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CULTURE AND EDUCATION

EUROPE FOR CITIZENS (2014-2020)

NOTE

Abstract

This note seeks to provide a concise overview and critical assessment of the proposed Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020, which aims to enhance remembrance and civic participation in Europe. Based on an outline of past “active citizenship” initiatives on a European level and the Europe for Citizens programme currently in force, the genesis of the Commission’s new proposal, its content, and its reception by other EU-institutions and stakeholders are analysed. The respective strengths and weaknesses are also examined, followed by a series of recommendations to revise the legislative proposal.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIVEX	Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs
CoR	Committee of the Regions
CULT	Committee on Culture and Education
DG COMM	Directorate General for Communication
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
ECP	Europe for Citizen Point
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
JURI	Committee on Legal Affairs
TEC	Treaty Establishing the European Community
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This note sets out to provide a concise overview and critical assessment of the proposed Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020, which aims to enhance remembrance and civic participation in Europe. The Note comprises the following constitutive parts:

- 1) an introduction outlining past “active citizenship” initiatives and the Europe for Citizens programme currently in force;
- 2) a summary of the Commission’s proposal for a renewed Europe for Citizens programme;
- 3) a brief overview of the reception of the proposal by the EESC, CoR and Council, as well as the legislative involvement of the EP;
- 4) an examination of the proposed programme in terms of strengths and weaknesses; and
- 5) a series of recommendations for revising the existing legislative proposal.

ad 1) Introduction:

Following calls made both at the Tampere (1999) and Nice European Council (2000) for a more open dialogue with civil society, a first Community action programme to promote Active European Citizenship was initiated by the European Council in January 2004 (Council Decision 2004/100/EC). In the wake of the failure of the Constitution for Europe project, Active European Citizenship was succeeded by the programme Europe for Citizens, established by Decision 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament (EP) and the Council for the period 2007 to 2013 with an overall financial envelope of **EUR 215 million**.

In order to meet its objectives, four main types of action have been implemented within the Programme since 2006:

Action 1: “Active Citizens for Europe”, encompassing two key measures, namely:

- I. town twinning and networking of twinned towns, designed to establish links at local level between twinned municipalities for fostering exchanges and cooperation;
- II. citizens’ projects and support measures, exploring innovative methods of citizens’ participation.

Action 2: “Active Civil Society in Europe”, providing (structural) support for civil society organisations and think tanks that link citizens and the European Union (EU).

Action 3: “Together for Europe”, comprising three sets of measures:

- I. high-visibility events and Europe-wide conferences designed to increase Europeans’ sense of belonging to the same community;
- II. studies allowing for a better understanding of active citizenship at European level;
- III. information and dissemination tools.

Action 4: “Active European Remembrance”, aimed to promote and preserve active European remembrance, specifically by sponsoring projects designed to commemorate the victims of National Socialism and Bolshevism.

The **mid-term evaluation** of Europe for Citizens 2007-2013, carried out in 2010, confirmed the relevance of the Programme and suggested a clear added value. At the same time, however, reference was made to a number of shortcomings and problems, including a considerable level of unmet demand. To remedy them, a series of recommendations were made for a possible successor programme, which can be summarised as follows:

- 1) **Achieving stronger understanding and ownership of the EU** by strengthening links between the Programme on the one hand, major societal issues and the EU’s major strategic goals and political priorities on the other;

- 2) **Further improving and adjusting the programme implementation**, among other things by finding a better balance between supporting major stakeholders and small-scale participants, increasing funding for Active European Remembrance and Active Civil Society Actions, and facilitating the application process;
- 3) **Achieving more balanced participation** by making an effort both to counterbalance existing geographical discrepancies and increase the involvement of “hard-to-reach” groups;
- 4) **Increasing the policy and media impact of activities supported by the Programme.**

ad 2) The Commission’s Proposal for a New Europe for Citizens Programme (2014-2020):

The “Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme ‘Europe for Citizens’” was formally adopted in December 2011 (COM(2011) 884 final). “**Strengthening remembrance and enhancing capacity for civic participation at the Union level**” (p. 3) is defined as the **principle objective** of the proposed Programme. This general objective is broken down into two specific ones, namely to:

- a) Stimulate debate, reflection and cooperation on remembrance, Union integration and history;
- b) Develop citizens’ understanding and capacity to participate in the EU policy-making process and develop opportunities for solidarity, societal engagement and volunteering at EU level.

To address these objectives, two main programmatic strands are envisaged:

- a) Remembrance and European Citizenship**
- b) Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation**

Horizontal activities for analysis and dissemination of the project results (“**Valorisation**”) supplement these two strands, under which a series of **actions** are planned to be supported: citizens’ meetings and town twinning, support for organisations of a “general European interest”, and debates and studies on defining moments in European history, to mention but a few. Access to these actions is declared open to “**all stakeholders promoting European integration**” (Art. 6 of the Draft Regulation).

Regarding the **implementation** of the Programme (Art. 8), the adoption of annual work programmes by the Commission is foreseen, while the key role of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) as the main management body is affirmed. In order to allow for efficient monitoring, a number of indicators are specified, against which progress of the Programme and achievement of the specific objectives will be measured (e.g., number of projects and quality of results, number of directly involved participants, or percentage of first time applicants).

The global **budget** foreseen for the Programme is EUR 229 million, **EUR 206 million** of which are **operational appropriations**. The remaining EUR 23 million are reserved for “appropriations of an administrative nature”, to which is added EUR 10.423 million not directly included in the budget but set aside in Heading 5 of the Multiannual Financial Framework (“Administration”), thus raising the **global administrative expenditures** to **EUR 33.423 million**.

Within the operational appropriations, the total of EUR 206 million is attributed to the three main lines of action as follows:

- **EUR 42.60 million (20.68%)** to **Action No. 1** (“Raise awareness on remembrance, Union history, identity and aim by stimulating debate, reflection and networking”);

- **EUR 139.45 million (67.69%)** to **Action No. 2** ("Encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level, by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy-making process and promoting opportunities for social engagement and volunteering at Union level");
- **EUR 23.95 million (11.63%)** to **Action No. 3** ("Analysis, dissemination and valorisation of project results").

ad 3) Reception of the Proposal by EESC, CoR and Council, and Legislative Involvement of the EP:

The **European Social and Economic Committee** (EESC) strongly favours a continuation of the Europe for Citizens programme on the basis of the Commission's proposal, while calling for a **stronger involvement** of the EP, the EESC and the Committee of the Regions in framing, monitoring and evaluating the Programme (SOC/458 – EESC/2012/1583). The EESC's main concern regarding the legislative proposal in its present form is the **lack of a sufficient financial envelope**.

The **Committee of the Regions** (CoR) also expressed general support for the legislative proposal while asking for more active involvement of external stakeholders (CoR 13/2012). Unlike the EESC, the CoR considers the financial envelope proposed by the Commission as sufficient. Referring to the success of existing schemes, it calls for a good part of the overall budget to be dedicated to town-twinning activities.

Following the report of its Permanent Representatives Committee, the **Council** reached a **partial general approach** on the Commission's proposal in May 2012. In line with the EESC and the CoR, the Council welcomes the Commission's proposal, and praises the simplification of the Programme structure in particular. Nevertheless, a number of **changes** to the original proposal are suggested, concerning 1) the activities to be funded under the Programme, 2) access to the Programme, 3) implementing provisions, and 4) indicators to measure the impact of the Programme.

The Commission's Proposal declares **Article 352 TFEU** (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) the **sole legal basis** for the envisaged Regulation on a new Europe for Citizens programme, thus providing for a consent procedure giving the **EP** only the choice of accepting or rejecting, but not amending the Council's position. Efforts from the Parliament's side to change to a dual legal basis involving both Art. 167 and Art. 352 TFEU, thus providing for an ordinary legislative procedure, have as yet been to no avail. Despite the Parliament's Legal Service arguing otherwise, Commission and Council consider the objective of "Remembrance and European Citizenship" incidental to that of "Democratic engagement and civic participation", hence forbidding the application of a dual legal basis. The Parliament decided nonetheless to 1) proceed with a "virtual codecision procedure" by preparing a formal report including recommendations for modifications and amendments, and 2) make its approval of the final version dependent on the Council's willingness to compromise.

ad 4) Evaluation of the Proposed Programme:

Underlying concept of "citizenship":

The Commission's proposal is based on a **civic-republican conception of citizenship** that emphasizes man's political nature, and sees citizenship as an active process. While the aim of encouraging a culture of participation is to be welcomed, the one-dimensional and overly **instrumental idea** of what active citizenship and citizens' involvement stands for gives reason for concern. Such an idea is manifest in the tailoring of the entire Europe for Citizens programme towards EU policies and especially the policy-making process. Thereby the EU exposes itself to possible **criticism** that after all, Europe for Citizens was not meant to promote a rich and diverse culture of active citizenship, but designed as a mere means for the **self-staging of the EU institutions**.

Programme design:

The programme design in its present form appears **asymmetrical**, with the Remembrance strand clearly subordinate to the Civic Participation strand: while only around 20% of the overall operational appropriations are budgeted for the former, more than two thirds are reserved for the latter. An imbalance can also be observed concerning the **thematic focus** in the two strands. This goes in particular for the Remembrance part, where focus of attention is almost exclusively on the causes of **totalitarian regimes** in Europe's modern history and their victims. Reducing European remembrance to National Socialism and Bolshevism not only fosters a one-dimensional historical understanding, but is also detrimental to the creation of a critical European public and does not do justice to the achievements of European integration since the late 1940s either. Accordingly, the range of projects to be supported under the Remembrance strand of Europe for Citizens should be widened. The design of the **second strand** of the Programme appears more balanced than that of the first, but would nevertheless profit from a more detailed outline of the extent to which the suggested instruments are suitable to reach the formulated objectives, and which respective added value one particular action might have vis-à-vis others.

Programme management and usability:

After the implementation of a series of simplification measures, the **management structures** of the current Europe for Citizens programme, which are supposed to be taken over for the new Programme, seem adequate and sufficiently efficient. Unlike the programme management suggested for Europe for Citizens 2014-2020, its **usability** appears deficient. Some progress has certainly been made in the current programme as to the **application process**, but no satisfactory solutions are evident in the legislative proposal regarding two other challenges raised in the mid-term evaluation: 1) finding a better balance between supporting major stakeholders and small-scale participants, 2) achieving more balanced participation in terms of geographical discrepancies and involvement of "hard-to-reach" groups. A key tool to address these challenges would seem to be an ambitious **communication strategy** that raises public awareness for the Programme throughout Europe and especially the opportunities given to non-institutional applicants and small-scale initiatives.

Budget:

The financial envelope for Europe for Citizens 2014-2020 appears **insufficient** taking the ambitious objectives into account, which are to be achieved. The budget does not only fail to get close to the symbolic "**one Euro per citizen**", or a total of **EUR 495 million**, which had been requested among others by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), but it does not even match the financial envelope of the current Europe for Citizens programme, if the amount is inflation-adjusted. Against this background, a **considerable increase of the financial envelope**, as requested also in the Opinion of the EESC, would seem commendable.

ad 5) Recommendations and Conclusions:**1) Acknowledgement of the overall importance of a renewed Programme:**

Considering the success of the current Europe for Citizens programme (2007-2013) and the fact that it is at present the only one devoted exclusively to promoting civic participation and active remembrance on a European level, continuing the Programme in one form or another seems highly recommended. Consequently, pros and cons of a wholesale rejection of the legislative proposal by the EP would have to be most carefully weighted even in the case of the Council refusing to take the Parliament's possible suggestions for amending the draft Regulation into due consideration.

2) Widening of the underlying concept of "citizenship":

Widening the understanding of citizenship underpinning the legislative proposal seems necessary. As yet, an essentially instrumental idea of what citizenship signifies and is to be directed to is prevalent, focusing predominantly on EU policies and the policy making

process. Such an understanding is negligent of the many forms civic participation and public spirit can beneficially take. Allowing for a broader idea in the final proposal of what “citizenship” stands for would also be in the self-interest of the European Institutions in order to avoid the Programme being branded as a propaganda tool of the EU.

3) Correction of existing imbalances in the programme design:

In order to remedy existing imbalances in the programme design and avoid the impression of one of the two thematic strands being a mere addition to the other, a more balanced distribution of funds would be required. Such a shift would also underpin the EP’s argument for the application of a dual legal basis with regard to the legislative proposal. Moreover, the present programme design asks for adaptations of the thematic focus, especially within Strand one (Remembrance), where subject matter and timeframe ought to be expanded beyond National Socialism and Bolshevism.

4) More consistent consideration of the mid-term evaluation results:

Even though the mid-term evaluation has left its marks in the new legislative proposal, a more conscious consideration of the suggestions made in the former would be desirable. This goes in particular for strengthening links to major societal issues perceived by citizens as being of direct interest to them, and achieving a more balanced participation in the Programme.

5) Maintenance of centralised management structures while strengthening ECPs:

In comparison to other programmes centrally administered by an executive agency under the Commission’s supervision, the current Europe for Citizens programme can refer to pretty efficient management structures. Decentralisation is not expected to lead to any savings, nor is it evident that this would result in any qualitative improvements. What seems more promising than a decentralisation of the programme management is upgrading the “Europe for Citizens Points” (ECPs). Such would strengthen the anchoring of Europe for Citizens in the individual member states and contribute to the Programme’s general renown and accessibility at the same time.

6) Increase of the Programme’s usability:

A further increase of the future Programme’s usability especially for individual citizens ought to be envisaged. To this aim, clear incentives for small-scale and bottom-up initiatives should be given, and a certain percentage of funds could be reserved for such non-institutional initiatives. In addition, more attention needs to be paid to the more active involvement of “hard-to-reach” groups, which is declared an objective with as yet no corresponding strategy to reach it.

7) Stronger emphasis on communication and targeted use of the related budget:

Acknowledging the key importance of an adequate communication strategy for the success of the Programme, the role of communication should be emphasised more decidedly in the Regulation. To avoid any dissipation and potential misappropriation of the funds foreseen for communication actions, the use of these funds for the Commission’s general communication policy should be ruled out.

8) Increase of financial envelope:

A considerable increase of the overall financial envelope for Europe for Citizens should be sought. Such an increase seems justifiable if the key role the Programme assumes in Europe’s “civic education” and the bonding of the EU with its citizens is put in relation to the size of Europe for Citizens, which is negligible compared to other programmes and the EU budget in general.