



**North-South Centre
of the
Council of Europe**

**NSC/EC (2013) 5 prov4 SV
20 August 2013**



**Lisbon Forum 2013
Presentation document**

**Valuing civil society as actor of governance:
Perspectives for the Southern Mediterranean region**

*How can the Governments, Parliaments and Local and Regional Authorities
contribute to making civil society an actor of governance?*

6 – 7 November 2013

Ismaili Centre, Lisbon

In partnership with:

AKDN

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK



**Anna Lindh
Foundation**
EUROMED



Event organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and funded by the European Union

**Strengthening democratic reform
in the southern Neighbourhood**

Funded
by the European Union



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by the Council of Europe

Background

Since it was established in 1994 by the Council of Europe's North-South Centre, the Lisbon Forum has been a platform for dialogue and sharing of experiences between Europe and its neighbouring regions, in particular the Southern Mediterranean, focusing in particular Human rights, democracy and the reinforcement of the rule of law.

As a response to the "Arab Spring", the last two Fora were devoted to key aspects of recent developments in the region. The discussions covered in particular the major challenges of transformations as well as the issues of human rights, freedom of expression, constitutional and justice system reforms, reform of local self-government and empowerment of women.

The on-going processes in several countries of the region, especially following the "Arab Spring", are still faced with a variety of significant challenges. The participation of organised civil society remains a key element for the democratic consolidation.

Among the responses of the international community to support these transition processes, the Council of Europe approved in May 2011 a policy towards its neighbouring regions. The cooperation component with these regions is to a large extent implemented through a privileged partnership with the European Union, and comprises a large number of actual actions to support the changes underway in areas of expertise of the Council of Europe. In this context, the Lisbon Forum of the North-South Centre stands as one of the key actions of the Joint EU/CoE Programme "Strengthening democratic reform in the southern Neighbourhood".

The current state of play in the Southern Mediterranean region, encompassed with the new role agreed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for its North-South Centre, as a key contributor to the CoE policy towards its immediate neighbourhood, have naturally resulted in the reconsideration of the place and role of this Forum.

Building on its unique configuration - gathering the four actors of governance (governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities and civil society, the so-called "quadrilogue") - the Forum is in an exceptional position to facilitate dialogue and therefore concretely contribute to a debate about the relevant issues regarding democratic governance. The fruitful expertise of the NSC, during the last almost 25 years, in empowering civil society, as well as the Centre's unique regional approach, convert its Forum in a recognised place to promote a dialogue between the historical experiences in the Northern and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean region. Accordingly, besides offering a space for exchange among relevant actors, the Forum will provide a tangible and constructive dialogue and impulsion to democratic governance processes, fostering as well cooperation and networking between the different stakeholders nationally and internationally. The Forum will allow adoption and dissemination of the policy frameworks and approaches, namely those developed by the Council of Europe.

As steadily repeated in relation to democratic processes under way in Southern Mediterranean countries, despite the decisive role played by civil society in the changes occurred, many question marks remain regarding its concrete future role in the governance processes. Taking into account different national experiences in Europe and the current models in the Maghreb and Mashrek regions, the Lisbon Forum shall address this issue and reflect on the means for an improved interaction of civil society with national governments and parliaments as well as local authorities. Valuing civil society as an actor of governance is widely regarded as bringing practical dividends and benefits for the consolidation of the national democratic processes. These efforts, conducted in a inclusive manner and favouring the dialogue and cooperation, help preventing polarisation and conflicts.

Objectives and expected results

The overall objective of Lisbon Forum 2013 is to contribute to empowerment of civil society as actor of governance in Southern Mediterranean region.

The Forum is expected to strengthen dialogue between the civil society on one side and the national governments and parliaments as well as local and regional authorities on the other. The debate will support internal dialogue and structuring within the civil society and should provide an opportunity to analyse the role the international organisations may play in the empowerment of the NGOs in order to contribute to their better inclusion in each national political process.

The Forum is expected to agree operational conclusions and recommendations, which will be addressed as guidelines for governments, parliaments, local authorities and international organisations – aimed at improving consultation, participation and cooperation of the civil society as actor of governance.

Implementation provisions

The Lisbon Forum 2013 will be held on 6 – 7 November in the Ismaili Centre in Lisbon, in the framework of the Joint EU/CoE Programme “Strengthening democratic reform in the southern Neighbourhood”. It is organised in cooperation with Anna Lindh Foundation, IDEA and Aga Khan Development Network. The working languages will be Arabic, English and French.

The Lisbon Forum will discuss the issues from a variety of perspectives. Personalities from the North and Southern Mediterranean, including representatives of governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities and civil society, as well as representatives of the Council of Europe and European Union will contribute to the event. The participation of young people and women is encouraged.

As for its previous editions, the Chairmanship of the Forum will be exercised by high-level personalities, who will be appointed by the Executive Committee of the North-South Centre.

The workshops will be moderated by personalities from both the South and the North. Two experts (one from North and one from South) will be invited to contribute to each workshop. In particular they will deliver a background paper before the Forum, participate in the debates with other panellists during the event and contribute to the conclusions and recommendations as well as to the final report.

The Lisbon Forum 2013 will be followed by a Parliamentary Conference, involving the countries of Southern Mediterranean and the Council of Europe member States, organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic on 8 November 2013.

The Anna Lindh Foundation will hold its Advisory Council meeting on 5-6 November in Lisbon and will actively contribute to the Lisbon Forum 2013.

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