

Brussels, 10 April 2008

## **Conference on Civil Society Development in Southeast Europe marks launch of new financing facility.**

***On 17 and 18 April, the Commission's Directorate-General for Enlargement will host the conference "Civil Society Development in Southeast Europe: Building Europe Together". The conference's main objectives are to offer civil society organisations from the EU and the candidate and potential candidate countries a platform for networking, exchanging best practices and building partnerships, and to disseminate information about financial support to civil-society development under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) and other EU programmes.***

When announcing the conference enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said: "Civil society has a central role to play in the EU integration of the candidate and potential candidate countries and their transformation into modern European democracies. We will focus more our financial support towards the civil society in the enlargement countries and thus help its development."

The conference will bring together some 450 participants, including Commissioner Olli Rehn, Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik, the founder of the "Open Society Institute" George Soros, and many high-level representatives of civil society organisations, primarily active in the fields of democratisation and human rights, social development, education and environmental protection.

The EU's strategy for enlargement has increasingly put an emphasis on civil society dialogue and development in the EU candidates and potential candidates. Since 2005, the Commission has granted financial support to projects on civil society dialogue with and between Western Balkan countries as well as with Turkey.

More needs to be done: local NGOs require training to adapt to present conditions and also need to strengthen their capacities in order to be included in the EU accession process. Further efforts are required to deepen freedom of association, to put in place regulatory frameworks and public incentives for the development of civil society organisations.

In its Enlargement Strategy 2007-2008, the Commission identified the need to increase support to civil society development, and announced the creation of a new financing facility to promote civil society development and dialogue. EU financial support to civil society activities in the Western Balkans and Turkey will approximately amount to 130 million Euros over the period 2008-2010.

The new facility will cover three areas of intervention:

- support for local civil society initiatives and capacity building, reinforcing the role of civil society in the candidate and potential candidate countries
- People-to-People Dialogue programmes aimed at familiarising journalists, young politicians, trade union leaders, teachers, etc. with EU policies and institutions

- support for building partnerships and developing networks between civil society organisations in the enlargement countries and the EU to promote transfer of knowledge and experience.

The conference is complemented by a cultural programme. On the evening of 17 April, the Sarajevo-based "Youth Symphony Orchestra of Southeast Europe", will give a concert in the Flagey concert hall. In this orchestra, founded in 2003 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, young musicians from the different countries in the Western Balkans play side by side – a powerful message of reconciliation. From 21 to 23 April, the "Balkan Film Days" will be a showcase of some of the region's best recent films.

Information about the Conference can be found at the following web address:

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/civil-society-development/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/civil-society-development/index_en.htm)