



**Local & Regional
Europe**

Towards a Europe for Citizens

Mid-term review of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020

CEMR Position Paper

December 2017

Foreword

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions strongly supports the Europe for Citizens Programme, which is one of the few EU Programmes both addressing the challenges of local and regional authorities, as well as issues relevant for citizens from a European perspective. Through its strand dedicated to democratic engagement and civic participation it offers local authorities and associations a unique opportunity to run projects of exchange and cooperation with and between citizens' in a sharing and openness spirit.

Even if the tendency towards autocracy of certain member states hasn't been so strong in Europe, the close linkages between local authorities of all sizes, everywhere in Europe, resist well to Euroscepticism. Within the initiatives supported by the programme, the different sorts of exchanges provide hope and colour to Europe as they are they soil that Europe needs in order to exist in the spirit of citizens who participate in them.

In a context in which local and regional authorities try to preserve social cohesion through their exchanges in order to reducing the gap between citizens and Europe, the CEMR calls not only for the continuation of the programme, but also for its reinforcement and renovation. In addition, the CEMR reminds the contribution of European associations of local and regional government, which everywhere in our continent, engage next to local authorities who wish to work with Europe and encourage them to participate in the programme. Taking into account that the programme aims at enhancing ties between Europe and its citizens, it is crucial that it remains open and accessible to everybody, particularly targeting disadvantaged groups as well as citizens' in risk of exclusion.

In addition, we believe that the discussion on EU citizenship should not only be about the programme but also about how to strengthen participation and active engagement in the EU decision-making. The Civil Dialogue on citizenship should be upgraded into a structured platform between decision-makers, local and regional governments, their national associations as well as civil society.

In a very challenging context for the EU, in which the refugee crisis, the Brexit as well as rising populism in several EU countries threaten our common values and open societies, programmes such as the Europe for Citizens can reinforce participation of citizens in European activities and enhance the democratic legitimacy of the integration process.

We would also like to underline, that as a result of its relatively small-scale, a first experience running a European project under the Europe for Citizens Programme framework, can support local authorities in starting a positive dynamic to foster transnational and innovative projects afterwards. The programme can therefore be a "first entry point" for local authorities to EU-funded initiatives.

Ms. Monica Cerutti
CEMR Spokesperson on Citizenship and Twinning
Councillor of the Piemonte Region (AICCRE, IT)



KEY MESSAGES

1. We believe, that as the main promoter of twinning in Europe and the biggest umbrella organisation of local and regional governments (LRGs), CEMR plays a unique role in this programme with a whole thematic area of our work dedicated to twinning and the Europe for Citizens programme.
2. We share the opinion of the European Parliament that the Europe for Citizens Programme “...is a unique and highly symbolic programme, insofar as it is a listening exercise on civil society’s debate, as it stimulates critical thinking on the European project...”¹
3. We also agree with MEPs that “... owing to budgetary constraints, the total number of funded projects is too small to achieve the programme’s ambitious goals...”².
4. In consequence, we welcome the European Parliament’s proposal aiming at providing the Europe for Citizens Programme with a total budget corresponding to the symbolic and reasonable amount of € 1 per citizen, and more concretely, € 500 million for the post-2020 period; while calling the European Commission and the Council to support it.
5. On the other hand, we are in favour of finding another legal basis under the European Treaties that enables the European Parliament to act as a co-legislator in all decisions related to the Europe for Citizens Programme.
6. We believe that the European Commission should reform the Civil Dialogue process as part of the programme’s framework into a permanent structured dialogue and a platform of discussion between beneficiaries, the European Commission and National Contact Points (NCPs) in order to discuss policy developments in the fields of democratic engagement, civic participation and citizenship in general, as well as the proportion of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) dedicated to it.
7. With this objective, as representatives of main implementers of the programme, we call on the European Commission to establish a *Permanent Table* between the European Commission, CEMR and national associations of local and regional governments to discuss the programme and the policy developments in the field of citizenship and democratic engagement. It is necessary to allow a higher involvement of national associations of local and regional governments is crucial, as they are the ones in close contact with local governments and also better placed to understand their needs.
8. We encourage the European Commission and the Council to better link the programme priorities with the challenges of citizens in their daily lives and the policy priorities of the EU legislative/policy agenda on citizenship.
9. The online platform showcasing projects for beneficiaries of the programme as well as interested organisations to disseminate project results, pool good practices, but also to enhance visibility and follow-up projects should be strengthened. It should also serve as the main platform of the Civil Dialogue group.
10. In a context in which the Union is striving to ensure support of citizens, we wish that the programme is preserved and reinforced after 2020 in order to, at least, be able to finance 1000 projects per year facilitating the accessibility in order to increase the impact and the image of the programme.
11. We recommend that the European Commission adapts the Multiannual priorities of the programme in order to allow open and critical discussions about the future of Europe. In particular, by supporting exchanges addressing challenges which mark the daily life of Europeans: employment, integration, housing, environment, mobility, etc., while promoting the European values and interculturality.

¹ goo.gl/ZrmyQr

² goo.gl/ZrmyQr

1. Introduction

The Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 aims at contributing to a better understanding of the EU by its citizens, as well as promoting European remembrance and civic participation. This programme is the third of its kind, following the 2004-2006 Active European Citizenship Programme and the 2007-2013 Europe for Citizens Programme.

The CEMR and its national associations welcome the consultation launched by the European Commission on the future of the Europe for Citizens Programme as well as the possibility to contribute to the reflection process on how the programme currently works. This contribution is based on a permanent dialogue with thousands of local authorities which are engaged in twinning activities, partnerships and cooperation initiatives with other counterparts on the continent.

CEMR, as the main organisation promoting twinning agreements in Europe, has traditionally been the first interlocutor of the European Commission for this programme, as it was created in 1989 to provide funding for twinning-related projects. In this regard, we have a long-standing collaboration with the EU institutions, not only to discuss the programme and disseminate it, but also to discuss citizenship issues in general at political level. Therefore, it is a critical moment for CEMR to contribute to this process in order to guarantee not only that the programme is maintained but that more financial and human resources are dedicated to it.

The European Parliament's resolution on the implementation of the Programme 2014-2020³, reflects CEMR's main messages. Mainly by supporting CEMR's proposal to increase the budget up to the symbolic amount of € 1 per European citizen (€ 500M for the overall post-2020 programming period). But also by supporting the creation of an online platform for beneficiaries to guarantee a proper follow-up and dissemination once projects have come to an end as well as the creation of more synergies between the programme priorities and the policy developments at the European level in the field of citizenship, civic engagement and democratic participation.

With respect to the timeline of the mid-term review, the European Commission is planning to submit its report to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions before the end of 2017.

The report will be based on the responses to the consultation and on the survey (and workshop) for beneficiaries conducted by Deloitte to which CEMR has contributed. Finally, by the end of 2018, the European Commission will inform the other institutions about the continuation (or not) of the programme as a result of the Mid-term review process.

The most important obstacle for the proper development and implementation of the programme is the lack of sufficient resources. Previously allocated with € 229 million (2007-2013), the current budget for the programme 2014-2020 has only around €185,47 million available. This results in a considerable decrease of the number of projects that can be financed (around 400 per year) as well as in the impossibility to respond to the high demand of beneficiaries willing to run a project.

On average, around 85% of projects are currently rejected due to a lack of available resources even if many of them are of very good quality. With a budgetary allocation of € 500m, for the post-2020 Programming period, it should be possible to reach around 20 million citizens, tripling the impact of the current programme. An increased budgetary would send a strong message, recognising the need to listen to citizens' and local governments' voices in the debate on the future of Europe.

³ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2017-0063&language=EN&ring=A8-2017-0017>

2. Reinvigorating twinning for a citizen-centred and bottom-up Union

The Europe for Citizens Programme allows to design exchange projects from a bottom-up perspective. Beneficiaries of the programme declare that the support of the programme encourage them to better prepare and diversify targets and participants. In addition, it also encourages projects to be more innovative, as well as to strengthen their European dimension and their learning component. Pedagogy and learning objectives entrenched in the programme break routine and oblige beneficiaries to think rigorously about interesting initiatives that increase the quality of projects.

In a period of reflection marked by different types of challenges on the future of Europe, growing euro-scepticism, populism and xenophobia, the programme and the exchanges that it supports in the framework of twinning agreements, has a crucial role in strengthening dialogue between Europeans and increasing citizens' participation and the EU's democratic legitimacy.

Thanks to their openness as well as their down-to-earth and European nature, citizens' exchanges represent European diversity, as they offer those who meet, a space to exchange ideas and opinions, while reaffirming their common values. Through the creation of strong ties at the local level, a series of issues such as youth mobility, language learning, intercultural dialogue as well as knowledge and best practice exchange, can be better addressed at the European level and help to build a more inclusive Europe.

Town-twinning has been one of the milestones that helped to establish the roots of reconciliation between European peoples after WW II. As a consequence, thousands of European cities and towns have a partnership with another European counterpart. This programme is unique when it comes to discussing the real problems and challenges of citizens and improve their involvement in EU decision-making.

In the middle of a reflection process on the future of Europe following the publication of the white paper on the future of Europe⁴ by the European Commission, commemorations of the anniversaries of the Treaties of Rome and Maastricht, as well as after the activation of Article 50 to start the negotiations on Brexit, town-twinning and citizen-led projects can help to re-launch the integration process by involving citizens in the debate.

The multiannual priorities of the programme offer the possibility to run projects dealing with the future of Europe, the root causes of Euroscepticism, how to strengthen solidarity in times of crisis or how to fight the stigmatisation of immigrants. We believe that these priorities also need to be flexible and allow beneficiaries to discuss issues that have an impact on their daily lives.

3. For a more open programme and Civil Dialogue around European citizenship

Even if we agree on the pro-European approach of the programme, it is important to present and re-design in a smart way, to get away from the perception that it is mainly used to make publicity of the European Union, as expressed by certain some European populists. Even if the 3rd European Citizenship report 2017⁵ points in the right direction, the efforts to strengthen the Europe for Citizens Programme and its synergies with the policy priorities on citizenship in general, are still insufficient.

Much more attention needs to be devoted to the civic engagement and democratic participation dimension of EU citizenship and the links between the programme and the legislative and policy priorities in this field.

⁴ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-385_en.htm

⁵ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-118_en.htm

To do so, the Civil Dialogue process of the European Commission, as the main platform to discuss the Programme, needs to be reinforced and regain the spirit of a proper structured dialogue on citizenship-related issues.

The creation of a Permanent Table, composed of the European Commission and national associations of local and regional governments, could complement the work of the Civil Dialogue and help to prepare discussions on the programme. The involvement of national associations of local and regional government in the design, implementation and evaluation of the programme is crucial for its future, as they are the ones in contact with local authorities and also better placed to understand their needs.

The reduction of the budgetary allocation to the programme has had a very negative effect in the success rates of grants finally conceded. This is why we are concerned about the continuity of the programme as well as about its image and impact. The low success rate is obviously linked to the lack of resources, which at the same time results in frustration for those beneficiaries not selected. In this respect, we call the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) to provide more accurate feedback on the applications in order to not discourage rejected applicants to apply again in the future. Currently, the EACEA only provides applicants with a general score on each of the award criteria. More detailed feedback will help applicants to know more in detail the weaknesses of their application and encourage them to apply again.

On the other hand, we call on the European Commission to facilitate the access to small projects, such as bilateral town-twinning initiatives, which have a high added value as a consequence of the variety of stakeholders they target, while being able to present Europe in its best form.

We invite the European Commission and the EACEA to account publicly for the expenses incurred through strand 3 on Horizontal Action – Valorisation – Analysis, dissemination and use of project results, as well as for the recognition and reinforcement of the role of European and national associations of local and regional government together with civil society organisations in raising awareness and disseminating the programme in order to increase the number of potential beneficiaries, as well as to support future applicants while reinforcing visibility.

4. Tackling the lack of resources: 1€ per European citizen is the solution

We believe that the insufficient budgetary allocation does not correspond to the high impact of the programme and the growing interest of beneficiaries in running projects under the Europe for Citizens Programme, as applications rise year after year. According to a recent study of the research service of the European Parliament⁶ on the implementation of the programme after the first 2 years of the current programming period, the Europe for Citizens Programme is one the EU funded Programmes with the lowest success rates (proportion of projects granted/projects submitted). If we take into account the data of 2014 and 2015, only around a 17.5%⁷ of submitted projects were granted with funding, showing the high interest of beneficiaries in the programme but at the same time, the contrasting lack of resources. In addition, the lack of resources results in big differences between success rates within the different strands of the programme, as some of them (Network of Towns, for example) have success rates below 10%.

The small budgetary allocation for this programme is far from the expected impact it is looking for. This is why its potential could be still reinforced if more resources were dedicated to it. We have to remember that in the 2007-2013 period, the programme reached 7 million direct participants, involved 25.000 towns and facilitated the creation of 350 networks of cooperation between European local authorities.⁸

⁶ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/581418/EPRS_IDA\(2016\)581418_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/581418/EPRS_IDA(2016)581418_EN.pdf)

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/evaluationreportefc2007-2013_en.pdf

On this basis, we estimate that with a budget of € 500M, the next programme could reach almost 20m citizens every programming period and around 2.750.000 citizens per year. According to *Euréval*⁹, which conducted a study on the impact of the programme for the 2007-2013 programming period, results show strong personal benefits from participation in the programme. The following benefits were outlined by participants: *“new contacts (88.1%); learned more about EU (73.7%); learned more about European history, politics and culture (88.9%); while learning more about people’s lives in other European countries remained the most mentioned benefit of participation (92.2%) and relatively stable”*.

5. Conclusion

CEMR and its national associations wish to express their full support to the Europe for Citizens Programme. It is an instrument that can respond to the needs of local authorities and citizens’ who are committed with European integration and want to put forward European intercultural and transnational activities.

Considering that such a programme has the objective of closing the gap between Europe and its citizens, it is essential that it reaches as many citizens as possible. It needs to keep the balance between its democratic dimension, expertise and learning. In this respect, it needs to continue offering Europeans who wish to meet, spaces to exchange ideas, opinions and values.

We hope that all the proposals made by CEMR can be taken into account by the European Commission and in particular, by the Council of the European Union in the framework of the current discussions in the post-2020 MFF as well and the Mid-term review of the Europe for Citizens Programme.

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/final_report_efc_may_2013_eurevalppmi.pdf

ANNEX

1. In-depth suggestions to reform the Civil Dialogue Group and to improve the programme

At CEMR we believe that the Civil Dialogue on citizenship should be something more than a platform to discuss the programme. It should be the main structured dialogue of the European Commission on citizenship-related issues.

The interests of beneficiaries participating in the Civil Dialogue, vary pretty much depending on their interests in the different strands of the programme (remembrance, civic engagement, etc.), reducing the efficiency and attractiveness of the Civil Dialogue as a platform for discussion. While some are more interested in following the EU policy developments in the field of citizenship, such as umbrella organisations and CSO's or beneficiaries of operating grants, others simply follow the developments of the programme or are granted with a project grant but they are not anymore active once projects come to an end. This is why, beyond plenary sittings, the civil dialogue should be divided in different working groups according to the different themes (citizens' rights, democratic participation, memory and remembrance, etc.) and efforts should be made to ensure that there is continuity between meetings, through encouraging working groups to exchange more regularly.

The Civil Dialogue of the European Commission on citizenship as well as the *Permanent Table* should then be the main policy platforms to discuss the programme, but especially, to discuss the policy priorities and developments in the field of citizenship at the EU level. The Civil Dialogue, working groups and the *Permanent Table* should discuss more policy developments and not only issues related to the programme. The creation of an online platform for beneficiaries, which enables the dissemination of projects and facilitates policy discussions could result in greater visibility of the Programme, better access and understanding of the programme and the establishment of more synergies between the policy dimension of EU citizenship and the programme.

Accordingly, we believe that the following proposals on the **reform of the Civil Dialogue** should be considered:

- The necessary means should be provided for the Civil Dialogue to meet more often (2 or 3 times a year) and to create different working groups considering the interests of beneficiaries (remembrance, civic engagement and democratic participation, etc.), but also of associations of local and regional government and organisations interested in participating in the policy/legislative dialogue on citizenship-related issues.
- The meetings of the Civil Dialogue and the *Permanent Table* should be split into two different parts, one dedicated to discussing the programme priorities and project-related developments and the other to the reflection on the policy/legislative developments on citizenship at EU level.
- The Civil Dialogue meetings, and especially the part dedicated to the policy developments in the field of citizen participation and remembrance, should also target organisations who are not yet beneficiaries.
- A Steering Board should be established (renewable every 2 years) composed of the European Commission, CEMR, one national association of local and regional government and one pan-European civil society organisation to decide the topics to be discussed in the Civil Dialogue, in close coordination with the abovementioned working groups.

With respect to the programme itself, as well as to the policy developments on citizenship in general and the link between them and the programme, we believe that the **following adjustments and proposals on the programme in general** should be taken into account:

- The European Commission should give more emphasis on the participatory and democratic dimension of the policy and programme priorities. Currently, and despite the advancements resulting from the last EU Citizenship report¹⁰ published this year, the priorities (actions) put forward to improve the current situation are excessively oriented towards the legal dimension of EU citizenship and awareness-raising on rights associated to it. In consequence, we call on the European Commission and Member States to be more ambitious with respect to enhancing the political and participatory dimensions of EU citizenship.
- The European Commission should, in dialogue with the Permanent Table and the Civil Dialogue, introduce more flexibility to allow changes in the multiannual priorities depending on political developments.
- The European Commission and Member States should continue to strengthen the rights of mobile European citizens and enhance the civic and educational dimension of citizenship.
- The European Commission should install even more mechanisms which allow or ease direct participation and monitoring in the Union policy-making process for programme beneficiaries, national associations of LRGs and those interested in EU citizenship in general.
- More and better coordination between DG Home, EAC, JUST, COMM and the EACEA Agency would contribute to an improvement of the policy discussions in the field of citizenship as well as the visibility and effectiveness of the programme. The current fragmentation of responsibilities with respect to EU citizenship across different DGs weakens the visibility of the programme and the development of effective policies on active citizenship.
- The European Commission should increase the human resources dedicated to the programme and citizenship in general, especially in the EACEA agency, DG EAC, DG Home and DG Justice, in order to be able to better deliver the objectives of the programme and reinforce policy discussions.

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=51132

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About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional authorities in Europe. Its members are over 50 national associations of municipalities and regions from 41 European countries. Together these associations represent some 150 000 local and regional authorities.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of local and regional authorities and to provide a platform for exchange between its member associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

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