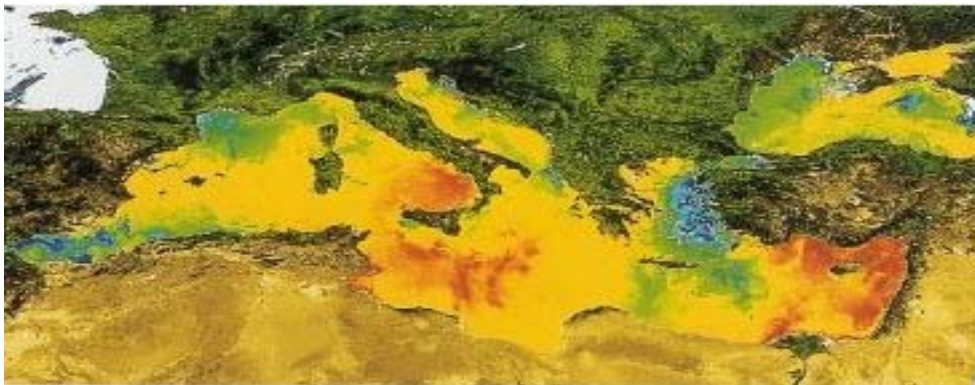




EURO-MED PARTNERSHIP

SYRIA

**National Indicative programme
2005-2006**



I. PRESENTATION

1. INTRODUCTION

The reform of the state-dominated economy is gradually beginning to take shape. The continuously slow economic growth and the rapid growth of the population and the workforce however put great pressure on decision makers to increase the pace of introducing economic reforms.

With an increasing budget deficit, the main challenges Syria faces are to stimulate growth and employment, diversify the economic structure and reduce reliance on oil revenues, undertake comprehensive reforms to improve the business environment, rationalise and improve the quality of the public sector, strengthen the rule of law, and promote and modernise the health and education system.

2. ORIENTATION COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER AND 2002-2004 NIP

Cooperation projects in Syria have traditionally experienced a rather slow pace and a quality not always above average. Reasons for this can be found in the lack of experience in international co-operation and of important administrative weakness of the Syrian counterparts. In some cases there has also been a relatively poor quality of technical assistance.

Nevertheless, we have recently witnessed a more genuine interest in the EU-Syria co-operation and an improved readiness to address all related issues.

Projects that support the private sector are implemented successfully. Implementation of projects in support of institutional upgrading is now gearing up. Should this positive trend be sustained, it is assumed that the pace of projects implementation will be faster and of a higher quality within the forthcoming period.

The current EU-Syria co-operation efforts, especially in the field of administrative reform through the Institutional and Sectoral Modernisation Facility (ISMF), will assist the Government in responding to the challenges and turning the Syrian economy into a more competitive one. Further assistance through specific and targeted programmes to fully benefit from the provisions of the Association Agreement is necessary.

The Syrian Government has a comprehensive economic reform programme since 2002. However, there have been contradictory signals on the length and objectives of the plan, which has not been released in its final form. The programme's main objective, mentioned by Minister of Finance Dr. Hussein, is 6% economic growth and recognising the importance of the private sector in stimulating growth. This will complement the steps taken recently to modernise the economy. They include the opening of three private banks in January 2004, the gradual simplification of the exchange rate regime, the start of tax reform and the gradual liberalisation of price controls. The lack of clear political willingness and a consistent strategy towards economic reforms by Syrian authorities has hindered the implementation of cooperation projects.

In the framework of the Barcelona process, the EIB has strengthened its financial partnership with the Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPC) through the creation of a specialized instrument, the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP - October 2002). At the end of 2003, it was decided to reinforce the FEMIP, by adding new financial instruments and changing some organizational features in order to increase activities in favour of the private sector and cooperation with Partner Countries.

Under FEMIP, annual volume of EIB lending in all partner countries will gradually increase from € 1,4 to € 2 billion. These resources are to support a much-broadened activity, with a priority for private sector development. Of particular importance are also those projects in the area of Environment, Human Capital and of mutual interest to the Union and Mediterranean Partner Countries or reinforcing "South-South" cooperation. Financing on own resources will be complemented with EU budgetary resources for technical assistance, both upstream and downstream. These will help with the preparation and implementation of investment projects. In addition, the EIB continues to make use of considerable amounts of risk capital resources for private sector development.

Amongst those priorities, the EIB and the Commission have decided specific objectives regarding:

- The reduction of the negative impact of human activity on the environment.
- The alignment of environmental norms with international agreements and treaties (European directives, Kyoto, etc.).

In those areas, EIB loans on own resources will be supported by interest subsidies (financed through budgetary funds).

3. MID TERM REVIEW (MTR)

3.1 Preamble

Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) are intended as an instrument for guiding, managing and reviewing EU assistance programmes. They are essential management tools to ensure that external assistance reflects EU's policy objectives and priorities. The completion of the "first generation" of CSPs/RSP for the MED region took place in December 2001.

With a view to the continuous improvement of the quality of the CSPs, the Council in March 2003 adopted conclusions on the use of the Common Framework for CSPs¹. In these conclusions, the Council invites the Commission to undertake a Mid Term Review (MTR) of each CSP in accordance with existing rules and lays down key orientations for the CSP review. Four parameters have been identified as basic reference points for the review process: (i) new developments in the country, (ii) new EC/EU policy objectives and commitments, (iii) results and performance, and (iv) lessons learnt and potential improvement.

¹ Council Conclusions on the Progress Report on the Implementation of the Common Framework for Country Strategy Papers, adopted by the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 18 March 200.

As far as the MED region is concerned, the general conclusion is that there is no need for an extended review, given the rather general content of the CSP/RSP 2002-2006 and their recent adoption. Minor revisions in the CSPs/RSP relate to already identified sectors corresponding to new EU/EC policy objectives and commitments (*see infra*). Since the MTR coincides with the 2005-2006 programming exercise, it was decided to express the CSPs/RSP adjustments through the national/regional indicative programmes.

3.2 Summary of the MTR

a) Developments

Syria continues a policy of prudent economic and administrative reforms, which tries to create an economic environment more conducive to economic growth and with a larger reliance on the private sector without upsetting the social balance. The Syrian Government recently approved the new 5-year plan and which tallies with the current Country Strategy Document.

The social and economic situation in Syria has remained stable, but economic growth remains insufficient to sustain this situation. IMF estimates GDP growth at 1.0 % in 2003 and at 2.9 % in 2004. This is barely at the level of the population growth and falls short of the 6 % growth that is estimated as necessary to create employment for the 350,000 new entrants in the labour force every year.

The Strategy puts the emphasis on support for economic reforms and on creating the social and political conditions conducive to reforms.

b) New EU/EC policy objectives and commitments

In the course of 2002-2003, a number of policy orientations have been adopted by the Commission, which will have an impact on our relations with the Mediterranean partners in the near future. Most significantly, the communication on "*Wider Europe and the New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*" sets out a new framework for relations over the coming decade with the Southern Mediterranean. The communication notes the growing interdependence between the EU and its neighbouring partners in terms of stability, security and sustainable development. In the suggested **New European Neighbourhood Policy**, the communication proposes that, over the coming decade, the EU should aim to work in partnership with its Southern neighbours to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood - a "ring of friends" - with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations. In return for concrete progress reflecting the shared values, and effective implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms, all the neighbouring countries can be offered the prospect of a stake in the EU's internal market. This could pave the way for further integration and liberalisation to promote the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital (four freedoms). For the period up to 2006, the countries of the south Mediterranean are to be invited to participate actively in MEDA neighbourhood programmes under preparation, aimed at strengthening the impact of trans-border co-operation with the Mediterranean EU Member States.

Other relevant policy orientations include: trade-related technical assistance and the Doha round, JAI related issues, better governance, human rights and democratisation in the MED region, and environmental initiatives agreed at the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development.

The launch of the new WTO Round - **the Doha Development Agenda** - comprises both further market openings and additional rule making, underpinned by commitments to strengthen substantial assistance to build capacity in developing countries. The main objective of the new round is to assist developing countries' integration into the world trade system in a way that will help them combat poverty.

The Council conclusions of Tampere (1999), Santa Maria da Feira (2000) and Sevilla (2002) defined a common policy regarding the integration of **Justice and Home Affairs** issues in EU external policy. The Action Plan adopted in Valencia (2002), in addition to the Barcelona Declaration, gave further orientations for reinforced co-operation in the MED region in three main sectors: migration, reform of the judiciary and the fight against criminality.

Better governance, promotion of **democracy** and respect for **human rights** constitute core objectives of the EU's external policies. In line with the conclusions drawn up in the 2002 UNDP Arab Human Development Report, the Commission recently adopted a Communication on "*Reinvigorating European Actions on Human Rights and Democratisation with Mediterranean Partners*" which aims at maximising the effectiveness of the instruments at the disposal of the EU and its Mediterranean partners in the field of human rights and democracy. The communication sets out working guidelines to promote Human Rights and fundamental freedoms in co-operation with the Mediterranean partners. It proposes 10 concrete recommendations to improve the political dialogue between the EU and its Mediterranean partners, as well as EU financial co-operation on Human Rights issues. Their implementation will be enhanced by three levels of complementarity: between the political dialogue and financial assistance, between the MEDA programme and assistance under the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), and finally between the national and regional dimensions.

A global commitment to the cause of sustainable development was restated at the Johannesburg Summit, through an ambitious action-oriented programme with clear and measurable objectives, demonstrating the increasing importance of **environmental issues** in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The key areas for EU action are water and energy. In Johannesburg, the EU launched two partnerships, one on water and sanitation and one on energy for the poor. The **EU Water initiative** ("Water for Life") will help coordinate existing financing mechanisms with a focus on three parameters: supply, sanitation and integrated resources management. At the moment, concrete follow-up is expected for the Mediterranean countries in the framework of the existing financing instrument (MEDA).

c) **Results and weaknesses/lessons learned/improvements**

The actual situation in the region and the war in Iraq can have a certain negative effect on the Syrian economy. The process of economic reform and the stability in the country could be damaged. Nevertheless, at this point in time the strategy is considered appropriate. If this changes, reassessment will be necessary.

Co-operation activities might meet delays and difficulties in project implementation.

In 2002, a first clear improvement in the EU-Syria MEDA co-operation was observed. There is also a more constructive Syrian approach to the Association Agreement negotiations which the NIP implementation rate is improving. In crucial areas of economic reform such as banking and finance, progress remains slow. In the implementation of co-operation

programmes, the Delegation still meets a lack of competence and experience on the Syrian side. The situation is improving, but there still is ground to cover.

Conclusion

The final conclusion of the Mid Term Review is that the CSP constitutes an adequate response strategy. It remains a good basis for further co-operation under the National Indicative Programme and therefore the CSP does not need major changes.

4. ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT

In December 2003, an understanding was reached between the negotiators on all issues and the negotiations of an EU Syria Association Agreement are now in their final phase. The Draft Agreement foresees provisional application of all trade and trade-related provisions as soon as it has been adopted by the European Community and Syria until the entry into force of the Association Agreement.

The draft EU-Syria Association Agreement is similar in pattern to other Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, but contains provisions in a number of new areas: non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures, trade facilitation and trade dispute settlement mechanisms. It also contains more far-reaching and substantial provisions in the areas of right of establishment and services, comprehensive tariff dismantlement on agricultural products, technical barriers to trade, government procurement and intellectual property rights. It will necessitate co-operation on far-reaching reform and modernisation of the Syrian economy.

5. PRIORITIES

The National Indicative Programme for 2005-2006, with an indicative amount of 80 €M, will build on the work on economic transition, modernisation and social support started under the previous programmes. Of this indicative amount 18 €M is conditional on the initialling of the Association Agreement.

In its co-operation efforts the EU will favour, as much as possible, a sector approach in order to broaden ownership by the Syrian Government over public sector policy and resource allocation decision; to increase the coherence between sectoral policy, spending and results; and to reduce transaction costs. This approach involves progressive development of a comprehensive and coherent sector policy and strategy.

The Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006, taking into account the recommendations of the Mid Term Review, identifies the following priorities, which continue to be valid for the period 2005 to 2006, to assist the Government in meeting some of these challenges.

- *Human Rights and Democratisation in the MED region*

The EC Communication on "*Reinvigorating European Actions on Human Rights and Democratisation with Mediterranean Partners*" proposes key practical measures which aim at facilitating a deeper and more operational focus for political dialogue on Human Rights and democratisation at all levels with MEDA partners. These include the development of National Action Plans and Regional Action Plans on Human Rights and Democracy issues with those

MEDA partners willing to engage in such an exercise. According to the Communication (recommendation 7), an allocation is envisaged for those countries which adopt National Action Plans in 2004. Such allocations will allow partners who progress this work to benefit from extra funds, not necessarily related to human rights objectives. This special additional facility will be allocated in 2005, in the framework of the revision of the 2006 programming exercise.

5.1 Priority 1: Institution building

Further focus on the private sector with the establishment of a new national institution aimed at supporting Syrian business, in particular small and medium enterprises. This measure will increase the competitiveness of the private sector and the efficiency of its support institutions in view of the progressive transition towards a market economy and facilitate the successful insertion of Syria into the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (FTA) by the year 2010.

Water supply and wastewater treatment face severe problems in Syria. The Syrian Government gives high priority to integrated management of water resources and treatment and is fully aware of the need for institutional reform in this sector. The programme provides an interest subsidy to an EIB loan in the water sector with the aim of improving domestic water supply and treatment.

5.2 Priority 2: Industrial Modernisation

The establishment and upgrading of Quality management and capability. This measure will strengthen the existing responsible bodies under the Ministry of Industry, such as the Syrian Arab Commission for Standards and Metrology, on the basis of the recommendations elaborated by the preparatory phase of the Industrial Modernisation Project, with a view to the support of Syrian industry in meeting the challenges of increased competition in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

5.3 Priority 3: Human Resource Development

The Higher Education programme will aim at enhancing the quality of Higher Education Institutions, through a reform oriented, sectoral approach programme based on a Syrian higher education policy outline.

The Cultural Heritage Development Programme will build on the results and achievements of the two previous programmes. Through a sectoral approach the programme will aim at developing a long term strategy and maintaining institutional support for the administrations involved, as well as elaborating a global approach on pilot sites to promote sustainable development of the territorial development for cultural heritage sites.

The Tempus Programme will be continued to support exchanges and co-operation in higher education, with a view to responding to the socio-economic needs of Syria, and to fostering a better understanding between cultures.

5.4 Priority 4: Trade enhancement

Association Agreement Support Programme. This will involve modernisation of the legislative, institutional and regulatory framework necessary for launching the trade-related

aspects of the Association Agreement, with a view to increasing local export capacity to the Euro-Mediterranean area.

5.5 Priority 5: Civil society and human rights

A programme to promote civil society in Syria will include institutional support to develop a more supportive regulatory framework and to improve the operational environment of the civil society organisations. This will aim at reinforcing the capacity of non-state actors through training tailored to their needs and providing support in their actions targeting poverty reduction, basic services, human rights and community based development initiatives.

II. PRIORITY 1: INSTITUTION BUILDING

1. SUPPORT TO THE SYRIAN EUROPEAN ENTERPRISE CENTRE

1.1 Justification

The Syrian Government has made some progress in reforming trade - it has reduced the list of prohibited products, abolished the exclusive rights of import agents and has merged import monopolies. Tariffs on imported raw material have been reduced and the Harmonised System of Tariffs has been introduced. Although still very limited in effect, foreign currency accounts for residents have been authorised.

Although these improvements do not match the more substantial trade liberalisation in some neighbouring Arab countries, the private sector's contribution to the overall development of Syria has become increasingly visible.

The EU has supported increased participation of the private sector in the Syrian economy through the funding of the Syrian European Business Centre (SEBC). This activity addresses the problem of the low level of competitiveness of Syrian enterprises and contributes to the upgrading of their managerial and technical skills.

Given the current low pace of the economic reform process the private sector faces a number of problems which jeopardise its further development, these include: the fragmentation of the sector, insufficient availability of business support services, under-developed information technology, lack of awareness on environment issues, limited access to international markets, inadequate promotion of foreign business co-operation and insufficient institutional support for export development and promotion.

The success of the programme will depend on the Government's efforts in economic development and deregulation.

1.2 General objective

Contribute to the economic reforms undertaken, or to be introduced by the Syrian Government, by improving the competitiveness of the Syrian private sector.

1.3 Specific objective

Development of Small and Medium Enterprises, to make them more efficient and competitive on both the national and international stage, thus generating more income and increased job opportunities in the sector.

1.4 Expected results

The programme aims at the following results:

- Increased number of economically viable SMEs.
- Increased number of SMEs applying modern management and marketing principles, modern technology, higher quality standards, etc.
- Increased sectoral co-operation both on horizontal and vertical levels.
- Increased use of information technology for business management and marketing.
- Improved adherence to EU environmental standards in the private sector.

1.5 Performance indicators

- Private sector contribution to GDP.
- Export earnings of the private sector.
- Number of economically viable SMEs.
- Application of modern management practices within the SME sector.

1.6 Short description of the programme

The new programme is built on the foundation of the Syrian European Business Centre (SEBC). During its life span, the SEBC has accumulated knowledge, experience and information covering a wide spectrum of the Syrian business environment. Together with its good image and wide network among the Syrian business community, it has become an efficient entity in improving the competitiveness of the Syrian SME sector.

The SEBC project, within its present extension until September 2006, will be transformed into a viable national institution, the Syrian European Enterprise Centre, SEEC. The new institution will be an agent for developing the private business sector and its permanent structure will ensure the sustainability of the programme.

The SEEC will offer programmes to SMEs in the form of basic and value added services, based on local and regional entrepreneurial needs. These services may include, customer service desk, assistance with start-ups (including incubators), information technology services, and entrepreneurial training. It may also offer special consulting and value added information services, tailor made training programmes, and export promotion activities. The new programme will support SEEC activities in areas agreed between the Commission and the Syrian side. The latter will have the responsibility for managing SEEC and for providing it with the necessary local resources with the understanding that the Centre has to become progressively self financing.

Specific support will be provided in the area of environmental standards. The new institution will also pursue SEBC experience as regards gender focus (women in business).

1.7 Conditions

The creation of an institutional framework for the SEEC and the participation of the Syrian side in its running costs. During the lifetime of the programme an assessment must be made of the progress of liberalisation and modernisation of the business environment in Syria.

1.8 Indicative budget

15 €M.

2. INTEREST RATE SUBSIDY IN THE AREA OF WATER

2.1 Justification

The relatively high population growth in Syria and the high rate of urbanisation has an adverse effect on both water supply and treatment, as the sector has difficulty in coping with the increasing local demand.

Water supply has faced severe problems in Syria over several years. The reduction in rainfall of the last decade and the overdraft withdrawal of groundwater has resulted in consistent and significant lowering of water tables. Over 90% of water use is for agricultural purposes, with the rest used for human and industrial consumption. The current water supply system represents an increasing risk of depletion of reserves and has a negative implication for the environment and sustainable development. Urban areas meet the increasing demand from existing wells which yield poor quality water.

Wastewater treatment is characterised by only 30% of water undergoing treatment, the rest being used untreated for irrigation. This results in a high risk of water borne disease and negative effects on the environment. More than 80 % of the population are served by sanitary drainage, which makes sewage treatment and water recycling into agriculture an urgent option.

The Syrian authorities are promoting change from isolated local water supply to regionally integrated supply systems. Water saving techniques and modification of consumer behaviour are also pursued. The Syrian authorities have assigned a high priority to integrated management of scarce water resources and treatment/recycling into agriculture. The Syrian Government is also aware of the need of institutional reform in the sector, with the need to promote a rational allocation of water, explain cost of services to the consumers and reduce the subsidies from the general budget of the state. Furthermore, authorities face difficulties in managing complex technological solutions and there is a need for know-how transfer through international projects.

International credit and know-how are highly necessary and the project will allow the transfer of practical project-based international experience.

2.2 General objective

To increase access and quality of water for the urban population; reducing the environmental effects of current use of this scarce natural resource.

2.3 Specific objective

To provide an interest rate subsidy to an EIB loan in the water sector, covering improvements in domestic water supply and wastewater treatment for the Damascus metropolitan area (preferably South), leading to an improvement of the quality of environment, pollution

control, human health protection and rational use of natural resources, all of which will contribute to sustainable development.

2.4 Expected results

- Reduced environmental risk of depletion of water as scarce natural resource.
- Increased availability of quality water for urban population.
- Increased knowledge of water supply and wastewater treatment technologies.
- Raised awareness on water as a resource.
- Institutional strengthening in water management.
- Increased human health protection.

2.5 Performance indicators

- Productivity indicators of water use.
- Quality parameters of water supply.
- Technical performance parameters of water supply system.
- Share of international credit in water sector.
- Population sanitary indicators.

2.6 Short description of the programme

The project location will be selected and identified in the course of 2004. EIB loan appraisal and signature are scheduled for 2005. Identification will consider as a priority area Damascus South-West area.

The European Commission is financing an 8 €M project promoting healthy living conditions in two Palestinian refugee camps in South Damascus (Khan Dannoun and Khan Eshieh) by connecting the camps to the regional water supply system and to sewage treatment plants. The project includes the design, engineering and construction supervision for the water supply and wastewater treatment facilities. The Financing Agreement was signed on 19 December 2002. The project was launched in 2003 and will be implemented by 2008. It foresees the preparation of funding documents for regional works, as required by international financial institutions; and assistance in funding negotiations.

The interest subsidy will increase the likelihood of financing of the necessary water supply and wastewater treatment project in the area.

The subsidy will ensure the sufficient economic and financial return of the project and will be accompanied by technical assistance during project preparation and implementation (including TA financed by FEMIP). This will include monitoring of indispensable project conditions in the area of water sector management ensuring the projects long term economic and financial viability.

The project should be coherent with the principles of the EC Water Framework Directive and subject to Environmental Impact Assessment procedures similar to those required under the EC EIA directive.

2.7 Conditions

- Commitment by the Syrian Government to pursue reform of the water sector.
- EIB financing of loan for a project in water supply and wastewater treatment in Damascus area.

2.8 Indicative budget

5 €M.

III. PRIORITY 2: INDUSTRIAL MODERNISATION

1. STRENGTHENING QUALITY MANAGEMENT, CAPABILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN SYRIA

1.1 Justification

International trade is increasingly influenced by requirements on health, safety, and environmental aspects of products emanating from internationally recognised technical regulations and standards.

Syria is in the final stages of concluding an Association Agreement with the EU and WTO membership is considered. Syrian industry therefore faces the challenge of international competition. It is thus important that Syrian products and services become compliant with such technical regulations. To demonstrate the compliance of the products and services, conformity assessment procedures will need to be improved.

The **"Programme for Strengthening Quality Management, Capabilities and Infrastructure"** (hereinafter called the "Quality Programme") assists in the creation of a complete and operational "quality infrastructure" in Syria.

The Quality Programme will assist in establishing a political and institutional environment that will create the conditions for Syrian economic operators to adapt to the more liberalised trading environment. The programme will address the issue of quality at policy, institutional and enterprise level.

The introduction of a system of conformity assessment and national technical regulations will also have a positive influence on the protection of consumers.

The quality infrastructure in Syria is not always on a level of performance comparable to international requirements.

In general, the level of conformity of Syrian products with specifications and international standards is low. However, a well functioning quality infrastructure and increased quality awareness can be factors that make it much easier for Syrian manufacturers to meet and to demonstrate the compliance of their products to international standards and quality requirements. Products with ascertained quality will have access to the high volume markets in the European Union and North America.

The current Industrial Modernisation Programme which has been integrated into the extension of SEBC foresees further analyses of the quality infrastructure in Syria, the results of which can be fed into the design of the Quality Programme.

Constructing and upgrading the Syrian quality infrastructure to a level of international acceptance by means of the Quality Programme can bring these benefits also to Syrian manufacturers and traders, and, ultimately, to the whole Syrian economy. It will have a positive influence on the volume of exports.

The proposed Quality Programme will play a part in building up a national capacity for developing technical regulations and the control of such regulations along with quality-related institutions and quality awareness.

The programme should promote convergence with standards and guidelines developed in the EU in order to assist implementation of the EC Directive on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control.

1.2 General objectives

The overall objective of the Quality Programme is to increase the share of Syrian products and services in international trade through better conformity with technical requirements and international standards. Additionally, the safety and health of consumers will be better protected by quality control of imported and locally manufactured products.

1.3 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the programme are:

a) On the policy level

The establishment of a policy and legal framework by the Syrian Government for quality related issues, as well as the creation of an adequately organised and operating system of market surveillance.

b) With regard to institutions

Completion of the Syrian conformity assessment infrastructure, and its adequate operation.

c) On the enterprise level

Creation of awareness on quality needs among Syrian producers, leading to the introduction and application of quality requirements in their production processes and products.

1.4 Expected results

a) Policy component

The Syrian Government has a policy and legal framework in place for quality-related issues and an adequately organised and operating system of market surveillance.

Key ministerial staff are trained and the legal and regulatory framework for conformity assessment is in place. In particular, laws and/or regulations on standardisation, accreditation, and metrology are in force.

The concerned Ministries are capable of formulating specific technical regulations or of reviewing and adapting technical regulations within their domain.

b) Institutional component

The conformity assessment infrastructure is substantially improved and operating adequately. In particular, setting up or up-grading of laboratories is supported, with the aim of achieving national and international accreditation. Procurement and/or upgrading of equipment and instruments may also be funded.

A national metrology function and a system for reference laboratories is set-up and operational under internationally accepted rules and best practices.

c) Enterprise component

Syrian producers are aware of quality needs and willing to introduce and apply quality requirements in their production processes and products.

An information centre for conformity assessment is operational to provide to exporting industries the relevant regulations and procedures related to the export of goods and services.

1.5 Performance Indicators

Percentage of national production in selected industries in conformity with international technical regulations.

1.6 Short description of the programme

The programme will tentatively consist of the following three inter-linked components:

- Policy Component will in particular assist in the creation of a national legislative framework for the separate elements of the quality infrastructure, and establish the legal basis for the quality infrastructure institutions. An overall vision of the Government on issues related to quality should be formulated in a national quality policy.
- Institutional Component will support the establishment and operational improvements of the functions of accreditation, metrology, standardisation, as well as of testing, inspection, and certification of products and services. Market surveillance organisations will serve for effective enforcement of national legislation on technical aspects. The aim is to achieve recognition of authoritative international bodies in these fields, and to achieve mutual recognition agreements.
- Enterprise Component will help in promoting awareness on the importance of quality and conformity assessment among the economic operators. The creation, together with industry, of a platform organisation as a focal point for matters of quality and as a counterpart to the Government is an essential means to that end.

1.7 Conditions

With regard to the policy component, the Syrian Government is committed to pass the necessary laws and to implement the quality policies formulated with the assistance of the Quality Programme.

Before engaging in substantial capital expenditure on equipment, the basic regulatory framework has to be in place.

1.8 Indicative Budget

12 €M.

IV. PRIORITY 3: HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

1. UPGRADING THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SYRIA

1.1 Justification

Higher Education is of growing importance. It is expected to provide the human resources for the transformation process in all fields.

Until recently Syria followed the policy of free education for all. Therefore, education is one of the main items in the national budget. Until 2002, higher education was limited to the public sector with its 155.000 students.

The Ministry of Higher Education is fully aware of the low quality of higher education in Syria. In order to achieve quick results they introduced centres of excellence outside the four public universities. Admission is highly selective to these centres and some of them are fee-based. They are the Higher Institute for Applied Science and Research (HIAST), the Syrian Virtual University (SVU), the Higher Institute of Business Administration (HIBA) and the Institut National d'Administration (INA). To satisfy the demand for quality higher education from both the employers' and the students' side, the Ministry of Higher Education gave private universities the opportunity to operate in Syria.

This recently more diversified higher educational landscape is placing new demands on the administration of the educational system.

The current system of higher education is characterised by the following factors:

- Centralised decision-making: Education-related decisions are highly centralised, with tight control over the curriculum, admissions and recruitment. Undergraduate student admission is very much influenced by administrative criteria.
- Inefficient processes: General inefficiency - due to volume, capacity and infrastructure factors - undermines the effectiveness of higher education in Syria. The result is less than optimal output, a longer period of completion and a final output where quality is not prominent.
- Emphasis on theory: Graduates have to undergo intensive competency training before they are able to perform a job or a function.

- Quality standards and quality-control mechanism: Although there is little official information on quality standards, it is believed that the quality standards of most higher education institutions in Syria are poorly defined, at best. This applies to the structure, curriculum, teaching material, faculty, research effort, and methodology as much as the infrastructure. Quality-control mechanisms are not adequately formalised.
- Bias: There is an exaggerated emphasis on university type higher education, both undergraduate and graduate, where social and human sciences predominate.
- Fixed and inflexible scope of study and fields of specialisation: Subjects taught at University are a fixed set not always in line with the needs of the labour market.
- Limited integration with other types and levels of education: there are still limited links between post-secondary academic education and more professionally oriented education offered by Intermediate Institutes.
- Limited role of universities in a lifelong learning perspective: Universities have presently a limited offer of courses, mostly focus on long term graduate courses. Their offer of short-term courses, adult training courses, etc. is still very limited.

So far, cooperation (EC, MS, etc.) has targeted either the creation of new Institutes or the development of new curricula, alongside the usual scholarships. In a significant change, the Ministry is now willing to address these issues on a systemic level and to engage in reform. Currently, the EU is involved in the following projects and initiatives in support of education and including higher education:

- The graduate programme at the Higher Institute of Business Administration (HIBA) (14 €M).
- TEMPUS (4 €M).
- The EU Directorate General for Research and Technology manages the 6th Framework Programme to support research. The programme "Specific Measures in Support on International Co-operation" is open for participation by the Euro Mediterranean Partner Countries (25 €M).
- Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training (21 €M that is expected to be approved by Med Committee in Spring 2004).
- Regional Programme on Education and Training for Employment (5 €M) that is expected to be approved by Med Committee in Spring 2004.
- Erasmus Mundus, a scholarship programme, will be launched in 2004. The budget is not yet specified.

The new programme should take stock of and benefit from experiences made in the implementation of the above projects and programmes. It should particularly build on the progress made under the VET Modernisation programme in the development of a comprehensive strategy for human resources development.

1.2 Global Objective

The upgrading of the performance of Human Resource Development in Syria is in line with national requirements.

1.3 Specific objective

Syrian Higher Education System is reformed in response to the needs of the economy and of more efficient management.

1.4 Expected results

- Quality Assurance and Accreditation System in place.
- Advisory Centre for Higher Education fully functional and services available to both the Ministry of Higher Education and the Universities.
- Status and financing of public universities reviewed.
- Modernisation of administration and management of universities.
- Pilot actions executed to establish links between university education and labour market needs.

1.5 Performance indicators

- Higher percentage of graduates finding employment 1 year after graduation.
- Improved gender ratio in the subjects where there is imbalance.
- Introduction of environmental awareness into curricula.

1.6 Short description of the programme

The programme will concentrate on:

- Improved management and administration at the level of the Ministry of Higher Education and at the level of the public sector universities, as well as support to the Ministry of Higher Education in its role towards the private universities.
- Review of the financing of public universities.
- Improved policy formulation.
- More flexible structuring of the delivery of Higher Education through a multidisciplinary approach and a flexible credit system.
- Improving capacities of graduates in line with labour market needs.
- Increasing the role of Intermediate institutes and universities in continuing training delivery and partnership with enterprises.
- Strengthening the partnership between enterprises and universities in the field of practical training, research and development.
- Introduction of gender and environment awareness as crosscutting issues.
- Implementation of pilots in subjects to be identified during the identification phase.
- Upgrading of equipment/installation of equipment will take place, inter alia, in the Ministry of Higher Education, the proposed Advisory Centre for Higher Education.

Beneficiary: Ministry of Higher Education;

1.7 Conditions

A commitment by the Syrian Government to adopt a reform policy in Higher Education.

1.8 Indicative Budget

10 €M.

2. CULTURAL HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

2.1 Justification

Syria enjoys one of the most important archaeological heritages in the world. The Directorate General of Antiquities and Museum (DGAM) is responsible for protecting archaeological and historical heritage.

To perform such a task, the DGAM is working with 110 on-going archaeological missions spread over the territories. Those missions are studying, excavating and consolidating an equivalent number out of the 3.000 sites existing in Syria.

Two previous programmes (Preservation of the Cultural Heritage Training Programme and Cultural Tourism Development Programme) have inspired the Syrian authorities to increase their knowledge in specific areas of the archaeological sectors and to promote cultural tourism. However, they also highlighted that there is a need for greater institutional support in terms of the management of archaeological and historical heritage in the Ministry of Culture.

The sectoral approach could be considered for this programme. At the institutional level, there are needs for a sectoral mid-term expenditure framework and the definition and implementation of a long-term strategy. Such a strategy shall take into account the internationally recognised standards but also the specificities of Syria and its potential for cultural tourism. At the field level, a *global approach* to the management of archaeological and historical sites should be implemented. This *global approach* would integrate all steps from the archaeological studies to the promotion of tourism of historical sites. Such an approach should be implemented under pilot cases.

2.2 General Objective

- To promote the sustainable development of the archaeological and historical heritage sector in Syria.

2.3 Specific Objective

- To support the DGAM in implementing a long term development strategy for cultural heritage in Syria.
- To support the promotion of a cultural tourism strategy of the Ministry of Culture together with the Ministry of Tourism.
- To assist the DGAM in co-operation with the Ministry of Tourism in mastering and implementing a *global approach* for site development, including all aspects of scientific works in cultural heritage, preservation, valorisation and tourism promotion and territorial development for cultural heritage sites.

2.4 Expected results

- The capacity of the DGAM for planning, control and regulation is increased.
- Enhanced management capacity of the DGAM in cultural heritage site management.
- A database of the sites, materials and artefacts is prepared and updated.
- A management system for materials and artefacts is implemented and promotes national, regional and international co-ordination.
- Capacity of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism to manage cultural tourism in historic sites in a sustainable and environment friendly manner improved.

- Operating co-ordination system between Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism, Municipalities and donors.
- Technical and scientific capacities of the DGAM in relation to archaeological excavations, archaeological sites preservation, museography, artefacts and materials strengthened.
- The staff of the DGAM is trained in scientific work in cultural heritage, site preservation and valorisation.
- Promotion of regional economic development.

2.5 Performance indicators

- A comprehensive strategy for the development of the Cultural Heritage sector is approved.
- Number of sites developed under a *global approach*.
- Number of tourists on pilot sites.
- Number of scientific studies and publications undertaken by archaeological missions.
- Studies on the involvement of population and municipalities in developing historical sites.
- Number of small and medium enterprises, and employment related to the tourism sector surrounding sites.

2.6 Short description of the programme

The European Commission is promoting a sectoral approach. The programme will focus on institutional support in order to implement such an approach with the DGAM.

At the field level, it is proposed to implement a *global approach*. Such an approach should offer the opportunity to implement the strategy on pilot sites taking into account all aspects related to the archaeological and historical heritage. Such a *global approach* should be sustainable, respect the environmental concerns and could include *inter alia*:

- Archaeological studies.
- Research and archaeological works.
- Consolidation and restoration.
- Involvement and awareness of municipalities and population living in the site and its surrounding.
- Territorial development.
- Tourism promotion.

The main beneficiary will be the Ministry of Culture (DGAM) but the Ministries of Tourism, and of Municipalities as well as the private sector related to the tourism sector shall be closely associated.

2.7 Indicative Budget

10 €M.

3. TEMPUS

3.1 Background and justification

In recognition of the important role of higher education in developing human resources and occupational skills and of exchange in promoting understanding between cultures, there is a

need for closer EU-Syria co-operation in the field of higher education. This will encourage a mutual understanding of the common goals in the education sector.

The 2003-2004 programme is fully operational and the quantity of proposals introduced indicate that the Syrian target group is now well informed about the Programme.

3.2 Specific objectives

The continuation of the TEMPUS programme aims to strengthen and deepen the whole fabric of relations between eligible countries through its emphasis on co-operation in higher education. This will further contribute to the social and cultural goals of the Barcelona Process and will feed into the economic and social development of Syria.

3.3 Programme description

The extension of TEMPUS will allow Syrian access to the Tempus IV programme. This covers participation in joint European projects (joint education and training actions; measures for the reform and development of higher education; the promotion of co-operation between universities, industry and institutions; higher education staff and student mobility).

Teachers, researchers, trainers, university administrators, senior ministerial officials, educational planners and other experts may use study grants to finance visits that promote the quality, development and restructuring of higher education and training.

3.4 Expected results

- Continuation of support to the reform and development of higher education structures and establishments and their management.
- Development of training leading to qualifications needed in the context of economic reform.
- Improvement in the links between the higher educational system and industry.
- Enhancing collaboration between the EU-Syrian academic communities and between the higher education sector and the wider world.
- The joint development of common curricula and qualifications in priority areas.

3.5 Indicative Budget

The TEMPUS programme will continue under the 2005-2006 National Indicative Programme with a budget of **5.5 €M**.

V. PRIORITY 4: TRADE ENHANCEMENT

1. ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

1.1 Justification

Shortly after the signature of the Association Agreement with the European Union, the trade and trade-related provisions of the Agreement will be subject to provisional application until the Agreement enters into force. The Draft Agreement goes beyond previous Euro-Mediterranean agreement in scope and ambition and includes provisions on sanitary and

phyto-sanitary measures, trade facilitation and trade dispute settlement mechanisms as well as more far-reaching and substantial provisions in the areas of establishment and services, tariff dismantlement on agricultural products, technical barriers to trade, government procurement and intellectual property rights.

Syria's adaptation to such a free trade business context will necessitate substantial efforts in modernising trade legislation and rules, as well as the creation of institutions to carry out trade reforms and Association Agreement obligations (for example in competition and protection of intellectual and industrial property). Some of these laws and institutions do not yet exist, others require strengthening. Legal and administrative reform should be elaborated in the interest of better governance. Such reform will also need to be flanked by actions against corruption.

To benefit from the Agreement, and improve the trade balance, exporters will need better access to information concerning market arrangements and import rules for the EU and other markets, particularly for agricultural and processed agricultural products. In view of the present problems over customs classification and clearance, a significant streamlining of customs laws, procedures, and the entire customs administration will be fundamental to enhance external trade.

The programme will benefit all sectors of the economy, including the energy, transport and agricultural sectors.

The programme will aim to make full use of the partnership between Syria and the EU under the Association Agreement and to put Syrian actors in a position to benefit from the Agreement.

1.2 General objective

The overall objective of the programme is to facilitate trade in all sectors between Syria and its Euro-Mediterranean partners and to improve the business environment in Syria.

1.3 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the programme are to support the Syrian public authorities concerned by the implementation of the Association Agreement, in preparing and implementing legislative, administrative and other measures to improve the business environment, and to facilitate trade in line with the regional Action Plan on trade and investment facilitation adopted by Euro-Mediterranean trade ministers at Toledo in 2002 and the recommendations for facilitation of customs procedures adopted by at Palermo in 2003.

1.4 Expected results

- Modernisation and harmonisation of the legislative and regulatory framework of Syria's internal market.
- An appropriate environment for business to meet the challenge of free trade.
- Facilitated and harmonised procedures for customs clearance.
- Increased awareness of the Agreement, and its significance in the business community.
- Suitable investment protection and promotion, through a modernised and streamlined investment code (and its application).

- Appropriate macro-economic and structural flanking policies to the implementation of the Association Agreement
- The provision of support to exporters seeking precise information on markets in the EU and elsewhere, and assistance in improving competitiveness.
- Improved administrative capacity of the Syrian institutions in charge of trade, services, competition, intellectual and industrial property.

1.5 Performance indicators

- Relevant new trade laws adopted.
- Number of complaints concerning customs delays and tariff classification.
- Number of trade enquiries received, and followed up.

1.6 Short description of the programme

The programme focuses on public administration, it is demand driven and will make available to the Administration an Operational Fund to be used in a flexible manner in order to respond quickly to needs arising from the implementation of the Association Agreement.

The programme will build on the experience accumulated by the Institutional and Sectoral Modernisation Facility (ISMF), launched in 2003 with an overall budget of 21 €M, and will focus on trade-related issues, as well as the Modernisation of the Ministry of Finance programme, to be launched in 2004 (8 €M).

The activities foreseen under the programme include, supply of short and long term expertise, exchange of civil servants, twinning, studies, participation at technical meetings, training, information, equipment.

These activities, to be identified in due course, may aim at:

- **Modernisation of legislative and regulatory framework.** Updating laws regarding international trade and streamlining of procedures for issuing licences.
- **Reform of customs procedures and administration** in light of the Association Agreement and possible future WTO accession.
- Support actions on **fiscal policy**.
- Preparation of laws and institutions required for carrying out rules on **competition and intellectual property rights**.
- **Syrian agro/agro-industry** to adjust to modern market demands for food products, to meet health and phyto-sanitary requirements.
- Opening of **energy and transport markets** and development of effective regulatory frameworks, including harmonisation of rules and standards with those of the EU.
- Easing of **transit** requirements in the transport sector.
- Improving the **investment climate**, such as removing administrative and procedural obstacles facing foreign investors, providing legal guarantees, protection and arbitration, "one stop shop" approach in issuing investment licences and permits.
- Capacity building for a number of the institutions and administrations concerned with the above activities, in particular for the Ministry of Economy and Trade.
- Improving the administrative capacity and other measures related to the implementation of the Agreement.

1.7 Conditions

Signature of the Association Agreement.

1.8 Indicative Budget

20.5 €M.

VI. PRIORITY 5: CIVIL SOCIETY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

1. CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

1.1 Justification

From neighbourhood associations to charity associations and to more development-oriented organisations, the profile of the civil society in Syria is changing. The non-state actors show an increasing will to get involved in their development process at the community level, in conjunction with the reform processes initiated by the Syrian Government.

In order to support the momentum of this increasing dialogue between civil society and the Government, regulatory and operational conditions must be adapted. On the other hand, civil society actors should have access to capacity building and funding in order to realise their initiatives.

1.2 Global Objective

The promotion of civil society in Syria as an actor for citizenship, local development and basic needs satisfaction.

1.3 Specific Objectives

- To support the reform of the regulatory framework and operational environment of civil society organisations.
- To reinforce the capacity of non-state actors through training tailored to their needs.
- To support Syrian civil society actors in their actions in aid of poverty reduction, environmental protection, basic services, human rights and community-based development initiatives.

1.4 Expected results

- The legislative, administrative and fiscal environment for Syrian Associations and NGOs are stimulating a greater involvement of civil society.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has the capacity to support the development of associations and NGOs.
- The number of Syrian associations and NGOs is increased.
- The dialogue between the Government and the Non-State Actors is reinforced.
- The partnership between civil society actors at national and regional level is promoted.
- Syrian associations and NGOs are trained, *inter alia*, in organisational and project management.

- Projects of Syrian and European NGOs in fields of poverty reduction, basic services, human rights, citizenship and community-based development initiatives are financed and implemented.

1.5 Performance indicators

- An increased number of requests for registration of associations and NGOs are concluded positively.
- The number and the relevance of consultative meetings between ministries and civil society actors are increased.
- The number of projects of associations and NGOs financed by the European Commission in fields of poverty reduction, basic services, human rights, citizenship and community based development initiatives.

1.6 Short description of the programme

The programme should develop activities at three levels: the institutional level, a platform of civil society actors and the civil society actors' level in itself.

The main beneficiaries should be civil society actors like, but not limited to, associations and NGOs. Several ministries from the Government of Syria, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour will be key partners in the programme as long as the aim of the programme is to promote dialogue and concerted actions between state and non-state actors. The programme includes training in human rights and democratisation concepts and awareness for public officials.

1.7 Conditions

Improvement of the legislative framework for NGOs.

1.8 Indicative Budget

2 €M.

CROSSCUTTING ISSUES

As in the previous programming exercise, reducing gender disparities in all EC-funded programmes will need to be addressed with special attention to women's rights and the need to enhance their role in society. While the position of women in Syria is better than in most countries of the region, significant inequalities still persist. Gender criteria will be taken into account in the implementation of all the programmes in the NIP.

Sustainable development, good governance and preventing the deterioration of the environment will also need to be taken into account in all EC-funded programmes and projects as cross cutting issues.

Budget and Phasing

Of the overall budget of 80 €M, an allocation of 18 €M is conditional on the signature of the Association Agreement. These 18 €M are provisionally allocated to the Cultural Heritage Development Programme (10 €M), the Association Agreement Support Programme (3 €M) and the Water Sector Interest Rate Subsidy (5 €M).

In addition, The Association Agreement Support Programme as such is of course conditional on the signature of an Agreement and will only be launched after signature of an Agreement.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY/PROGAMME	INDICATIVE AMOUNT (€ Million)	ALLOCATION (€ Million)		% BUDGET
		2005	2006	
<u>Priority I Institution building</u>				
Support to the Syrian European Enterprise Centre	15	15		18,75
Water Sector Interest Rate Subsidy	5	5		6,25
<u>Priority II Industrial modernisation</u>				
Strengthening Quality Management, Capabilities Infrastructure	12		12	15,00
<u>Priority III Human Resource Development</u>				
Upgrading the Higher Education System	10		10	12,50
Tempus	5,5	2,5	3	6,875
Cultural Heritage Development Programme	10	10		12,50
<u>Priority IV Trade Enhancement</u>				
Association Agreement Support Programme	20,5		20,5	25,625
<u>Priority V Civil Society and Human rights</u>				
Civil Society Development Programme	2	2		2,5
<u>TOTAL</u>	80	34,5	45,5	100

Indicators related to the Millennium Declaration

Indicators	1995	1999	2000
1. Proportion of population below \$1 per day	na	na	na
2. Prevalence of child malnutrition (% of children under 5)	12,9	na	na
3. Under-five mortality rate (per 1000)	36,0	32,0	29,0
4. Net enrolment ratio in primary education	91,4	92,4	na
5. Percentage of cohort reaching grade 5	93,5	na	na
6. Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education	86,5	87,6	na
7. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	77,0	na	na
8. Proportion of 1 year old children immunised against measles	90,0	97,0	na
9. HIV adult prevalence rate (estimate)	na	0,01	na
10. % of population with sustainable access to an improved water source	na	na	80,0

Source: World Development Indicators database

Economic situation

Syria - Selected Economic Indicators, 1996-2003

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	prel. 2003
Real GDP growth (in %)	9,8	5,0	6,8	-3,6	0,6	3,4	3,2	2,0
Unemployment rate (ILO definition)	---	---	8,9	9,5	9,5	10,3	---	---
CPI inflation (average, in %)	8,9	1,9	-1,0	-3,7	-3,8	3,0	0,8	3,5
Broad money (end of year; % change)	10,0	8,4	10,5	13,4	19,0	23,5	18,5	7,4
Consolidated government balance (% of GDP)	-2,9	-1,4	-2,2	-1,1	-2,1	1,8	-2,8	-4,1
Current account balance (% of GDP)	-0,4	1,9	-0,3	0,6	5,6	6,2	7,0	3,9
Official net international reserves (end of year)								
In millions of US dollars	1.709	1.624	1.860	2.213	2.776	3.462	4.221	4.813
In months of imports of G&NFS	3,4	3,8	4,6	5,1	6,2	7,0	8,0	9,4
Public external debt (% of GDP) (end of year)	22,7	21,9	23,8	24,4	20,8	18,7	18,3	17,4
Debt service (in % of exports of GNFS)	17,4	28,2	26,5	26,0	23,5	20,4	20,2	22,9
Exchange rate (Syrian pound/EUR) (end of year)	---	---	52,2	51,8	50,3	51,7	51,7	---
Real effective exchange rate (1994/95=100)	107,1	111,4	109,3	109,0	109,6	113,3	---	---
GDP per capita, in USD	1.075	1.090	1.083	1.095	1.169	1.186	1.210	1.210

Source : National sources, WB, IMF, Global Insight, Datastream

**EC and Member States with cooperation with Syria - Planned disbursements for 2003
(€M)**

SECTORS	EC	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	I	NL	A	FL	S	UK	Total
Education	1,05				0,14		2,00	9,00		0,60			0,44	13,23
Health	2,27				0,89		0,40	5,70		0,15			0,04	9,45
Water	4,66						0,30		0,5					5,46
Gov/Civil Soc	2,40				0,31		0,30						0,06	3,07
Transport	3,42								0,4			0,05	0,01	3,88
Communication	4,42													4,42
Energy	8,37											0,20		8,57
Banking							0,20						0,03	0,23
Agriculture		0,09	0,4		0,06	0,37	0,10						0,01	1,03
Industry								5,30						5,30
Trade & Tourism	1,49						0,01							1,50
Environment							0,20	3,00					0,03	3,23
Gender													0,03	0,03
Debt related Aid														
Emergency														
NGOs													0,04	0,04
Unspecified							2,00	4,40	0,05					6,45
Total	28,08	0,09	0,4	na	1,40	0,37	5,51	27,40	0,95	0,75	0	0,25	0,69	65,89

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