Implementation report on Europe for citizens

2015/2329(INI) - 02/03/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 470 votes to 132, with 37 abstentions, a resolution on the implementation of Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 establishing the "Europe for Citizens" programme for the period 2014–2020.

Parliament recalled that the Europe for Citizens programme aims to strengthen a sense of European citizenship and belonging, enhance solidarity, mutual tolerance and respect, to promote a better understanding of the EU.

It underlined that the overall funding available (EUR 185.47 million) to the only programme dedicated entirely to European citizenship, i.e. the Europe for Citizens programme, is negligible in comparison with other education and culture programmes, such as Creative Europe (EUR 1.46 billion) and Erasmus+ (EUR 14.7 billion), with the result that applicants' expectations will be disappointed.

Although overall Parliament welcomed the efficient running of the programme in the first two years, it recognised that the main obstacle to the successful implementation of the programme is insufficient financial allocation which has dramatically reduced the number of financeable projects as a consequence.

It acknowledged that the **impact of the programme remains proportionally high**, as is shown by the fact that in 2015 an estimated 1 100 000 participants were involved in the 408 projects selected. However, it called for important amendments in terms of the programme's general approach.

Members made a series of recommendations that the next generation of the "Europe for Citizens" programme should take into account. It should:

- be adopted using a **legal base that enables Parliament to be involved in the adoption of the programme as a co-legislator under the ordinary legislative procedure**, on an equal footing with the Council;
- benefit from a **substantial increase in the current budget** in order to achieve a higher target rate; Members, therefore, called on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to consider a total financial envelope of approximately EUR 500 million for the Europe for Citizens programme under the next multiannual financial framework (MFF);
- ensure the sustainability of the funded projects and provide better support for cooperation among local administrations or organisations at a wider distance;
- enable operating grants to guarantee independence to beneficiaries and offer the possibility of long-term planning to realise vision-oriented activities.

Coordination and communication aspects: Parliament called on the Commission to gather together all useful information regarding the "Europe for Citizens programme" along with all the programmes, actions, grants and structural funds that come under the umbrella of European citizenship, in a unique, **user-friendly communication portal** (one-stop-shop online platform). It emphasised that rejected applications should be responded to satisfactorily, indicating the reasons for the rejection. Members also recommended the creation of an **online platform** for the main organisations working in the field of citizenship and benefiting from the programme in order to pool good practices.

The Commission is called on to raise the programme's profile and make the public more aware of its objectives, by implementing an engaging communication strategy for European citizenship – using social networks, radio, TV advertisement and billboards. Parliament encouraged the participating countries

which have not yet done so to designate a **national contact point**. It also called on the Commission to increase to an even greater extent its efforts on administrative simplification.

Focus and objectives of the programme: Parliament recommended, in the next generation programme, formalising the multiannual approach in the definition of the priorities and enhancing synergies among the strands and the components of the programme.

It highlighted within the priorities of the programme the importance of projects focused on current challenges for Europe, on issues such as **diversity, migration, refugees, preventing radicalisation**, fostering social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, addressing financing problems and identifying the common European cultural legacy.

It also called for the programme to reach out to a wider range of participants, including asylum seekers and to develop - within the 'European Remembrance' strand - a European identity and to achieve a common integration founded on European values and European secular and spiritual heritage.

Parliament stressed the need to ensure that **history is not used as a divisive tool**, but as an opportunity to address contemporary challenges through sensitive interpretation and skillful, targeted education programmes.

The programme should: (i) enrich the programme with proposals which empower citizens to make use of their rights, for instance through the implementation of e-democracy; (ii) be open to all European Free Trade Association (EFTA), European Economic Area (EEA), accession and candidate countries; (iii) enhance cooperation to join forces with EU Member States in applying for projects, and calls for more cooperation between NGOs from the EU, Eastern and Southern Partnership countries and potential candidates in order to bring the EU closer to citizens.

Lastly, Parliament stressed the need to develop **town twinning**, focusing on ways of making greater use of the scheme, its promotion and results, including the adequate allocation of financial resources.