading editors from both sides and prominent policy-making figures in the EU and in the Member States.

### **3.2.11. Religious communities and associations**

As spelled out in the Commission recommendation of October 2004, the civil society dialogue should also focus on religious issues. An open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches and other religious associations or communities and organizations will thus be encouraged, respecting fully their specific identity and contribution.

Since the 1980s the Commission has maintained a dialogue on European integration between churches and religions in accession countries and EU Member States on the one hand and European institutions on the other. A growing number of religious organisations have already appointed representatives in Brussels to carry out this work, who could be instrumental in developing this dimension of the dialogue.

## **4. IMPLEMENTATION MODALITIES**

### **4.1. Advice from leading personalities**

The Commission will conduct regular consultation of leading personalities from the EU and Turkey, chosen on the basis of their expertise in EU-Turkey relations and their involvement in civil society, with the purpose of seeking their advice on making proposals for future actions to be undertaken. Furthermore, such personalities may be invited to take part directly in conferences, seminars and other events in the framework of the civil society dialogue.

### **4.2. Financial support**

In principle, activities proposed in this Communication will be co-financed under the pre-accession assistance budget for the relevant candidate countries, following currently

applicable rules and procedures. In addition, events and activities may be financed by media groups, business associations and social partners, cultural institutions, and public or private institutions more generally. The Commission may endorse such events responding to the objectives of the civil society dialogue. Bilateral and multilateral activities sponsored and financed by the EU and candidate countries' governments will continue and be strengthened in the future.

For EU-funded activities concerning Turkey, the EU will make use of the financial allocation available under the Turkey pre-accession assistance programme, which will increase from € 300 million in 2005 to € 500 million in 2006. The Commission will seek to allocate the necessary funding to the foreseen activities of the civil society dialogue, thereby broadening the share of activities currently funded under the heading of 'political and cultural dialogue' in the planning document for pre-accession financial assistance. It can be tentatively anticipated that 8 to 10% of the total amount yearly available would be needed to finance activities under the civil society dialogue, including participation in Community programmes. As far as the 2006 programming exercise is concerned a total amount of € 40 million is envisaged.

As regards Community programmes, candidate countries provide a contribution to the budget. This contribution is partly covered by the national budget of candidate countries and partly by pre-accession funding. In order to strengthen participation in the ongoing programmes, the Commission will in the future allocate an appropriate share of pre accession support to Candidate countries' participation. In the shorter term, other forms of additional funding may be envisaged. In the case of other programmes in which candidate countries do not currently participate the Commission will encourage them to do so, and will provide support if necessary to ensure a smooth and beneficial functioning of the programmes. For other specific activities, the Commission may also pay direct grants to some beneficiaries, when appropriate, in pursuance of specific objectives under the civil society dialogue and in accordance with the Financial Regulation and its implementing rules.

The Communication Strategy on Enlargement shares with the civil society dialogue the objective of enhancing public debate on future enlargements in the EU and the candidate countries, and will thus support the civil society dialogue in several respects. The communication and information budget allocated to Delegations in candidate countries as well as the PRINCE programme budget for enlargement, targeted to actions within the European Union may be used in this respect.

To manage and implement projects related to the civil society dialogue the Commission will rely on its existing structures and resources, both in Brussels and in the EC Delegations in candidate countries, as well as appropriate bodies in candidate countries. Only if needed, in consideration of future developments, will the possibility of setting up additional specific structures be considered. Existing foundations, aimed at promoting mutual knowledge and cultural exchanges between the EU and other world regions may be considered as examples.

#### **4.3. The visa issue**

Turkish citizens are currently subject to a visa obligation, which may prove to be a bottleneck restricting participation in some of the activities discussed in this Communication, especially if there is a significant increase in demand for visas at relatively short notice. Thus any further streamlining of visa procedures would be welcome as regards participants in the civil society dialogue. In order to ensure that the civil society dialogue functions smoothly, the full co-

operation of the Member States (who are responsible for issuing visas) will be necessary to ensure that participants are able to obtain visas in a timely fashion and without being required to submit excessive supporting documentation.

## **5. MONITORING AND REPORTING**

The present Communication is only a first step on the way to strengthening a dialogue between civil societies in Turkey and Croatia and in the EU. As the dialogue will proceed in parallel with accession negotiations, the needs and objectives will evolve over time, and may require re-orientation.

The Commission will ensure a regular follow up on the activities developed and results achieved. The regular reports on Turkey, published on a yearly basis, will feature a special section on the civil society dialogue, covering the main activities and results. In addition, a dedicated section within the EU Web-supported portal Europa will be devoted to the dissemination of information on ongoing projects and on initiatives related to the civil society dialogue.

Besides broad polls investigating on the popular support towards EU enlargement, there is a lack of factual information in particular as concerns EU-Turkey cultural relations and mutual perceptions. To bridge this gap, the Commission will establish a more effective regular monitoring of EU and Turkey civil societies and mutual attitudes, serving as guidance in view of the future policy evolution of the dialogue. The possibility of commissioning a specific study on EU-Turkey mutual perceptions may also be considered.