Implementation of the current CERV Programme 2021-2027 – Citizens' engagement and participation

2023/2004(INI) - 16/01/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 476 votes to 130, with 14 abstentions, a resolution on the implementation of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme 2021-2027 – citizens' engagement and participation.

Parliament believes that the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme makes a unique contribution to **enhancing civic engagement and participation from a fundamental rights** perspective by effectively combining values, civil dialogue and citizenship, while also promoting social and gender equality, the diversity through the assistance for preserving the regional heritage, historical consciousness and the fight against discrimination and violence.

Members are of the opinion that the CERV programme is an essential instrument for the future of the EU and for **addressing socio-political challenges**, such as the knowledge gap, Euroscepticism, shrinking civic space, and the erosion of and challenges to the rule of law across Europe. They encourage the programme to support actions aimed at building the resilience of civil society organisations, including those focused on the rule of law and EU values.

The early stages of the implementation of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (2021-2027): Strand 3 – Citizens' engagement

Only a few projects in Strand 3 have been completed and there is little information available from beneficiaries to enable results to be evaluated accurately. The Commission is called on to prioritise data collection on the CERV programme, particularly on disadvantaged groups, including marginalised communities, minorities, and vulnerable populations to address their unique challenges and promote research into their experiences.

Members underlined that the programme faced several challenges that hindered the initial stages of its implementation, many of which were external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine. They are concerned that the use and introduction of new digital tools for the implementation of EU funds appear to be a key issue for beneficiaries with regard to the programme's development. Complex procedures have also hindered the participation of smaller organisations that do not have the time and resources required to go through the application process within the set timelines.

Members called for the **elimination of the administrative burdens and the simplification** of the application, contracting and reporting processes. They also deplored the fact that current inflation rates mean that beneficiaries sometimes have to forego some of the activities they had originally planned in order to keep within their budget.

Policy recommendations for the future of the CERV programme

Parliament called on the Commission to establish the **Civil Dialogue Group** to ensure regular, open, and transparent dialogue to strengthen civil dialogue throughout the programme. It suggested using civil

dialogue as a tool for governance and to determine priorities for the two-year work programme and promoting further the collective dimension of civic engagement as a critical dimension of democracy and of the rule of law.

Members recalled the need to encourage **citizens' active participation** by reinforcing the European dimension of citizenship education, both in curricular and extracurricular activities. They emphasised the importance of including non-citizens who live in the EU, and their self-led organisations, in the target group of the CERV programme, which will foster democratic governance, the rule of law and social inclusion.

Parliament called on the Member States that have not yet designated national contact points to do so as quickly as possible. It encouraged the Commission, Member states and national contact points to establish a **European network of national contact points** to facilitate the sharing of best practices and the exchange of knowledge.

The Commission urged the Commission to **further simplify the administrative procedures** and requirements for re-granting to give organisations applying for re-granting more flexibility vis-à-vis sub-grantees. Co-funding requirements could be revised with a view to adapting the rules to the beneficiary's situation in order to support a larger variety of beneficiaries, including individuals and microstructures, and thematic fields.

Members insisted on the importance to promote the use of the programme in the **educational sector** at large, including students, teachers, educational staff and youth workers. Funding provided from the CERV programme in the field of rights, equality, values and civic engagement, for which other sources of funding are very scarce or absent, should cover a greater percentage of grant amounts. Members urged the Commission to ensure that financing goes to structures that respect the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Parliament called for the programme's budget to be increased to **EUR 2.6 billion** in the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) to meet the growing demand for civic engagement and democratic participation initiatives.

It suggested establishing an ad hoc mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders, similar to mechanisms in place for human rights defenders outside the EU or the protection of journalists, and, in general, to address the impact of inflation on programme costs.

The resolution stressed the need to address the challenges associated with the war in Ukraine by **encouraging projects with Ukrainian partners** through remembrance, and democratic participation activities and recovering Ukrainian cultural heritage. Parliament its call to make the CERV programme a lever for action in the field of European historical consciousness.