European Year of Citizens (2013)

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In accordance with the Decision establishing the European Year of Citizens 2013, the Commission presented this report offering an overview of its implementation, results and overall achievements.

It also builds on insights from the ex post evaluation of the Year carried out for the Commission by an external contractor.

Objectives of the European Year: in its Resolution of 15 December 2010 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2009), the European Parliament called on the Commission to make 2013 the European Year of Citizens 'in order to give momentum to the debate on European citizenship and inform EU citizens of their rights, in particular the new rights resulting from the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon'.

It was therefore appropriate, 20 years on from the Maastricht Treaty, to designate 2013 as the European Year of Citizens, to enhance awareness of the rights attached to Union citizenship, in order to help citizens make full use of their right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States. This objective was all the more relevant given the upcoming (2014) European elections, in which all Union citizens were entitled to vote and stand.

The Commission report recalled the following specific objectives for the European Year of Citizens 2013 (hereinafter 'EYC2013'):

- to raise Union citizens' awareness of their right to move and reside freely within the European Union and more generally their rights in cross-border situations, including the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union;
- to raise Union citizens' awareness of how they can tangibly benefit from Union rights and policies while living in another Member State, and to stimulate their active participation in civic fora on Union policies and issues; and
- to stimulate debate about the impact and potential of the right to free movement as an inalienable aspect of Union citizenship, in particular in terms of strengthening societal cohesion and mutual understanding between Union citizens and the bond between citizens and the Union.

EYC2013 was meant to show that **Union citizenship is not an empty concept**, but a fundamental status of nationals of the Member States involving tangible rights and benefits for them (as individuals, consumers, workers, students, volunteers, political actors, etc.).

By extension, EYC2013 would also emphasise that Union citizens themselves have a critical role to play in strengthening those rights through their participation in civil society and democratic life.

Main conclusions: the Commission welcomes the external evaluators' conclusions as to the relevance of the portfolio of activities chosen for EYC2013 and their recognition that these fully covered the Year's objectives, without major gaps or overlaps. It also noted that the breadth of the topic meant that a wide range of relevant actors and multipliers got involved and so contributed to spreading the EYC2013 message. The communication activities were seen as having addressed the needs of the target groups.

(1) Late adoption: the Commission acknowledges the external evaluator's conclusions that:

- the late adoption of the Decision made it difficult for potential partners to get mobilised in time to contribute to the activities, in particular at national level;
- the financial resources made available did not match the ambition of informing all citizens of their EU rights.

However, the evaluators consider that participative activities and events proved more effective than information through mass media. Furthermore, they highlight the considerable mobilisation of stakeholders, who contributed human and financial resources and/or participated on a voluntary basis, and underline that the **categories of activity varied in terms of efficiency**.

(2) Sustainability of activities: the Commission also shares the evaluators' conclusions on the sustainability of the EYC2013 activities. On the one hand, the effects of the EU-wide information and communication campaign are indeed not likely to be sustained, due to its low budget, and this **detracts from overall sustainability**. On the other hand, the participative forms of communication that were promoted, centred as they were on citizens' needs, are likely to have a lasting influence on the stakeholders involved, provided the expectations for follow-up that they created are met; otherwise, some stakeholders may be less inclined to get involved in the future.

(3) Citizens' awareness of their rights: as regards its impact on European citizens' overall awareness of their rights and their ability to engage in the process of European integration, EYC2013 can only be seen as a specific contribution to the Commission's general efforts through its corporate communication strategy and EU outreach programmes and policies.

EYC2013 was conceived as an EU-wide campaign to raise awareness about EU citizens' rights and as a catalyst for policy development in the area of EU citizenship, especially as regards the creation of a genuine European public space. The latter consideration became much more prominent as the Year progressed, particularly with **the extension of EYC2013 activities into 2014** in the run-up to the European elections. The modest budget limited the scope and impact of the communication campaign, but this was effectively mitigated by the creativity, commitment, voluntary efforts and drive of all stakeholders at Union and national levels. These included EYCA and its members from organised civil society, which generated sustainable networks with lasting effects that will help foster the development of a genuine European public space.

Challenges for future European Years: the external evaluator considered that:

- in order to reach a large audience, targeting the 28 Member States equally, an information campaign would require a budgetary 'entrance ticket' of at least **several million euros**, e.g. for media placements alone. It would also need to convey sharp and original messages to catch people's attention and potentially have an impact;
- when resources are limited, the priority is to deploy a **communication campaign that supports events**. In such cases, events are the key pillars of information dissemination and the campaign is a tool that aims mainly to involve participants and attract media attention so as to secure wider dissemination; and
- trying to implement a traditional campaign and event-based communication with a limited budget is ineffective. The communication strategy should be decided on at an **early design stage**.