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**Subject: HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum**

In the Commission Working Paper: *“Coordinated and Integrated Approach to Combat HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in its Neighbourhood”* section 3.3.4 underlines the importance of the involvement of Civil Society in combating HIV/AIDS. In the section it says: *“In those countries where combating HIV/AIDS has been a success, the role of non-governmental organisations and more generally civil society has been key”*. In line with the important role of the civil society in combating HIV/AIDS, the HIV/AIDS Task Force proposes to the HIV/AIDS Think Tank to establish a HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum. The Forum will increase the involvement of the Civil Society, working in the field of HIV/AIDS, in Policy Development. The aim of the Forum is to increase informal consultation with the Civil Society before Think Tank meetings. The establishment of the Forum will limit NGO representation in the Think Tank meetings to pan-European umbrella organizations such as AIDS Action Europe and European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG).

Membership in the Forum will be open to NGOs working within EU, Candidate and EEA countries. The NGOs working both within the EU, Candidate or EEA countries and the Neighbouring countries will be encouraged to become members of the Forum. The membership will however be limited for practical reasons and efforts will be made to include NGOs from both new Member States and Candidate countries in addition to the NGOs based in Western Europe (EU15+EEA).

The role of the Forum will be to provide advice and identify issues relating to the implementation of EU HIV/AIDS policy. This will include but is not limited to comment on proposed policy proposals, policy activities, implementation of policy and priorities in the annual work plan of the Public Health Action Programme.

First meeting of the Forum will take place before the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the HIV/AIDS Think Tank meeting. Meetings will be held in the same location, if possible, as the Think Tank meeting. The number of participants in the Forum is expected to be between 20 and 40. It is expected that each NGO sends one representative for which the Commission will reimburse travel cost and per-diem. Additional participants from NGOs who are members of the Forum will be able to attend, as long as places are available and expenses of those participants have to be paid by their organizations.

The agenda for the meetings of the Forum will not be limited to items on the Think Tank agenda, but will contain all relevant items on the Think Tank agenda. The agenda will be drafted in cooperation with the members of the Forum.

The HIV/AIDS Task Force will lead and facilitate meetings of the Forum. Planning of the meetings should encourage open discussion with the members of the Forum. Other relevant Commission services will be invited to attend the meetings, as appropriate.