

## **Letter of 15 November 2016 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the House of Representatives concerning the Shiraka programme in the Arab region**

On 29 October 2015 (ref. 32623-154/2015D41017), the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs asked the government for information concerning the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department's evaluation ('IOB evaluation') of the Dutch contribution to democratic transition in the Arab region. This letter fulfils the government's pledges in its response (2015-2016, 32623, no. 158) to the Committee. In response to question 35, the government undertook to share the main features of its new *country-specific approach* with the House of Representatives. In response to question 4, moreover, it undertook to inform the House about the use of performance indicators.

The requested information is set out in this letter. Three preliminary comments are in order:

1. By letter of 2 September 2015 (2014-2015, 32623, no. 154), the government sent the House of Representatives its response to the IOB evaluation of the Matra South programme in 2012-2015. This letter also gave an outline of the programme's successor: the Netherlands-Arab Partnership – Shiraka. Along with the Matra programme for Central and Eastern Europe, Shiraka is part of the Dutch Fund for Regional Partnerships (NFRP), which was established in response to the motion submitted by MPs Michiel Servaes and Han ten Broeke (2015-2016, 34300-V, no. 26). A letter containing the government's response to the evaluations of the Matra programme, including the new policy framework, was sent to the House of Representatives on 8 January 2016 (2015-2016 34300-V, no. 51).
2. Since 2013, the budget of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations has set aside €0.5 million annually for the activities of Dutch political parties in the Arab region under the Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP). This sum, which is transferred by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represents 3.3% of Shiraka's total budget. The government raised this share to 6% for 2015 and intends to raise it to 9% in 2017 and 12% in 2018, in line with the Matra programme for Central and Eastern Europe.
3. The agreement on Iran's nuclear programme creates opportunities for closer cooperation with that country on training, and with Iranian civil society. The Shiraka programme has accordingly been extended to Iran.

### *Theory of change*

In the above-mentioned letter of 2 September 2015, the government defines the objectives of the Shiraka programme as follows:

Supporting a sustainable transition in the Arab region that leads to:

- democratisation, including greater government accountability;
- development of the rule of law and protection of human rights and minorities;

- economic growth, partly through the development of economic infrastructure, including promoting employment.

The programme operates in a complex environment that is constantly evolving. It is therefore very difficult to predict the specific impact of the activities supported by the Netherlands. Moreover, the Netherlands is just one of many players. Other bilateral and multilateral donors are also active in the region, including some whose programmes are substantially larger than the Netherlands'. Nevertheless, the Shiraka programme can play a dynamic and meaningful role, because it allows the Netherlands to respond swiftly and flexibly to specific needs in recipient countries, which in turn may serve as a catalyst for large-scale projects by other donors and local initiatives. By collaborating with governments and civil society, the Netherlands is improving its access to information and strengthening its network, allowing it to respond more effectively to unfolding developments.

The sustainable transition that the Netherlands is seeking to promote through the Shiraka programme is a complex and non-linear process. In several countries, for example those without a stable government, the current situation sometimes places limits on the type of activities that can be supported. The programme's ability to promote this transition therefore depends heavily on the current prospects for reform in each individual country.

Further to the findings of the aforementioned IOB evaluation, a 'theory of change' has been developed for the Shiraka programme, based in part on scientific insights. This theory, which provides a general framework for the programme's implementation, will have to be adjusted from time to time in the light of new insights. Its purpose is to help the programme select the appropriate tools for each country. In the coming years, the theory of change will operationalise the aforementioned objectives as follows.

Shiraka supports sustainable transition in the Arab region that ultimately leads to:

- pluralism, including the acceptance of political, religious and cultural differences and a certain degree of inclusiveness;
- states governed by the rule of law which guarantee legal certainty and legal equality and are regarded as legitimate by their citizens;
- favourable conditions for economic growth and employment.

The Shiraka programme's theory of change is based on three related pillars: the public, the government and the economy. The theory's perspective on the relationship between the pillars is described below.

The changing relationship between the government and its citizens is a key aspect of the transition process that the Shiraka programme has in view. The *public* is entitled to a functioning government that is accountable, serves their interests and takes seriously their concerns about issues that matter to them, such as corruption, employment, education, housing and healthcare.

In this pillar, the Shiraka programme focuses on strengthening the public's position, for example by promoting active citizenship and inclusiveness. The public should be given a greater say in the formulation of government policy. In order to facilitate this, the Shiraka programme focuses on supporting civil society organisations and strengthening the position of specific groups such as women and young people.

*Government* must also enable the public to play a more active role. If citizens are to flourish, regimes in the Arab region will have to grant them more freedoms and protection, and be more responsive to their concerns. By also focusing on the level of governance, the Shiraka programme aims to improve governments' stance on active citizenship and encourage them to devote more attention to issues that matter to the public, which should ultimately improve people's future prospects. The programme therefore supports efforts to improve the quality of central and local government in a wide range of areas, and also devotes attention to how governments communicate with their citizens.

In addition to the government and the public, the Shiraka programme focuses on the *economy*. This is important, because the socioeconomic situation was a key factor in the 2010-2011 uprisings. At the time, the call was not just for democracy but also – and perhaps even primarily – for better socioeconomic prospects and an end to corruption. Since then, the socioeconomic situation in various countries has deteriorated rather than improved, despite the high hopes of those involved in the uprisings. If regimes in the Arab region are unable to show results in this area, support for them and their ability to carry out the reforms will continue to decline. In this pillar, the programme will therefore focus on creating favourable conditions for sound economic governance, good education policies, cooperative and transparent government, and the adoption and enforcement of better legislation.

#### *Performance indicators*

When it undertook to inform the House of Representatives about the use of performance indicators, the government noted that the potential for their use was limited by the uncertainty surrounding developments in the region and the relevant policy areas. As a result, such indicators are primarily qualitative and descriptive. Where possible, they are used to assess the extent to which an individual activity, once completed, has achieved its intended results. In this context, they are certainly a useful tool. At the level of the programme and its instruments, however, it is harder to define quantifiable indicators. It has therefore been decided to use the aforementioned theory of change at that level, since it can show how activities supported by the Netherlands help to achieve the objectives of the programme as a whole.

#### *Risks*

The situation in various countries in the Arab region is so unpredictable and unstable that efforts to achieve the Shiraka programme's objectives will sometimes involve taking risks. Predetermined and predictable policies are not an adequate response for a region that is simultaneously experiencing both change and stagnation.

The Shiraka programme takes calculated risks to ensure that resources are not invested exclusively in the same types of programmes and projects, while ignoring other innovative initiatives – perhaps by unfamiliar organisations – that could help produce fresh results. This requires proper monitoring of all implementation processes. Based on the theory of change and the findings of such monitoring, the government can steadily find better ways to support the transition process in the Arab region. Risk taking naturally involves a risk of failure. However, by collaborating and sharing experiences with other governments and international organisations, it is possible to increase the effectiveness of such interventions.

#### *Efforts by country*

Efforts as part of the Shiraka programme differ from country to country, depending on the local situation and the intensity of the transition process. The Netherlands uses the Shiraka programme to support existing and potential developments in recipient countries. In several countries (e.g. Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia), the programme is focusing broadly on the public, the government and the economy, while in others (e.g. Mauritania and Sudan) its efforts are limited to the public. The proposed activities for each country over the next few years are described in the annexe. These proposals are based on the current situation in each country. Changes in the situation may lead to fresh insights that result in different efforts.