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Summary and key recommendations to EU member states regarding the Mid Term Review of country / regional strategy papers of the EC development cooperation with Central America

This report strives to highlight the main concerns expressed by civil society networks from Latin America (ALOP) and Europe (APRODEV, CIDSE and CIFCA) in collaboration with local partner organisations in Central America regarding the European Commission (EC) Development Cooperation with Central America and the Mid Term Review (MTR) of the Country Strategy Papers/Regional Strategy Papers (CSP/RSP).

Lack of transparency and access to information regarding the EC's development cooperation and the MTR process, and limited civil society participation throughout this process, have constituted a serious impediment to an effective consultation process on these matters and an obstacle to all efforts to monitor and evaluate successfully the impact of EC aid.

Consequently, we would like to draw your attention to the following points:

1. The lack of availability of the most basic information on projects and spending which has made it impossible to compare the different sectors and amounts defined in the CSP/RSP 2007-2013 and to evaluate how EC money was actually spent.
2. The only information available was aggregated data in annual reports, delegation websites (which are out of date), as well as very general and brief responses obtained from delegation staff.
3. The implementation of the CSP and RSP have experienced serious delays making the MTR process problematic, as there are few results to evaluate and conclusions to draw from the first years of the strategy period.
4. There have been serious limitations regarding the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the MTR consultations carried out by the EC delegations in Central America. These were mainly due to the following:
 - a. Consultation meetings were convened at a very short notice.
 - b. Very few organisations were invited to these meetings.
 - c. The criteria for selecting and inviting the participants were unclear.
 - d. Lack of consensus regarding the joint participation of national and international civil society.
 - e. Consultation meetings being too short.

- f. Relevant documents and agendas were not distributed prior to the meetings, impeding substantive analysis and effective discussions. This occurred, despite several requests made by civil society to the EC in this regard.

All these elements generated real constraints for civil society participation instead of facilitating a genuine and effective consultation in the process. Unfortunately these deficiencies in the consultation process also had a negative impact on the perception of the EC consultation processes. Certain sectors of civil society felt that these consultations do not reflect a serious effort on the part of the EU to adequately involve civil society in the policy process. These are serious shortcomings given that ownership and participation are core principles of EC development policy.

In-depth information should be widely available for civil society organisations and parliamentarians in order for them to establish an informed opinion on whether the EU's aid is well directed and effective. Given the harsh reality experienced by poor and marginalised communities and the situation of poor governance in Central America, EC development strategies with the region should above all focus on poverty reduction, good governance, and rule of law, democracy and human rights in the region. .

Furthermore, the impact of the financial crisis on the poverty situation in Central American countries must be carefully considered in the MTR, so that adjustments are made accordingly. Special attention ought to be paid to ODA additionality and poverty reduction. These two should be the departing points when the new priorities of the EC (energy, aid for trade, climate change and migration) are included in the CSP/RSP through the MTR.

On the basis of the findings of the report, we would like to make the following recommendations to the member states and the DCI Committee:

- ✓ Information on the implementation of the CSPs/RSPs must be made public and widely available allowing for qualitative monitoring and evaluation.
- ✓ The EC delegations should revise the current spaces and mechanisms regarding information, communication and consultation with CSOs in order to establish a systematic and structured dialogue and consultation mechanism to allow more regular exchange between CSOs and the EC.
- ✓ These consultations should be convened with sufficient time in advance; key documents should be available in the language of the country/ region; criterion for invitation should be clear and broad; lists of participants and documentation from the consultations should be made publicly available.
- ✓ The main focus of EC development cooperation should be the eradication of poverty, reduction of inequality, improvements in governance and human rights and the achievement of the MDGs, and this must be evaluated in the MTR. The current CSP/RSP for Central America are not properly placing these issues as the main objectives but rather moving to an emphasis on supporting market driven economic growth.
- ✓ The priorities for cooperation identified in the Association Agreement negotiations must be coherent with the above and comply with ODA criteria.