Active European citizenship: Europe for Citizens programme 2007-2013

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In accordance with the Decision N° 1904/2006/EC, and building on the conclusions of an external ex post evaluation, this report from the Commission offers an overview of the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 'Europe for citizens' programme 2007-2013 (EFCP).

To recall, the 'Europe for citizens' programme was established in December 2006 for a period of seven years (from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013). The programme was seen as an initial step towards a more coherent strategy and policy in the area of civic participation. It was designed to support a wide range of activities and organisations promoting active citizenship through the involvement of individual citizens, local authorities and civil society organisations in the process of European integration.

Key activities and implementation of the programme: the EFCP provided financial support for a wide range of activities, which were grouped under four actions:

- ***Action 1: Active citizens for Europe***: This measure offered funds for organising town citizens' meetings and networks of twinned towns, as well as citizens' projects of a trans-national and cross-sectorial dimension. These activities were all aimed at strengthening mutual knowledge and understanding between citizens from different municipalities and cultures.
- ***Action 2: Active civil society in Europe:*** this provided structural support for European think tanks and civil society organisations and for projects initiated by civil society organisations.
- ***Action 3: Together for Europe***: supported (i) high visibility events aiming to make European citizens aware of European history and of the EU's achievements and values; (ii) studies to provide a better understanding of active citizenship at European level, and information provided through an internet website; (iii) the establishment of 28 **'Europe for Citizens' Contact Points,** out of which 22 received operating grants from the European Commission.
- ***Action 4: Active European Remembrance***: this measure offered funds for projects commemorating the victims of mass extermination and deportations as well as for preserving remembrance sites, memorials and archives.

Budget: the financial envelope for the EFCP's implementation from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013 was **EUR 215 million**:

- EUR 78.280 million were granted to towns and municipalities through both types of twinning projects,
- EUR 14.203 million were spent on remembrance projects,
- EUR 35.077 million on civil society and citizens' projects,
- EUR 49.935 million were granted as structural support to think tanks and European civil society organisations.

Applications and participants: over the 2007-2013 period, almost 20 000 grant applications were submitted. The programme saw a **steady growth** in the number of applications of more than 45 % between 2007 and 2013. The lion's share of applications concerned town twinning.

Germany was the Member State introducing the greatest number of projects (2 791), followed by France (2 537), Hungary (2 434), Italy (2 265) and Poland (1 219). In 2007, these five countries represented more than 70% of the projects submitted. In 2013, that share was 54 %.

Over the years, the projects submitted involved a **growing number of participants**. Overall, the total number of direct project participants increased from 700 000 in 2007 to 1 175 000 in 2013.

Over the 2007-2013 period, the 'Europe for Citizens' programme had approximately **7 million direct participants.** The programme reached almost **25 000 towns and cities** in Europe and created 350 networks of towns and cities around common issues. 4 250 civil society organisations were mobilised to meet citizens' concerns. More than 500 organisations were involved in remembrance activities vis-à-vis citizens.

Conclusion: the report concludes that the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-2013 triggered a lot of interest amongst citizens, as the steady growth in number of applications clearly shows. Citizens are eager to take part in discussions and to have their say in EU policies that affect their daily lives.

Even if the long-term impact of the EFCP is difficult to assess, **the programme effectively fostered civic participation and democratic engagement** and reached large numbers of citizens who otherwise would not have been engaged with the European project.

As the only EU programme that targets citizens directly the EFCP:

- contributed to raise awareness on EU activities and achievements, to foster a sense of ownership of the EU and to enhance mutual understanding and tolerance in a difficult context;
- served as an important entry point for ordinary citizens who wanted to discuss and engage with the EU, and as a dynamic platform of cooperation between civil society organisations and local authorities to develop citizenship activities;
- contributed to promoting fundamental values on which our European societies are based, such as peace, tolerance, mutual understanding and solidarity.

Over the final three years of the programme, the fact that **the projects were of higher quality and larger in scale,** with closer links to the main themes associated with citizenship and civic participation and that many first time participants were involved, considerably augmented impact of the programme.

In future, and taking into account the budgetary requirements, **the programme will continue to be developed** with a view to maximise its impact and deploy its funding strategically focussing on activities targeting citizens directly.