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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Report on the mid-term evaluation of the «Europe for Citizens» Programme 2007 - 2013

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1.	The Programme.....	4
1.2.	The mid-term evaluation.....	6
2.	MAIN FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION.....	7
2.1.	Relevance.....	7
2.2.	Overall programme efficiency.....	7
2.3.	Overall programme effectiveness, participation and impact.....	8
2.4.	Sustainability and dissemination of the results.....	9
3.	FOLLOW UP OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	10
3.1.	Achieving stronger understanding and ownership of the EU.....	10
3.2.	Further improving and adjusting the programme implementation.....	10
3.3.	Achieving more balanced participation.....	11
3.4.	Increasing the policy and media impact of activities supported by the programme..	12
4.	CONCLUSIONS.....	13

1. INTRODUCTION

This document presents main findings and recommendations of the mid-term evaluation of the "Europe for Citizens" Programme 2007-2013, as well as the reactions and conclusions of the Commission to these recommendations.

1.1. The Programme

The EU Action Programme "Europe for Citizens" to promote active European citizenship was established by the European Parliament and the Council in December 2006¹. The general objectives of the Programme are:

- (1) Giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever closer Europe, which is democratic and world-oriented, united and enriched through its cultural diversity, thus developing citizenship of the European Union.
- (2) Developing a sense of European identity, based on common values, history and culture.
- (3) Fostering a sense of ownership of the European Union among its citizens.
- (4) Enhancing tolerance and mutual understanding between European citizens respecting and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, while contributing to intercultural dialogue.

The specific objectives of the "Europe for Citizens" Programme are as follows:

- (5) Bringing together people from local communities across Europe to share and exchange experiences, opinions and values, to learn from history and to build for the future.
- (6) Fostering action, debate and reflection related to European citizenship and democracy, shared values, common history and culture through cooperation within civil society organizations at European level.
- (7) Bringing Europe closer to its citizens by promoting Europe's values and achievements, while preserving the memory of its past.
- (8) Encouraging interaction between citizens and civil society organizations from all participating countries, contributing to intercultural dialogue and bringing to the fore both Europe's diversity and unity, with particular attention to activities aimed at developing closer ties between citizens from Member States of the European Union as constituted on 30 April 2004 and those from Member States which have acceded since that date.

The Programme has a budget of €215² million and is built around four actions:

¹ DECISION No 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006, OJ L 378 of 27.12. 2006, p. 32

- (a) Active citizens for Europe, consisting of:
- Town twinning
 - Citizens' projects and support measures.
- (b) Active civil society in Europe, consisting of:
- Structural support for European public policy research organisations (think-tanks).
 - Structural support for civil society organisations at European level
 - Support for projects initiated by civil society organisations.
- (c) Together for Europe, consisting of:
- High visibility events, such as commemorations, awards, artistic events, European-wide conferences.
 - Studies, surveys and opinion polls.
 - Information and dissemination tools.
- (d) Active European Remembrance, consisting of:
- Preservation of the main sites and archives associated with the deportations and the commemoration of the victims.

Intended outputs of the programme include:

- Programmes of activities run by organisations supported by operating grants, including meetings, dialogue with EU institutions, position papers, networking, exchange of good practice and awareness-raising.
- Meetings, education and training programmes and tools, publications, dissemination activities organised by civil society organisations.
- Meetings between citizens, conferences, information campaigns and training events for twinning officers.
- High visibility events at the EU level during the respective Presidencies of the EU, studies in the field of active citizenship (civic participation) on volunteering, mobility and citizenship.

"Europe for Citizens" Programme was preceded by community action programme to promote active European Citizenship (civic participation) 2004-2006. The programme

² Within the annual budgets the budgetary authority allocated supplementary funds in 2009 (€3 million) and 2010 (€1.775 million) and the total budget of the programme thus increased to €219.775 million.

which had a budget of €72 million confirmed the need to promote sustained dialogue with civil society organisations and municipalities and to support the active involvement of citizens³.

The "Europe for Citizens" programme covers the 27 EU Member States. In addition, Croatia joined the programme in 2007 followed by Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in 2009. The participation of organisations based in the new Member States increased during the first three years of the implementation of the programme. This trend is especially significant in the case of Hungary and Poland.

The Programme is managed centrally by the European Commission which is assisted by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The European Commission is in charge of the strategic management of the Programme, including setting priorities and targets, managing the budget, guiding and monitoring implementation of the Programme and supervising the evaluation. EACEA is responsible for the management of certain parts of the programme under supervision from the Commission, *i.e.* through carrying out the operations linked to the award of grants, gathering, analysing and passing on to the Commission all the information needed to guide the implementation of Europe for Citizens Programme.⁴

In addition, National Contact Points⁵ were established in the majority of participating countries. The task of the National Contact Points is to disseminate information about the Europe for Citizens programme to a broad spectrum of prospective beneficiaries, to provide support to project applicants and to follow developments in the area of active citizenship at the national level and communicate them to the European Commission.

1.2. The mid-term evaluation

The mid-term evaluation was carried out by the Commission with the support of external experts⁶. The overall aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

1. To provide an overview of the results obtained in the first three years of the programme;
2. To provide an assessment of qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation; and

³ The full report of the external evaluation of the community action programme to promote active European Citizenship is available on the following internet site: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/index_en.htm#civilsocietyHeader

⁴ COMMISSION DECISION of 20 April 2009 setting up the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency for the management of Community action in the fields of education, audiovisual and culture in application of Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003, (2009/336/EC), OJ L 101 of 21.04. 2009, p. 26

⁵ In 2009 and 2010 17 Member States established their Europe for Citizens Points and requested financial support from the European Commission. 5 other countries provided services of Europe for Citizens Points on an ad hoc basis without requesting financial support. An effort is made to establish Europe for Citizens Points in all countries participating in the Programme. A list of existing Europe for Citizens Points can be accessed at: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/how-to-participate/doc714_en.htm

⁶ ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd. Please note that as of 04 October 2010 changed its name to ECORYS UK Limited. www.ecotec.com

3. To provide recommendations and guidance on how implementation of the remaining years of the programme could be improved.

The evaluation focused on the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the programme and its coherence with other interventions supporting the development of active European citizenship.

The evaluation was carried in the course of 2010 and based on 2007, 2008 and 2009 data⁷.

2. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

2.1. Relevance

The mid-term evaluation confirmed the relevance of the Europe for Citizens Programme especially in terms of achieving its overarching aim of *"giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever closer Europe, thus developing citizenship of the European Union"*.

The activities supported by the Programme have the potential to develop positive impacts for citizens such as an increased sense of belonging and European identity, to create changes in attitudes of programme participants towards other European citizens and to boost their involvement in democratic processes and to increase their knowledge of and interest in the European Union and EU institutions.

The evaluation suggests that there is a potential role for the present Europe for Citizens Programme in strengthening the role of citizens in the formulation of new policies and strategies, such as Europe 2020. This can be achieved by aligning the Programme priorities with the Commission political objectives, getting projects to develop proposals that could be testing grounds for new policy initiatives, ensuring a greater dissemination of the results of the projects and forging stronger links with other EU programmes and initiatives.

There is a clear added value of the programme in terms of scale and scope of activities undertaken by organisations supported by the programme. The most significant added value of EU involvement seems to be in influencing civil society sector capacity and networks that will have an impact on policy process in the future.

2.2. Overall programme efficiency

The evaluation shows that the demand for the programme remains strong and judged on the numbers of submitted applications and the approval rate the programme budget is below levels of actual demand.

⁷ 113 operating grants, 366 civil society projects, 141 remembrance projects, 9 innovative actions, 29 citizens projects, 225 networking of twinned towns projects and 2,927 town-twinning citizens meetings.

The evaluation also pointed out that there is a considerable level of unmet demand for actions and measures, such as Active European Remembrance, Operating grants and Mobility Measures.

The current programme strikes a good balance and achieves good cost-effectiveness by means of combining actions reaching out to small scale operators and those which support capacity building.

There seems to be overall satisfaction with the implementation of the programme including the split of responsibilities between the European Commission and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The share of responsibilities between the Commission and the Executive Agency brought increased opportunities for synergy by aligning the application procedures with other programmes managed by EACEA, and improved efficiency in terms of the handling of applications and requests for information from the beneficiaries.

Concerning the Europe for Citizens Points established under the Europe for Citizens Programme, the majority of beneficiaries surveyed found their services very useful (77% to 78%). The evaluation indicates that there is room for further improvement in terms of forging stronger links between the Europe for Citizens Points and the network of twinning coordinators as well as boosting the coverage and the profile of Europe for Citizens Points in individual countries.

As the main points for improvement in the Programme management the evaluation mentioned the need for greater consistency in guidelines and simplified forms, the provision of application forms and related materials well before deadlines and the qualitative feedback provided on applications.

2.3. Overall programme effectiveness, participation and impact

The mid-term evaluation indicates that the operational objectives of the Programme implementation as well as beneficiaries' expectations of the Programme are being met.

The results of the evaluation provide evidence that the Programme reaches out to a considerable number of new project promoters – just under one half of projects surveyed. The rate of new applicants seems to be highest in the remembrance action of the Programme (63%) and lower but still significant in town twinning action (around 33%).

As far as the geographical balance of project promoters is concerned the best represented countries tend to be in Central and Western parts of Europe and in Italy. The under-represented countries seem to be located in Northern as well as in Southern and South-Eastern Europe. It needs, however, to be underlined that there is a much broader distribution and much more even geographical coverage when the origin of project partners and the nationality of participants in the projects is also taken into account.

The evaluation suggests that there is a balanced representation of women and men in the programme activities, however, minority groups, people with disabilities and marginalised groups in general are under-represented.

The impact of the Programme can be summarized in the following categories:

- (a) **Supporting and capacity building of civil society organisations and movements.**
- Civil society organisations perform a valuable role as intermediaries between public policy actors and citizens – the evaluator noted that these organisations carry out activities which create significant "multiplier effects" by informing the greater public about EU related affairs and initiating informed debate on topical policy issues.
- (b) **Providing impetus to the town twinning movement**
- The mid-term evaluation indicates that the Programme encouraged potential beneficiaries to think more in terms of developing greater thematic coverage and establishing links with new themes or policy areas such as environmental issues or remembrance.
- (c) **Positively influencing the scale and volume of activities undertaken by the policy research organisations (think-tanks)**
- The evaluation shows that funding provided by the Programme enabled supported organisations to increase European focus of their activities, develop partnerships and networks across the EU and to reach out to European audience.
- (d) **Positive effects on participants of activities supported by the programme in terms of learning, mutual understanding, identification with the EU**
- The mid-term evaluation gives a strong indication of positive effects on the participants including making new contacts with people across the EU, developing new skills and interests and becoming more involved in organising events or projects at EU level.

The evaluation thus provides evidence of the positive impact of the programme in line with the programme's objectives.

2.4. Sustainability and dissemination of the results

The evaluation suggests that the Programme is able to achieve longer-term sustainability by developing the capacity of civil society and by encouraging participants to become future actors and multipliers. 53% of the participants surveyed for the purpose of the mid-term evaluation intended to become involved in organising or promoting events of their own and 45% planned to develop ideas for their own events.

According to the survey among beneficiaries of the Programme, the main effect of removing or reducing the level of funding would have negative results in terms of limiting the scale of activities, numbers of participants, a weaker international dimension, less networking and mobility. Civil society projects would be less likely to continue.

As far as the dissemination of results is concerned the evaluation points out that the vast majority of project promoters claim to have successfully used a range of communication

methods, especially events and different forms of social/interactive media or multimedia such as printed publications and DVDs.

A number of barriers to the wider dissemination was identified; they include the lack of specific funding for communications, the cost of advertising and translations, the need for specialist staff and a relative lack of interest from national media.

3. FOLLOW UP OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations which follow from the mid-term evaluation can be grouped into four major categories. The European Commission is planning to implement appropriate actions to respond to these recommendations during the remainder of the current Programme and take them into account in the preparatory work for the next generation Programme.

3.1. Achieving stronger understanding and ownership of the EU

The mid-term evaluation firstly recommends that the link should be strengthened between the Programme and major societal issues and issues identified by citizens as being of direct and current interest.

Secondly, the current Programme should in the future consider identifying ways to uphold EU major strategic goals and political priorities such as the Europe 2020 strategy and ensuring links with the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship. Projects which have strong links to these EU priorities should be encouraged.

Thirdly, these recommendations should be reflected in the role and the function of the permanent and annual priorities of the Programme.

The current Programme already allows for increasing the profile of projects focused on current EU policy issues. During the selection process further efforts will be made to better identify and support projects which promote effectively the understanding and ownership of the EU.

When setting the annual focus of the Programme's permanent priorities further attention will be paid to the existing political context. The needs and interest expressed by stakeholders as well as synergies with other similar EU supported programmes and initiatives will be taken into account.

3.2. Further improving and adjusting the programme implementation

The recommendations concerning the implementation of the current Programme and possible adjustments comprise:

- Finding the appropriate balance between supporting major stakeholders of structural value and reaching out to and supporting (through capacity building) small-scale and/or new participants.

- Increasing the level of funding for the Active European Remembrance and Active Civil Society Actions.
- Addressing the balance of reaching out to a significant number of participants and maintaining the quality and innovative content of supported activities.
- Monitoring the impact of Europe for Citizens Contact Points and further developing their capacity.
- Expanding the role of training, capacity building and support for multipliers across all measures.
- Continuously reviewing of the structure and the content of application forms and their simplification whenever possible.
- Processing applications in additional EU languages (apart from three EU working languages).

The European Commission has, in cooperation with the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (ECAEA), already made a number of arrangements to improve the implementation of the current Programme continuously. This includes encouraging regular feedback from beneficiaries (through the Structured Dialogue and other means) and from the Europe for Citizens Contact Points. The feedback is used with a view to adjust and to simplify the Programme implementation. The introduction of flat rates for town twinning projects in 2010 is an example for this.

The support measures were introduced in order to increase the capacity building of project promoters, especially in the area of town twinning. Other beneficiaries of the Programme, such as civil society organizations, can also benefit from such measures.

An eventual re-balancing of the distribution of financial support, consistent with the global envelope of the Programme, currently foreseen in the financial programming for 2011-2013, to the different actions in the Europe for Citizens Programme will be reflected upon and possibly introduced in 2011.

The support to Europe for Citizens Contact Points in terms of training and regular exchange of information will also continue in 2011. The European Commission is actively encouraging all EU Members States and countries participating in the Programme to establish their Europe for Citizens Contact Points.

3.3. Achieving more balanced participation

The mid-term evaluation highlights that the origin of lead partners of projects supported by the Programme is not equally spread across the European Union. Moreover, projects do not reach out to all groups in society in the same manner.

Measures addressing the geographical balance have already been undertaken and will continue in the future. These include bigger efforts to raise the profile of Europe for Citizens Programme through the Europe for Citizens Contact Points in countries where

less project promoters are located. Moreover, the Commission continues to encourage the establishment of a national Contact Point in all participating countries.

High visibility events, such as Presidency events and the Golden Stars annual award (for particularly successful project funded by the Programme), attract further attention to the Programme in all participating countries. In addition, during the project selection process a better geographical balance should be ensured, for example by raising the qualitative threshold for the countries that largely exceed the average participation rate in the Programme.

Concerning the "hard-to-reach" groups, the Europe for Citizens Programme paid special attention to the equal participation based on gender, age and disability in the Programme activities. A special priority was given to the promotion of women's participation in democracy at the local level. The better involvement of "hard-to-reach" groups will be approached by sharing lessons and best practices of projects that have been particularly successful in this area. Their experiences will be mainstreamed into the Programme as a whole.

3.4. Increasing the policy and media impact of activities supported by the programme

The mid-term evaluation suggests that there is a potential to be exploited in order to increase the policy impact of the Programme through activities, such as:

- Exploiting the links between local government capacity building and town twinning activities supported by the Programme.
- Exploring the possibility of organizing events, press meetings, partnerships and round table discussions which bring together policy-makers, thematic experts and organizations which benefit from the Programme and their networks in order to explore specific policy issues.
- Ensuring that whenever possible projects assess their impact in the media and on the policy-making process.
- Forging stronger links with other EU programmes and initiatives such as the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship programme, Youth in Action, Culture, e-democracy and e-participation.
- Encouraging supported projects to analyze the impact of their dissemination tools.
- Developing a more comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of Action 3 "Together for Europe" especially the media coverage and impact on the participants.

The Commission will make efforts to allow for a better analysis and valorisation of the impact of individual projects in the final reports by adjusting the structure of final reports.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation confirms the importance the 'Europe for Citizens' Programme for the promotion of civic participation, strengthening the sense of belonging together, tolerance and mutual understanding. The programme has so far given 2.8 million European citizens and their organizations an opportunity to interact and to participate in the process of the European construction, to express their opinions and to feed into the political process. It has connected people and local communities from different countries. The evaluation has also highlighted the scope for further development.

The evaluation shows that the demand for the programme is strong and that the programme budget is below levels of actual demand. In order to reach out to prospective project promoters and to further strengthen the programme impact, a re-balancing of the financial support within the budget of the current Programme should be seriously considered.

Should the decision be taken to continue the Programme in the next Multiannual Financial Framework, the lessons learned from the mid term evaluation might be integrated into the reflections and preparatory work for the 2014-2020 Programme. The mid-term evaluation suggests in particular the need for strengthening the policy impact of the Programme. The possible next Programme should therefore be more closely linked to the key topics on the EU agenda. It needs to be coherent with a view to improving European governance and to exploit synergies with other EU Programmes and policies.