



TO: Mr. Holger K. Nielsen, Minister for Foreign Affairs

CC: Members of Danish Parliament; Members of Danish Government

December 13, 2013

APPEAL

Weak document undermines human rights and civil society work in the Eastern Partnership countries

Your Excellency,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the **Danish Neighborhood Programme 2013-2017**, the document which clearly lacks long-term strategic vision for the Eastern Partnership region and undermines international, regional and national efforts to promote human rights and democratization in this complex but important region. At the same time, we would like to **enquire about Danish government's strategy for human rights and democratization in Azerbaijan** over the next few years.

While Sweden, Norway, Netherlands and other European countries consistently backed the human rights and civil society work in Azerbaijan, Denmark has chosen a different approach. As evidenced by exclusion of Azerbaijan as a country from the Danish Neighborhood strategy, the Danish government seems to be less concerned about human rights and democratization when it comes to Azerbaijan than other countries of the Eastern Partnership.

The Danish Neighborhood Programme 2013-2017 sets Armenia, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine as priority countries for Danish development assistance in the Eastern Partnership region, passing Azerbaijan and Georgia. In the light of recent political developments around Vilnius summit, this choice has proved to be a failure. Rather than signing and initialing, Ukraine and Armenia rejected an Association Agreement with the European Union. Due primarily to Russian pressure, Armenian President Sarkisjan declared in September that his country would not sign the agreement and would join the Eurasian Customs Union instead¹.

Azerbaijan is currently negotiating the contours of its own partnership track with the EU, and the international community continues to encourage Azerbaijan to build the democratic and economic institutions and conduct the reforms necessary for a deeper relationship with the Euro-Atlantic community. As a civil society, we believe that a democratic, prosperous and secure Azerbaijan will benefit not only the Azerbaijani people but also its neighbors, i.e. Armenia and Georgia.

There is certainly a space for Denmark to play a role here, and we call on the Danish government to revisit Danish Neighborhood Programme 2013-2017, and immediately start negotiations with Azerbaijani civil society vis-à-vis promotion of human rights and good governance. We've been lacking that Danish government attention and support since the of media and democratization program funded by Danida, and implemented by International Media Support (NB: program ended in 2012).

In the meantime, **we call on your ministry to closely monitor implementation of the new Danida's Technical Assistance to the Media and Democratisation Programme in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Turkey (2012-2016)**². We have serious concerns over design and implementation of this action. It has been a year now since the

¹ <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67482>

² <http://um.dk/en/danida-en/activities/business/contracts/long/contracts-awarded-by-danida2/contracts-awarded-by-danida-2012/>

program start, but no serious move has been made to fulfill the program objectives. To the contrary, wrong, regressive decisions have been adopted by the agency managing the grant.

One of those strategically wrong decisions was the decision to exclude Azerbaijan from the program. This decision has been made without any consultations with civil society in Azerbaijan.

In the light of above-mentioned, we are deeply disappointed with the decision of Danida to trust important human rights and democratization project to the consultancy company with strong business interests in region, Niras, which continues to ignore Azerbaijani civil society calls for cooperation, despite of the initial commitment to work with these NGOs. When a human rights NGO sends numerous work-related emails to the company, trusted by Danida to manage Danish tax payers funds, and does not receive a single reply, then there is a big question mark over this company competencies and competencies of those at Danida who made a funding decision vis-à-vis this company. From our perspective—and please forgive us if we are speaking in ignorance- there had been a lack of research/assessment and consultations with local media and civil society, prior to making this funding decision.

Denmark's development cooperation is laid down and administered on the basis of the Danish Act on International Development Cooperation (Consolidated Act no. 541 of 10/07/1998). In line with the Act on International Development cooperation, the Government every year presents to the Parliament its plan and priorities for Danish development assistance for the coming five year period. **We therefore call on your Ministry to revisit the Danish Neighborhood Programme 2013-2017**, which proved to be a weak document, design a new action plan and submit it to the discussion of the Parliament as soon as it possible.

A new Act on International Development Cooperation (Act no. 555 of 18/06/20125) was adopted by Parliament in May 2012 and entered into force on 1 January 2013. Increased transparency both at partner country level as well as in Denmark is a key element in the act. We therefore urge you **to engage in close monitoring of the implementation of the Danida's Technical Assistance to the Media and Democratisation Programme in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Turkey (2012-2016)** and make public all the information related to the execution of the program since it started in December 2012.

Finally, we urge your Ministry, and Danida in particular, to engage in direct and constructive communication with the civil society of Azerbaijan.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this appeal.

Yours sincerely,



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