



Plenary sitting

B8-◀2018/2597▶

27.3.2018

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

further to Questions for Oral Answer B8-0000/2018 and B8-0000/2018

pursuant to Rule 128(5) of the Rules of Procedure

on the Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme
(2018/2597(RSP))

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on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food
Safety

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Motion for a European Parliament resolution on the Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 November 2017 COM (2017) 642 final, on the Report accompanying the mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme and the related staff working documents, SWD(2017)355 final and 356 final,
 - having regard to the Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the establishment of a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 Text with EEA relevance,
 - having regard to the question to the Commission on Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme (O-000000/2018 – B8-0000/2018),
 - having regard to the motion for a resolution of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety,
 - having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the LIFE programme contributes to sustainable development and to the achievement of the objectives and targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the 7th Union Environmental Action Programme and other relevant EU environment and climate strategies and foresees addressing challenges such as halting the loss of biodiversity or reducing the costs of inaction related to the consequences and effects of climate change;
- B. whereas the LIFE programme plays an important role in promoting environmental priorities by financing projects that demonstrate holistic solutions for complex and interlinked problems in variety of land use activities including agriculture and works alongside agri-environmental-climate measures under the CAP on numerous Natura 2000 sites;
- C. whereas the mid-term evaluation provides only a first overview on the changes implemented and whereas the external independent evaluation provides reasonable assurance that the programme's implementation is progressing in the right direction;
- D. whereas the mid-term evaluation report identifies weaknesses; such as the need to have more strategic focus with the possibility of addressing Union environmental and climate policy issues depended on the quality and quantity of the applications received; such as that the application process and reporting obligations need to be simplified; such as that the objectives of certain strands need to be better defined, which is especially the case with environmental policy and governance and information and communication as well as a deeper focus on implementing and creating multipliers to improve the utilisation of project results and the transfer of know-how; such as the need to be more complementarity and synergies with other EU Funds;

- E. whereas the mid-term evaluation reports recognise that most projects have yet to begin and few projects have been completed (the average duration of a LIFE project is 4 to 5 years), meaning that a full analysis of the long-term effect of LIFE, as required under Article 27 of the LIFE Regulation, is premature at this stage; as a consequence the mid-term evaluation has focused mainly on the processes put in place, ongoing activities (such as contracts and projects already financed) and, where relevant their anticipated results;
- F. whereas the LIFE programme also consists of a new category of projects, jointly funded integrated projects, which will operate on a large territorial scale. These projects aim to implement environmental and climate policy and better integrate such policy aims into other policy areas;

General remarks

1. Stresses that final conclusions about the implementation of the LIFE programme cannot yet be properly drawn as there is an insufficient amount of information and data available within the mid-term evaluation report; therefore calls on the Commission to continue to regularly monitor and report on the implementation and to inform Parliament about the conclusions; looks forward to a proposal for a continued LIFE programme post-2020 based on an impact assessment and on the lessons drawn from the previous programmes;
2. Believes that there is a need to focus on existing and new priorities: the circular economy, delivery of the 2030 climate and energy framework especially by encouraging innovation, the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the possible review of the EU adaptation strategy, the achievement of the objectives of the Nature Directives, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), within available financial resources;
3. Recognises the importance of the LIFE programme to contribute to the development of EU environmental and climate policy notwithstanding the criticisms examined in the mid-term evaluation. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to enhance the role of the LIFE programme in the European agenda and to face correctly the lack of efficiency and effectiveness of the programme by improving its functioning mechanics and procedures;
4. Welcomes the conclusions of the mid-term evaluation showing that based on the available information the LIFE programme is on track to deliver its objectives, in particular in terms of delivering EU added value, providing value for money, and achieving concrete and measurable environmental impacts;
5. Is of the opinion, that the evaluation report shows a number of key shortcomings which should be addressed by the Commission as soon as possible in order to guarantee the efficient and effective implementation of LIFE;
6. Underlines that LIFE is the only programme dedicated specifically to environment and climate action and that it plays an important role in supporting the implementation of Union legislation in these areas;
7. Calls on the Commission to propose a new LIFE programme for 2021 onwards

specifically dedicated to environment and climate change and building on the long experience of previous LIFE programmes;

8. Supports the conclusions of the mid-term evaluation that LIFE can provide a positive contribution to the EU economy by supporting the development of best practices, incentivising sustainable technologies and delivering close-to-market solutions that can be up-scaled; calls on the Commission to keep a continued focus on projects that can be replicated and transferred in order to maximise the EU added value, and to encourage projects that are investment-ready and economically viable;
9. Regrets that two Member States share more than a third of the entire LIFE budget for traditional grants for 2014 and 2015, leading to an uneven distribution of funds among Member States and confirming that national allocations have not been effective in ensuring a balanced distribution of projects; welcomes the phasing out of national allocations in the second multiannual work programme as foreseen by the LIFE Regulation; considers it necessary to increase effectiveness of the mechanisms of selection of projects based on merit, and to boost Member States' capacity to submit more high quality projects as well as to ensure a more equitable distribution of LIFE funds between Member States and provide a better geographical balance of the integrated projects;
10. Recognises the importance of the integrated projects, which support the implementation of EU environmental legislation and serve as a catalyst to implement environmental and climate plans and strategies at regional, multi-regional or national level; also highlights the importance of having international projects included in LIFE as environmental and climate issues often have a transboundary dimension; considers that, in the future, the Commission should ensure that all projects are selected on the basis of merit, guaranteeing that applicants are given an equal chance and that the projects chosen are of a high quality;;
11. Underlines that reaching the full potential of these integrated projects depends on the availability of complementary finance, in particular from mainstreaming of environment and climate in the major EU financing instruments;
12. Notes that the demand for funding traditional projects is very high, with a ratio of submitted proposals to projects awarded reaching 9 to 1, and that the demand for integrated projects has also significantly exceeded the available resources; believes that this shows the continued relevance of the LIFE programme;
13. Stresses that LIFE has played a significant role in implementing Natura 2000 and the Birds and Habitats Directives in the Member States, and in increasing the general level of awareness concerning biodiversity at regional and local level;
14. Emphasises that, in future, LIFE projects should devote more attention to ecosystem dynamics and changing natural values;
15. Agrees with the report that 'after-LIFE' plans are a positive improvement and that a systematic follow-up of all projects to identify best practices, cost-saving measures and a comprehensive customised support for the most promising ones could allow the replication/sustainability potential to be further strengthened;

16. Welcomes that the transfer of most of the grant management from the Commission to the executive agency EASME seems to be well on track and it is expected to produce an overall gain in efficiency, above the EUR 8.2 million gains initially planned for 2014-2020;
17. Emphasises the need to reinforce the role of NGOs and civil society associations in proposing, designing and piloting the LIFE projects;
18. Welcomes the new pilot financial instruments under LIFE but takes note of the challenges highlighted by the mid-term evaluation; encourages the Commission to make further efforts to support the development of these innovative projects as a means of promoting models for sustainable finance;
19. Emphasises that one of the strengths of the LIFE programme has always been its flexible structure and the involvement of a range of different stakeholders including SMEs, civil society, universities and national, regional and local authorities; calls on the Commission to further develop and strengthen these aspects in its upcoming proposal for a new LIFE programme after 2020;
20. Urges the Commission to ensure that, when allocating LIFE funds to projects in which large grazing animals are used for management purposes, the welfare of those animals is guaranteed and it is not possible for large-scale starvation to occur in enclosed areas during periods of food shortage, if the grazing animals cannot move to areas where there is more food;

Efficiency of the programme

21. Welcomes the conclusion that LIFE is less costly to manage than other comparable programmes; however considers that the grant management procedures, in particular the application and reporting processes need to be further simplified and streamlined, to reduce the administrative burden of applicants and accelerate the procedures given that not all the originally envisaged simplification measures proposed have been introduced in the current LIFE Regulation. Underlines that the simplification should not happen at the expense of the quality of the projects and the continued monitoring of the use of funds; welcomes the Commission's decision to introduce a two-stage application in the Environment sub-programme;
22. Notes the simplifications to the grant management procedures introduced in the 2018-2020 multiannual work programme, based on the outcome of the mid-term evaluation, and expects the Commission to report to the Parliament about the effects of these revisions;
23. Welcomes the conclusion of the mid-term evaluation that the LIFE programme is well managed with a very low error rate; notes that this finding is preliminary and insists on the importance of a continued strict monitoring of funds;
24. Calls on the Commission to improve communication about, and the access to, information regarding LIFE programme application and management at the national, regional and local level; encourages the Commission to strengthen the national contact points;

25. Notes that the national contact points need a stronger role to ensure a minimum level of service across Member States and a more proactive approach;
26. Requests that each project should be accompanied by a communication strategy to better target audiences, deliver more objective-specific and target-specific key messages, and ensure more structured coordination between players;
27. Stresses that the long-term success of projects depends on the support of and hence a good cooperation with land- and forest owners; therefore urges project leaders to include affected land- and forest-owners at all stages of project planning and implementation;
28. Regrets that at present the existing monitoring and reporting systems are focused exclusively at the project level, and recognises the importance of increasing the strategic focus of the programme in order to strengthen the coherence of the objectives of LIFE;

Effectiveness of the programme

29. Calls on the Commission to further monitor and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of the projects, using clear and well-defined qualitative and quantitative indicators, and carefully examining the possibilities for cost savings, with a focus on the delivery of value for money and on the benefits deriving from the good implementation of EU environment and climate objectives and legislation, as well environmental improvements as set out in Article 3 of the LIFE Regulation;
30. Notes that concrete results about the effectiveness of LIFE are not available at this stage; nevertheless welcomes the fact that preliminary analyses indicate that the programme is effective in delivering towards its objectives and that the target milestones are set to be achieved;
31. Supports an enhancement of the results-orientation including through a requirement to produce measurable effects on the environment and climate change in all projects under all priority areas; in this regard welcomes the changes included in the 2018-2020 multiannual work programme;
32. Underlines that in order to achieve maximum EU added value of LIFE funding, the Commission must ensure complementarity with other EU funds and avoid overlaps with other Union financial instruments;
33. Recalls the general need to step up financing for biodiversity and for the Natura 2000 network; underlines that LIFE is the only EU programme investing directly in the protection of natural capital and an important instrument for the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and the EU biodiversity strategy; calls on the Commission to increase funding within LIFE to these objectives through the sub-programme for Environment and through the integrated projects, as highlighted inter alia in the Commission's Action Plan for nature, people and the economy (COM(2017)198);

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34. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission.