Establishing ACCESS a co-financing mechanism aimed at developing civil society in Eastern countries by strengthening the operational capacities of non-governmental and non-profit operators,

THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community,

Having regard to Council Regulation (EEC) No 3906/89 of 18 December 1989 on economic aid to certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as last amended by Regulation (EC) No 753/96 of 22 April 1996 and in particular Article 9 thereof,

Whereas Regulation No 3906/89 lays down the rules and conditions for the granting of economic aid to certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe,

Whereas the measures provided for by this Decision are in accordance with the opinion of the Committee on Aid for Economic Restructuring in certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe,

HEREBY DECIDES AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1

The programme described in the Annex to the present decision is hereby adopted.

Article 2

The maximum amount of Community assistance shall be 20 MECU to be financed through Budget line B7-500.

Done in Brussels,
For the Commission
1. IDENTIFICATION

Countries: All Phare beneficiary countries
Name: ACCESS
Year: 1998
Cost: 20 MECU
Implementing Authority: European Commission
Expiry date:
- Contracting: 31/12/2000
- Disbursement: 31/12/2002
Sector: DE
Group: L
Budget line: B7-500
Task Manager: Willy Vandenberghe

2. SUMMARY

ACCESS is an “Institution building” programme aimed at strengthening Civil Society in central and eastern European countries and particularly in the 10 Associated Countries. It replaces the LIEN and Partnership programmes which have been in operation between 1993 and 1997.

ACCESS will stimulate initiatives and strengthen the operational capacity of non-governmental and non-profit organisations through co-financing grants and horizontal activities.

The Commission will have the overall responsibility for the mechanism. The day to day implementation, including contracting and payments, will be entrusted to an external organisation selected through a call for tenders.

3. STRATEGY

3.1. AGENDA 2000 AND CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

Agenda 2000 and the opinions on the candidate countries provided the basis for the Accession Partnerships. These in turn set the priorities and objectives for Phare assistance within the reinforced preaccession strategy. The continuing need to support NGOs is mentioned in both the Opinions and the Accession Partnerships as an important preaccession priority.

To meet the first criteria of Copenhagen, associated countries are expected not only to formally subscribe to the principles of the rule of law, human rights and the respect for and the protection of minorities but to put them into daily practice and establish the necessary institutional
framework that supports their sustainability. The development of a democratic society is related to the emergence and the development of an open civil society, the so-called third sector placed between the state and market economy; and the functioning of NGOs; which have a key role in it; is articulating the demands of citizens through active participation and consciousness raising.

Access will address the priorities identified in the Commission Opinions and the Accession Partnerships by strengthening the institutional capacity of non-governmental and non-profit organisations (NGO/NPO) and by actively supporting the inclusion and participation of individuals who risk being socially, economically or politically marginalised due to culture, beliefs, orientation or disability.

3.2. EXPERIENCE WITH HORIZONTAL PROGRAMMES ON CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

ACCESS is developed on the basis of experience gathered with previous multicountry programmes on civil society development that operate since 1993, notably the LIEN, Partnership and Democracy programmes. These programmes yielded substantial results. This was shown by several programme evaluation reports which clearly recommend continuing support to the third sector and point to the following particularities which should be taken into consideration in designing a new support programme:

- The capacity and performance of NGOs differs considerably from country to country: NGOs are numerous and active in a variety of areas in some countries and few, poorly developed and restricted to specific sectors in others
- The speed and scope of development of the NGO sector is very different from country to country
- The distribution of NGOs between sectors of activity is different from country to country. In some countries they are almost exclusively confined to specific areas (human rights) and persons (circles of intellectuals)
- The general needs of the sector can clearly be identified in all countries: need for training, transfer of know-how, exchanges with sister organisations, financial support to stimulate creativity and to ensure the organisations’ viability and sustainability.
- The recognition of the role of the NGO sector by governments and their support and cooperation on local and national level differs extensively from country to country

These evaluation findings have been taken into account in the programming of ACCESS: the programme has been kept as flexible as possible, guided by a bottom-up approach, providing for a variety of cooperative ventures, a mixture of sectors and differing allocation levels. ACCESS does not differentiate between micro and macro projects as in the past, but allows for budgetary flexibility for project cofinancing between 3.000 and 150.000 ECU. While ACCESS will continue to demonstrate flexibility in regard to identification of priorities, the latter will be clearly focused on the priorities in the Accession Partnerships relating to the political criteria and other relevant accession
priority areas such as social policy, environment and regional development. ACCESS focuses furthermore on strengthening the capacity of the third sector.

4. OBJECTIVES AND DESCRIPTION

4.1. The wider objectives of ACCESS are as follows:

a) to safeguard and develop the democratic process in the candidate countries and non-candidate countries by strengthening the institutional and operational capacity of non-governmental and non-profit organisations through partnership and cooperation with sister organisations and through direct support for activities;

b) to encourage the inclusion and participation of individuals and groups who risk being socially, economically or politically marginalised due to culture, beliefs, gender, orientation or disability.

4.2. The specific and immediate objectives are as follows:

a) to provide financial support on a co-financing basis for activities of NGOs/NPOs that address the relevant priorities identified in the Accession Partnerships;

b) to strengthen the institutional and operational capacity of NGOs/NPOs through the support of sustainable transnational or interregional partnerships with a view to exchange relevant knowledge, know-how and skills and through direct support for activities;

c) to strengthen sectoral and regional networks between NGOs/NPOs with a view to ensure interaction, cooperation, the exchange of experience and information and to increase the visibility of the third sector.

These measures will be financed alongside the support provided through the European Initiative for Democracy\(^1\) and in close coordination with this programme.

5. DESCRIPTION

5.1. MULTICOUNTRY PROGRAMME

ACCESS is set up on a multi-country basis so as to achieve its specific objectives on a transnational and interregional basis. Attention will be paid to country-specific priorities. However, no set country allocations are foreseen. The multi-country nature of this mechanism will ensure autonomy during the selection process.

5.2. ELIGIBLE BENEFICIARIES

The direct beneficiaries of ACCESS will be non-governmental and non-profit organisations in Central and Eastern Europe. Local and regional authorities may be associated to projects as appropriate.

Beneficiary organisations must be:

\(^1\) formerly Democracy Programme managed by DGIAA2

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• nongovernmental and/or non-profit organisations that are officially registered in their country of establishment and are given legal statutes;
• established in an eligible country;
• established and run predominantly by local nationals and responsible to an in-country board;
• non ‘partisan’ organisations, i.e. organisations which do not condition their support or actions to ideological, doctrinal or religious beliefs.

5.3. ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Eligible areas of activity will be defined in relation to Accession Partnership priorities and will include activities in the areas of democracy, social affairs (e.g. disadvantaged groups, youth, promotion of equal opportunities, health etc.), local development, environment and agriculture.

Certain projects will merit special attention, for example:

- under-resourced organisations and organisations working in less developed areas;
- projects which generate local support;
- projects that usefully complement (without duplicating) existing Phare and other donor's activities in central and eastern Europe;

5.4. GRANT MECHANISM

5.4.1 Grant Facility

ACCESS will co-finance projects initiated by registered non-profit and non governmental organisations. The Commission will award grants to support projects selected in accordance with the eligibility and financial conditions set up by the programme.

The basic conditions to apply are as follows:

- Projects must be coherent with the programme objectives. Projects should be self contained operations designed in response to the situation of the country(ies) concerned and to the specific needs of the beneficiary country or beneficiary target group. They should indicate a coherent set of activities with clearly defined operational objectives.

- The financial EC contribution will be from 3,000 up to 150,000 ECU. Financing up to 100% may be available. However, cofinancing will be positively assessed in the evaluation process.

- With the exception of small projects less than 15,000 ECU for which a partnership is not compulsory, all projects must be submitted by at least two partner organisations. A partnership is a relation of substance involving an active exchange of skills, experience, knowledge and/or
finance. All partners must be involved from the start in the elaboration of this project and actively participate in its implementation.

- One of the partners will act as lead organisation, which means that it must demonstrate enough experience and capability to assume the financial and legal responsibility of the project. The lead applicant organisation must be based in one of the Phare beneficiary countries. Partners may be based in:
  - another Phare beneficiary country;
  - the European Union;
  - any country eligible under the Tacis programme (on the specific condition that the cost incurred in these regions is not covered by the Phare grant).

- Each project should provide for at least the two following components:
  (a) activity related component: concrete actions implemented for the benefit of the sector or target group
  (b) capacity related component: training activities targeted at the beneficiary NGO’s staff (e.g., management, bookkeeping, HR, marketing, fund-raising etc.) in order to ensure viability and sustainability of the organisation.

- The administrative costs of the organisations involved may be covered under the EC contribution (up to a maximum of 10% of the total cost of the project concerned) insofar as they are directly related to the implementation of the activities. One-Off conferences, academic research and feasibility studies not followed by an implementation phase will not be accepted for funding. EC financial participation in amortisation, capital endowment, or deficit financing will be equally refused. Emergency relief projects, those having already started and those of a partisan nature will also not be supported.

5.4.2. **Horizontal Activities**

An indicative amount of up to 1 MECU of the budget is allocated to horizontal activities. Projects of the horizontal facility are initiated by the Commission. They will foster interaction, cooperation and information within the third sector and increase its visibility. Examples of eligible activities include inter alia training, seminars, networking workshops, sectoral/regional round tables, information and publication activities (database, Web site, programme compendia, success stories etc.) and studies. Up to 100% of total project costs will be financed.

5.4.3 **Evaluation and Selection Process**

The programme will launch calls for proposals. An open and widely publicised call for proposals allows maximum publicity and thereby a stimulation of project generation and encourages competition and the improvement of project quality.

The responsibility for the final selection of projects lies with the Commission. Projects will be selected following (a) an independent technical evaluation, (b) a consultation process with
sectoral DGs, Delegations, Civil Society Foundations and other relevant institutions if appropriate (c) an assessment of evaluation and consultation results by an Advisory Group (see below) which proposes a list of projects to be financed to the Commission.

5.5. **Programme Review**

The programme may be subject to a review at the request of the European Commission during the course of its implementation in order to assess its appropriateness with regard to the pre-accession process.

6. **Other Donors’ Activities and Coordination**

Close attention will be paid to activities’ coherence and complementarity with the National Programmes and other "people-to-people" programmes such as Ecos-Ouverture, CREDO, European Initiative for Democracy and the various Civil Society Development Programmes. Coordination with other donors will also be sought.

7. **Cost and Financing Plan**

The Phare contribution to ACCESS will be 20 MECU for 1998.

*ACCESS will expire on 31 December 2002 (disbursements).*

Allocation for 1998 is planned as follows:

- Grants: 16.5 MECU
- Horizontal activities: 1 MECU
- Programme Management: 2.0 MECU
- Advisory Group meetings, Evaluation, Study, Monitoring: 0.5 MECU

**TOTAL** 20 MECU

See expected commitment and disbursement schedule in annex 2 and 3

8. **Implementation Arrangements**

The Commission will have overall management responsibility for the programme.
An Advisory Group will be established by the Commission. This Advisory Group will be composed of representatives from the services of the Commission (DGIA, Delegations, relevant Dgs) and the Programme Management Structure. Representatives of other Donors and representatives of the third sector may be asked to participate as observers in the Advisory Group as appropriate. The Advisory Group will advise the Commission on the general orientations of the programme, on implementation modalities (selection, call for proposals) and on the horizontal facility. The Advisory Group assesses project proposals submitted and proposes a list of projects to be financed to the Commission.

A Technical Assistance Office will be established which will:

- provide technical assistance to the programme at all levels as required and appropriate
- act as contracting organisation (sign contracts and make payments on behalf of the Commission)
- organise the technical evaluation, consultation and supervision of contracted projects
- act as the Advisory Group secretariat;
- manage programme relevant data, information and publication
- provide expertise for the implementation of the horizontal activities.

The EC Delegations and Civil Society Development Foundations which are funded under the Phare national programmes will be closely involved in the programme through an active participation in selection and supervision of projects and the identification of local priorities. Special attention will be paid to involving local actors in the evaluation process.

9. Audit, Monitoring and Evaluation

9.1 The accounts and operation of any contractor will be checked at regular intervals by an outside auditor contracted by the Commission and financed under the present programme, without prejudice to the responsibilities of the Commission and the Community's Court of Auditors as referred to in the General Conditions.

9.2 The Commission services shall:

- monitor the implementation of the programme on the basis of regular reports prepared by the individual project managers and by the programme management and support organisation;
- organise assessment reviews to provide better insight into the performance of contractors and the impact of the activities;
- sign contracts with independent experts to follow the progress of the programme and its components and carry-out an ex-post evaluation after completion of the programme or parts thereof.

9.3 In order to facilitate these activities, a detailed set of indicators of achievement will be defined according to the objectives and targets of the Programme.
10. **Risks**

The predominant risks relate to: co-ordination between the various bodies involved in the programme; effective programme management; and the timely availability of co-financing resources.

*The problems that could interfere with effective implementation of the programme are as follows:*

- Interference of the government in NGO projects
- The weak institutional and professional capacity of the NGO to implement their projects satisfactorily
- The non existence of a real partnership between NGOs involved in the project.
# ANNEX 1 - LOGFRAME MATRIX - PROGRAMME IDENTIFICATION

## 1998 ACCESS

### WIDER OBJECTIVES
- To safeguard and develop the democratic process in all Phare beneficiary countries
- To strengthen civil society by developing the institutional capacity of NGO/NPO through partnership and cooperation with sister organisations;
- To encourage the inclusion and participation of individuals who risk being socially, economically or politically marginalised due to culture, beliefs, gender, orientation or disability.

### INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
- Increased number of active NGOs
- Increase in partnership and cooperation between NGOs;
- Increased participation in society of targeted individuals;
- Existence of appropriate NGO Legislation

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION
- National reports
- Studies by intern institutions (EBRD, World Bank, EU);
- Commission reports;
- CEC press and media.

### IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES
- To stimulate initiatives from NGO/NPO in favor of target group
- To stimulate initiatives from NGO/NPO in sectors where governments are not active;
- To provide financial support on a cofinancing basis to those NGO/NPO which tackle that candidate country’s civil society priorities identified in the Opinions;
- To strengthen the institutional and operational capacity of those organisations, through among other things transfer of know-how and trainings, seminars, provision of technical assistance;
- To set up and organise networking
- To provide annual country reports as input into the European Council pre-accession reports

### INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
- Improved socio-economic indicators in the beneficiary countries;
- Increase in number and quality of applications for funding;
- Number of projects/activities meeting the objectives
- Increased number of NGOs which received a training
- Existence of a working network

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION
- Contracting organisations reports and statistics;
- National reports
- Commission reports.

### RESULTS
- Management structures set-up and operational;
- Projects selected;
- Implementation of horizontal activities.

### INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
- Structures set-up/operating according to (realistic) timetables and plans;
- Projects selected according to transparent, fair and clearly specified procedures;
- Project implementation initiated according to timetable.

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION
- Progress monitoring reports;
- Project managers’ reports;
- Contractors’ reports.

### INPUTS
- 20 mecu EU budget, comprising: project funding, horizontal activities, programme management structures, monitoring and studies, etc
CONTRACTING SCHEDULE - ANNEX 2

Project Title: ACCESS
Implementation Agency : European Commission
Year : 1998
Expiry: 31/12/2001
Total EU Contribution: 20 MECU
Date of drafting: 10/02/98

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2 depending on timetable of call for tender for the Programme Management Structure
DISBURSEMENT SCHEDULE - ANNEX 3

Project Title: ACCESS
Implementation Agency: European Commission
Year: 1998
Expiry: 31/12/2001
Total EU Contribution: 20 MECU
Date of drafting: 10/02/98

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