



Brussels, 13.12.2023  
C(2023) 8752 final

**COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION**

**of 13.12.2023**

**on an exceptional assistance measure regarding Central America**

# COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION

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## on an exceptional assistance measure regarding Central America

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012<sup>1</sup>, and in particular Article 110 thereof,

Having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009<sup>2</sup>, and in particular Article 23(6) thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) In Central America civic space is rapidly contracting as restrictions against civil society have become increasingly repressive and effective, taking multiple forms. Some governments have imposed foreign funding restrictions or misused national security and anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing laws to clamp down on civil society and independent media's rights to exercise freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. The unlawful or arbitrary use of the police and the judicial system also targets civic participation and can effectively cut off the public's access to information, undermine democratic debate, and hinder the vital work of civil society and journalists. Several journalists and media have had to flee after receiving visible and virulent public attacks, abusive legal action, smear and intimidation campaigns and online harassment. The situation is most dire in Nicaragua, where over half its registered civil society organisations have seen their legal entities removed and their members persecuted, representing the culmination of a clear pattern of repressing civic space that could have rapid and far reaching consequences for the region. In an increasingly constricted civic space, effective support to civil society organisations requires strong inclusive coalitions to facilitate a more enabling environment for civic activism. The present situation makes it necessary to adopt an exceptional assistance measure regarding Central America and especially the countries most affected by these trends to different extents, namely Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.
- (2) In order to ensure the implementation of the measure, it is necessary to adopt a financing decision. Article 110 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 ('the Financial Regulation') establishes detailed rules on financing decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 209, 14.6.2021, p. 1.

- (3) The planned assistance is to comply with the conditions and procedures set out by the restrictive measures<sup>3</sup> adopted pursuant to Article 215 TFEU.
- (4) The objective of the measure set out in this Decision is to provide support to civil society to enhance the civic space in Central America in order to remedy exceptional and unforeseen situations as referred to in Article 4(4)(a) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947.
- (5) In accordance with points (d), (n) and (q) of Annex IV, paragraph 1, second paragraph of Regulation (EU) 2021/947, the activities set out in this Decision will contribute to an enabling civic space and safer conditions for the defence of human rights, freedom of association, freedom of expression, press freedom and access to justice in an increasingly restrictive operating environment in Central America.
- (6) The effectiveness of the Union response to the situation referred to in recital (1) depends on the rapid and flexible implementation of an exceptional assistance measure of limited duration in accordance with Article 23(6) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947.
- (7) The measure provided for in this Decision is complementary to assistance provided under other Union short-term or long-term external assistance instruments. No fully adequate response can be provided under those instruments to the specific needs being addressed. Therefore, an effective response is required to enable early action in accordance with Article 4(4) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947.
- (8) The measure provided for in this Decision is consistent with the Union strategic policy framework for Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Synergies and complementarities are expected with other Union interventions, as detailed in point 7 of the Annex.
- (9) It is appropriate to authorise the award of grants without a call for proposals and to provide for the conditions for awarding those grants.
- (10) It is necessary to allow for the payment of interest due for late payment on the basis of Article 116(5) of the Financial Regulation.
- (11) In order to allow for flexibility in the implementation of the measure, it is appropriate to define changes which should not be considered substantial for the purposes of Article 110(5) of the Financial Regulation.
- (12) The European Parliament and the Council have been informed of the exceptional assistance measure to be adopted by this Decision, in accordance with Article 25(3) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947,

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

*Article 1*  
*The measure*

The financing decision for the implementation of the exceptional assistance measure regarding Central America, for 2023, as set out in the Annex, is adopted.

The measure shall include the following action: Central America Protection and Civic Space Promotion Programme, set out in the Annex.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.sanctionsmap.eu](http://www.sanctionsmap.eu). Note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy, the OJ prevails.

*Article 2*  
*Union contribution*

The maximum Union contribution for the implementation of the measure for 2023 is set at EUR 4 000 000.00, and shall be financed from the appropriations entered in the budget line 14 02 03 10 of the general budget of the Union.

The appropriations provided for in the first paragraph may also cover interest due for late payment.

*Article 3*  
*Grants*

Grants may be awarded without a call for proposals in accordance with the conditions set out in point 6 of the Annex. Grants may be awarded to the body/bodies selected in accordance with point 6 of the Annex.

*Article 4*  
*Duration of the measure*

The maximum duration of the exceptional assistance measure adopted under this Decision shall be 18 months. The authorising officer responsible may decide to extend this period twice by a further period of up to six months, up to a total maximum duration of 30 months, under the conditions laid down in Article 23(6) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947.

If the implementation of this measure or any of its components is suspended owing to ‘force majeure’ or circumstances beyond the control of the contracting authority and its implementing partner(s), the period of suspension shall not be taken into account for the calculation of the duration of the implementation of this measure.

*Article 5*  
*Flexibility clause*

Increases or decreases of up to EUR 10 million and not exceeding 20% of the contribution set in the first paragraph of Article 2 or cumulated changes<sup>4</sup> to the allocations of specific actions not exceeding 20% of that contribution, as well as extensions of the implementation period shall not be considered substantial for the purposes of Article 110(5) of the Financial Regulation provided that these changes do not significantly affect the nature and objectives of the actions.

The authorising officer responsible may apply the changes referred to in the first paragraph. Those changes shall be applied in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and proportionality.

Done at Brussels, 13.12.2023

*For the Commission*  
*Josep BORRELL FONTELLES*  
*High Representative / Vice-President*

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<sup>4</sup> These changes can come from assigned revenue made available after the adoption of the financing decision.