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Support to civil society – a new financial facility under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)¹

Civil society has a key role in democratic public life. In the Western Balkans, social partners (trade unions and employers' federations), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), consumer organisations, women's and youth associations and others are already actively involved in political, social and economic reforms. They contribute to strengthening democracy and reconciliation. A broad range of civil society organisations already receive EU support, in particular in the areas of inter-ethnic relations, poverty reduction, environmental protection and social development. The Commission places high priority in supporting further growth of their activities.

The Commission is presently establishing a new facility under IPA to promote civil society development and dialogue in the Western Balkans. It is also substantially increasing financial support to civil society organisations in the region.

The new Facility will embrace sectors such as human rights, gender equality, social inclusion, health, environment, business advocacy and representation, culture and consumer protection. The facility will cover three types of activity:

- support for local initiatives and capacity building, reinforcing the role of civil society;
- bringing groups like journalists, young politicians, trade union leaders, teachers etc. into contact with EU institutions;
- support for partnerships and networking between the civil society organisations, businesses, trade unions, other social partners and professional organisations in the beneficiary countries on one side, and their counterparts in the EU on the other side to exchange knowledge and experience

Projects will be supported from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). Technical assistance, including exchange of experts, will also focus on training, capacity building and networking and on disseminating the results of projects of this facility.

A civil society conference to launch the new facility will be held in Brussels on 17-18 April 2008. It will bring together some 400 participants from candidate and potential candidate countries as well as from EU Member States. Information about the conference can be found at the following web address:

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/civil_society_conference/index_en.htm

¹ Fact sheet for the Commission Communication: "Western Balkans: enhancing the European perspective" See IP 378