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Ten Points of the Citizens for Democracy Programme in Response to the Position of Right-Wing Organisations on the Norwegian Funds

In connection with false information about the Citizens for Democracy programme disseminated in a position paper developed by the Confederation of Non-governmental Initiatives of the Republic of Poland established on February 19, 2017, and affiliating a dozen or so organisations that describe themselves as conservative right-wing, we are making the following statement:

- 1) The objectives, priorities and the budget of the programme for non-governmental organisations, funded by the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (known as EEA Grants) were agreed between the Donor States, i.e. Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and Poland and adopted by the Polish Government. In accordance with the agreement, EUR 37 million from the EEA Grants has been allocated "to support the development of civil society and increase the participation of non-governmental organisations in building social justice, democracy and sustainable development".
- 2) Prior to the commencement of the programme for non-governmental organisations in Poland, the areas of support and the choice of priorities for our country were widely discussed in the non-governmental community in the framework of inclusive consultations under the auspices of the Public Benefit Activity Council that were open to all interested parties. Information about the consultations was distributed through a range of different channels, including the ngo.pl portal visited daily by some 35,000 non-governmental activists.
- 3) The Stefan Batory Foundation in partnership with the Polish Children and Youth Foundation were selected to operate the programme for non-governmental organisations in an open and competitive process during which they had presented their grant programme proposal built on the findings of the consultations and of research into the quality of the Third Sector in Poland.
- 4) The programme has supported a wide range of activities that seek to: involve citizens and civil society organisations in public policy making at the local and national level, ensure public scrutiny over public institutions and institutions of public confidence, increase the scope and diversity of support provided to socially vulnerable groups, promote and protect human rights, combat all forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation, to promote citizenship and combat exclusion and marginalisation of children and youth, strengthen the institutional capacity of non-governmental organisations and create frameworks for the growth of the Third Sector.
- 5) The Citizens for Democracy program was implemented in line with policy guidelines adopted by the Polish government that defined the thematic scope, distribution procedures and accounting rules for grants. The requests for project proposals held in the programme strictly adhered to the principles of equal access, openness, transparency and clarity of procedure. Application deadlines were communicated at the launch of the programme and requests for proposal were widely promoted on NGO and local government portals and

widespread mailing campaigns. 6,726 grant applications that were submitted in 6 grant contests were evaluated by 115 independent external experts selected in an open call based on competence in thematic areas. One of the experts was Mr. Wojciech Kaczmarczyk, the current director of the civil society department at the Office of the Prime Minister. He assessed proposals for systemic projects, civic participation and watchdog activities. The results of expert assessments were published and that included the names of the applying organisations, places of registration, project titles, the amount requested and the grant amount awarded.

6) Over the past 2.5 years (between November 2013 and April 2016), 667 non-governmental organisations implemented 617 projects worth a total of PLN 131 million. Projects were implemented in 773 communities in Poland. 146 projects were national in scope. Most projects were carried out by organisations from the Masovian Province. They implemented their activities not only in the capital city but also in other parts of Poland or nationally. In addition, nearly half of them (96 organisations) implemented partnership projects with 125 organisations from other parts of the country. For organisations outside of Warsaw, such partnerships meant a reduction in formalities, administrative burden, accounting effort and the need for a matching contribution.

7) The programme was not an easy one for small and less experienced organisations because of its regulatory formalities, short lead-time, need for a matching contribution, and accountability requirements. Therefore, we introduced a two-step application process (short pre-proposals and then detailed full applications) in order to increase access and reduce the workload for organisations. To facilitate entry for smaller organisations, the Batory Foundation offered its own grants to cover the required matching contribution. Forty seven organisations used this type of assistance.

8) The aim of the program was not to distribute support evenly per capita in each province but to choose projects that warranted the accomplishment of all expected outcomes. Nevertheless, if you look at the relationship between the number of organisations in a province and the number of organisations awarded a grant, and the number of organisations registered in the province and their percentage share in the total number of non-governmental organisations, there is a clear confirmation of a statistical pattern. Most of the applications came from organisations in the Masovia (1,528) and Małopolskie (739) -- these are two provinces with the highest rate of registered organisations, closely followed by Ermland and Masuria, Podlasie and Pomerania, where the number of organisations is among the lowest in the country. The lowest number of applications originated from Opolskie, Lubuskie and Świętokrzyskie where the number of organisations is the lowest. The Opolskie and Lubuskie provinces have rated poorly in all civil society statistics for years having been awarded marginal number of FIO and ASOS grants.

9) The programme supported a vast diversity of organisations. They ranged from large and experienced metropolitan organisations to young and small rural groups such as the CampoSfera Foundation for Creative Space and Development from Klimontów, the Concordia Foundation from Kaszczor, "Leave Your Home" Disability Support Foundation from Moszczenica. It should be emphasised that Christian organisations received grants as well. Examples include Caritas of the Toruń Diocese, St. Brother Albert Help Society, Kolping Foundation in Poland or the "Ognisko" Christian Association of People with Disabilities and their Families and Friends.

10) The overarching goal of the programme laid out in EEA Funds files agreed at the EU level and adopted by the Polish Government was to promote democratic values and universal human rights enshrined in EU Treaties and in the Polish Constitution such as the freedom of conscience and freedom of expression, gender equality, protection of minority rights and non-discrimination. The protection of these values has been the main goal of projects that sought to combat and prevent discrimination and exclusion of vulnerable

members of the community, overcome stereotypes and prejudice against others: Roma, migrants, refugees, non-heterosexuals (research suggest they are the most exposed to aggression and hate speech), protect the rights of women, children and people with disabilities. Today, when core values underlying the European community and the democratic rule of law are being attacked, when populism and lie, contempt, hatred, and hostility to others are on the rise it is clear that these initiatives were extremely relevant and timely, and that the group of projects implemented in this area was indeed small and insufficient.

P.S. We fully identify with the drive for transparency, impartiality, equality and respect for constitutional values in non-governmental organisations. We urge the signatories of this statement to follow these principles.

Warsaw, March 30, 2017