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EU Association applications to the International Mobilization Trust

In 2004 the EU Association started a capacity building program for AI sections and structures in four of the new member states that joined the European Union in 2004. Initially termed the Enlargement Support Project, this activity has since then been extended to other countries as well, including two candidate countries, Croatia and Turkey. The basic idea behind this new venture, that has been run on a project basis with additional funding from a number of EUA member sections, was twofold:

- externally, effective advocacy of the EU requires lobbying not only in Brussels but also of the EU member states, and with the enlargement of 2004 bringing in ten new countries, AI suddenly found itself with significant gaps in its ability to influence the EU through its members;
- internally, AI's well-developed ability to lobby the EU provides a powerful development and profiling tool to national AI branches especially in countries with newly emerging democracies.

The EUA Board presented a comprehensive progress report to the EUA AGM in May 2006, together with a proposal that aimed to start extending the project to countries where AI has no national presence: the three Baltic countries (EU members since 2004); Bulgaria and Romania (EU members since 2007); and the remainder of the West Balkan countries (which are all eligible to join the EU in due course). Both documents are attached for reference of the IMT.

Initial reactions to this proposal from IS and IEC confirmed that further consultations would be necessary to start anything in a 'new' country. Such consultations are still ongoing, and although they have not yet resulted in formal agreement, the IEC has indicated to have no objection to the possibility of funding through the IMT being explored. The EUA AGM in 2006 had specifically requested the Board to do so, on the assumption that there could be a relevant mobilization and growth component, and considering also that it would be appropriate to broaden the basis of engagement in the project by the wider AI movement.

The applications that are hereby submitted to the IMT to support new projects in what is now termed the Advocacy Development Program (ADP) include one country in each of the three 'subregions' mentioned before: Estonia, Bulgaria and Serbia. The proposition is to start in one of these (Bulgaria) by way of pilot during the second half of 2007.

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The recent history of the countries in South Eastern Europe, including full-scale war with hundreds of thousands of people killed and societies torn apart, creates a certain moral imperative for an organization like AI to manifest itself not only through human rights intervention from the outside, but also to be open to engage in advocacy and capacity building. However, since the shift towards a mobilization and growth approach AI has no articulated organizational strategy with regard to those parts of Europe. Consequently, the pragmatic line taken by IMP is not to open up possibilities for developing traditional AI structures. The question is then how much room this could leave for the kind of structural engagement implied in the EUA proposition.

There is an element of catch-22 here. Not allowing for capacity building that leads to AI presence in the traditional sense (national structure with members and groups) means no mobilization and growth in membership and money. Conversely, not creating mobilization and growth in those terms appears

to ‘disqualify’ from organizational support and funding. On the basis of experience so far, we suggest that it is possible, with the method developed through the ADP, to build a qualitative presence that gives AI profile and impact without committing as yet to the traditional organizational framework (but without precluding such development at a later stage). Which means that there can be a solution to this dilemma provided that there is agreement with the IMP about such a strategy and the relative priorities that it would imply.

Such agreement with IMP has not yet been reached, the reason being that from both sides the discussion has been conducted primarily in terms of whether new ventures as proposed by the EUA would qualify for funding through the IMT. Which raises the question how the IMT’s criteria of mobilization and growth can apply if such new ventures are *de facto* excluded from pursuing mobilization and growth. This has led the Senior Director of IMP to conclude after recent discussions that the IMT would not be an appropriate source of funding for our ADP projects.

There are two ways to respond. One is to examine more closely whether the IMT’s criteria (growth, activism, accountability and impact) could not be interpreted more flexibly to encompass the basic ambitions implied in the EUA proposals, namely to establish a qualitative presence capable of advocacy in terms of lobbying, media work and campaigning. Essentially that is precisely what the experience so far has shown the ADP’s benefit to be: to inject substantive quality of content and expertise, in a sustainable manner, in structures that tend to be heavily preoccupied with existential organizational and funding requirements.

The other would be for the EUA to forego the possibility of IMT funding, find agreement with the IS on a strategic concept that enables the EUA to proceed with one or more pilots, and seek the necessary resources elsewhere in (or indeed outside) the organization.

For the EUA Board it is formally not possible at this stage to forego an approach to the IMT, given the AGM decision. But there is also a more substantive reason to proceed as planned with an application, namely to ‘test’ the IMT’s mandate with regard to possible flexibility for innovative approaches to mobilization and (potential) growth. Either way, agreement will be required of the IEC/IS for the strategic approach proposed by the EUA. They will therefore be appraised of the application with the request to allow the EUA room to engage in a pilot scheme in Bulgaria regardless of whether the IMT decides to fund or not. Needless to say, the IMT’s advice with regard to the substantive aspects, as distinct from the funding decision, would be most welcome.

It is important to note in conclusion that the EUA’s program and application do not ‘fit’ the regular scheme of the IMT or of the IMP’s approach to organizational development. The main aim should be to join forces and achieve agreement on overall strategy and priority for such development with regard to a region that would otherwise risk remaining neglected by AI.