



CIVIL DIALOGUE MEETING **BRUSSELS – 1 JUNE 2016**

The meeting was chaired by Marta CYGAN (DG HOME, Director A "Strategy and General Affairs") during the morning, and by Marc RICHIR (DG HOME, Deputy Head of Unit A1: "Interinstitutional relations and Citizenship") during the afternoon.

37 organisations belonging to the Civil Dialogue group were represented in this meeting, out of 56 invited, and around 20 beneficiaries of action grants under strand 2 also attended it (see list of participants in Annex 1).

1. Welcoming words, approval of agenda and of last meeting's minutes

Marta CYGAN introduced herself and welcomed the Civil Dialogue members for this first meeting of 2016, which was also the second one officially held under the auspices of DG HOME since the transfer of the "Europe for Citizens" programme (EFCP) from DG COMM on 1 January 2015.

She said that she personally viewed this Civil Dialogue as one of the main assets of the current programme, inasmuch as civil society organisations are an indispensable link between citizens and authorities, a place of political apprenticeship and civic engagement, and a major channel for citizens' participation. She underlined that it was important to consult stakeholders regularly so as to improve the implementation of the programme and to better exploit its results. She reminded that it was for these reasons that, since its creation, the EFCP had been proposing a structural support funding scheme for civil society organisations and initiated this particular consultative and advisory forum.

Marta CYGAN highlighted that this fourth edition of the Civil Dialogue was special for four reasons:

- it was the first time that a civil dialogue was organised in partnership with the University of Barcelona. She thanked the University of Barcelona, and especially Jordi GUIXE, Director of the European Observatory on Memories (EUROM), for making that meeting possible;
- it was also the first time that the civil dialogue was included in the larger context of a conference dedicated to the two strands of the EFCP. She explained the Commission intended thereby to bring together programme stakeholders and a wider audience to reflect on a positive and cohesive message that the European Union could send to its citizens in order to regain their confidence in a context where Euro-scepticism grows and challenging times threaten its internal cohesion and its core values;
- Marta CYGAN also welcomed in this meeting beneficiaries of action grants (civil society projects selected in 2014 and 2015) and thanked them for having accepted the Commission's invitation to speak about their concrete experience in applying to the EFCP and in implementing their projects;



- she added that this session would adopt an interactive format with two workshops animated by Civil Dialogue members themselves on topics that they suggested during bilateral meetings held at the beginning of the year with the Citizenship team.

The previous meeting report and the proposed agenda were approved with no specific comments.

2. Programme implementation and evaluation

Marta CYGAN welcomed Maria Teresa GIMENEZ BARBAT (MEP, Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) in her capacity of Rapporteur of the intermediary evaluation of the EFCP. She said that this Civil Dialogue was an excellent opportunity for the Honourable Member to have a direct access to the stakeholders of the programme and get their feedback on its implementation.

2.1. Mid-term evaluation of the programme

a. Europe for Citizens implementation report by the European Parliament

Maria Teresa GIMENEZ BARBAT gave a short presentation of the implementation report on the EFCP conducted by the European Parliament, which was then under preparation and to be adopted before the end of 2016.

During her speech (reproduced and translated in English in Annex n° 3), she sketched the four main recommendations that would be put forward in her evaluation report:

- making this programme better known by potential beneficiaries and local administrations through a better communication strategy involving the national contact points of the Programme;
- increasing substantially its budget;
- enriching the programme with innovative lines of action, namely (a) the promotion of e-democracy at local, national and European levels, and (b) the integration of the "New Narrative for Europe" project;
- underlying the role of a secular perspective in the programme as a driver for European integration.

Marta CYGAN noted with interest some remarks made by the Honourable Member:

- her proposal for reinforcing the communication strategy on the programme (being noted nonetheless that stakeholders had already access to all necessary information about the programme on the dedicated websites of EACEA, DG HOME and national contact points);
- her wish to strengthening and developing cooperation between the programme and the cities and local authorities;
- her stress on new possible actions lines, like the integration of the "New Narrative for Europe", and on specific targets, like young people.

Questions/Answers session

During the ensuing discussion with the Civil Dialogue group, the following comments were made:

- EUROPEAN ALTERNATIVES put forward the added value of the EFCP, which is its unique political focus on all dimensions of European citizenship, including civic participation and democratic engagement aspects, as well as its transnational perspective. Especially in a time when democratic values are under attack by various forces, it underlined that this programme had to be preserved as such. For the future programme priorities, EUROPEAN ALTERNATIVES suggested to enlarge our common

understanding of European past beyond the recent history of the European continent and to include its influence over the rest of the world (impact on the current conflictual situation in the Middle East, long term consequences of colonial wars, etc.).

- EUROPEAN HOUSE welcomed the positive approach presented by the Honourable Member, and her wish to support an active European citizenship notably by increasing the budget of the EFCP. However, it expressed its concerns about the growing weight of Eurosceptic political forces inside her institution, which do not share the same views on the merits and relevance of a programme promoting an active European citizenship like the EFCP. In that respect, it considered that the budget cuts were not a financial issue, but the result of a worrying political situation. It evoked the possibility that Eurosceptic influence inside the European Parliament might even grow in the future legislature, making very unlikely an agreement on a more ambitious EFCP.
- ALDA agreed on the need to raise awareness on the EFCP, which is indeed one of the few financial tools available at national and EU level for making citizens engage in and discuss various European issues. It also praised another of its specificity, which is to allow funding for small projects, whereas the current trend is towards funding large scale projects. It considered that it was important to better explain why those small projects are indeed a good investment for the European Union: firstly, despite their small scale, they reach out to citizens at local level (especially, in ALDA's case, in the neighbouring countries like the Western Balkans); secondly, they rely pretty much on the good cooperation between local authorities and civil society organisations; thirdly, they are a listening-to-the-citizens exercise, and not a selling-the-European-project exercise. ALDA proposed to feed the evaluation report of the Honourable Member not only with its best practices and good results, but also with its collection of political feedbacks from the citizens.
- VOLONTEUROPE welcomed the Honourable Member wish to foster European citizenship, and especially the participation of young people. It praised the EFCP as a rare example of a programme aiming at giving (young) citizens opportunities to discuss European issues through small scale projects. In these challenging times for the European project, it was looking forward to see strengthened this programme that improves the understanding of the EU.
- SOCIAL PLATFORM pointed out the current trend in the European Commission to cut grants, and especially operating grants to the benefit of action grants. It regretted this inasmuch as action grants cannot enable civil society organisations that are implementing projects to determine independently how the political priorities settled at EU level can be reached. By contrast, operating grants allow for a systematic and structural action in favour of civic participation and democratic engagement, while preserving the independence of civil society organisations.
- ECAS agreed with previous organisations on the uniqueness of this programme, which gives civil society organisations that are not "usual suspects" the possibility to access funding and to be heard. It also praised the programme for its user-friendly application form, compared to other EU funding programmes (like Erasmus+). ECAS said it would be happy to contribute to the EP's evaluation report. It expressed some worries concerning the news of a budget transfer from the programme to the implementation of the European Citizens' Initiative, and wondered why and for what this transfer had been decided.
- Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADES and the representative from SG were invited to bring elements of explanation about this transfer later on.

- CEMR agreed on preserving the specificities of the Programme (notably the opportunity given to small municipalities to finance small town-twinning projects). It advocated for more coherence in the initiatives in the citizenship area, considering that they are currently scattered among the Commission services. This lack of coherence was palpable in the 2016 EU Citizenship Report, which deals mainly with legal issues (mobility issues, consular protection, citizens' rights, etc.). It said that the Commissioner Avramopoulos should have a more political leadership on his citizenship portfolio, which is currently too much focused on legal issues, so as to better link the programme to other dimensions of citizenship and take into account participatory issues and subsidiarity (participation of citizens *and* of local authorities in the European decision-making process). CEMR noted with satisfaction EP' support to the strengthening of the programme.
- After more than 25 years of working in European Affairs, JEAN MONNET ASSOCIATION felt that times were more challenging than ever for the European Union as a political project and confessed that its work was pretty much now like swimming against the tide. In the framework of its activities, it noted that there were more and more difficulties in raising awareness of young people on European issues. It argued that, beyond the EFCP itself, the European Commission should help civil society organisations to conceive new tools and new solutions to "sell the European product" and reconnect with citizens, especially the younger ones.
- Marta CYGAN conceded that times were currently challenging, but said that we needed to remain optimistic about the future of the European Union and to consider this period as transitory. She also acknowledged that communication tools had to be adapted to the new uses and habits of the younger generations.
- EAB BERLIN believed that the context was not particularly propitious to optimism. It added that providing citizens with arguments about the blessings of Europe was not sufficient and that young people were not the only target group, as Euroscepticism was widespread among the population. It considered that part of the solution was to go on the ground and discuss directly with the citizens with tailor-made arguments. In this regard, listening to citizens' concerns is not the only purpose of funded activities under the EFCP, which ambitions to create opportunities for discussing, debating and engaging with citizens.
- IEP BERLIN agreed with the Honourable Member on the need for a "positive secularism", and welcomed her proposals for increasing the programme budget and making the EFCP better known. It considered that national politicians and national parliaments were contradicting themselves when they wish to narrow the gap between the Union and its citizens and, at the same time, they reduce budget of programmes like the EFCP. IEP BERLIN advised the Honourable Member to highlight better in her report this contradiction, and to base her defence of the EFCP on the fact that not strengthening the programme and cutting more its budget would be tantamount to develop anti-Europeanism.
- EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM expected the European Parliament to pinpoint in its evaluation report what additional goals or political directions should be pursued through the EFCP. It considered that the strand 1 "European Remembrance" should be preserved insofar as it can help citizens understand our common history. However, it wondered whether the European Parliament could consider opening this historical approach so that a better understanding of the European past also contribute to building a common future based on EU values (solidarity, equality, inclusiveness, etc.). It also requested the European Parliament to suggest in its report directions to be followed in order to address the issue of disengagement of citizens from civic affairs at national and EU levels.

- ICLS considered that organisations like ICLS aimed to create the conditions for a civic democracy and for a sense of belonging together in Europe beyond the social, economic, religious and ethnic fractures that cross European societies. In this respect, it regretted to disagree with the Honourable Member about the "positive secularism": in its opinion, this approach was insufficient to tackle radicalisation, as it could leave certain minorities (especially the young) on the roadside and offer a basis for discrimination to some extremist parties. To the contrary, the religious dimension that is noticeable in the phenomena of terrorism and radicalisation should not be forgotten, which is why we should instead work closely together with the faith based organisations. In line with ASSOCIATION JEAN MONNET's request, ICLS pleaded for finding another "vehicle" or tool to address this issue (specific training sessions like those already implemented by ICLS). In particular, it deemed necessary to change the strategies and content of the EU's institutional communication through social networks in order to reach the young population.
- EUROPEAN POLICY CENTER said that, as a think tank, it was operating at a different level than the fieldwork done by the civil society organisations. In its perspective, the big challenge was to fight the populist stance adopted by national politicians for tactical reasons. It also considered that a mainstream populism is slowly contaminating the "élites", which is particularly worrying, as "élites" are well known for being multipliers and opinion leaders. Against this background, it deemed the "positive secularism" advocated by the Honourable Member of Parliament as part of the solution, but not the entire solution to the current waves of mainstream populism.
- As a basis for discussion, ALDA circulated a document co-signed with EMI and Social Platform (see Annex n° 4) suggesting to consider migrants as future Europeans as their objective once arrived in Europe is to integrate and take part to society, and become in the long run full EU citizens. ALDA added that the real budget of the programme lied in the Member States hands, and that ambitions should be put on national contact points of the programme, that would be entrusted by Member States a complementary budget to address the programme's objectives (better information of potential applicants, etc.). Finally, ALDA considered that the best remedy against populism was to let people meet each other and exchange together on European issues.
- Marta CYGAN replied that short-term response to emergencies should not indeed overshadow the need for longer-term perspectives like the integration policy under the European Agenda on Migration. She also found interesting the idea of complementing the EFCP by national programmes dedicated to similar priorities under shared management funds (like integration aspects implemented under shared management of Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund).
- ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP NETWORK considered that the EFCP would be more useful if it helped to foster a "pragmatic culture of outputs and not only outputs", and to influence concretely the EU policy-making process, as ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP NETWORK already managed to do so through a recent initiative carried out at national and EU levels. For ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP NETWORK, the EFCP is not a tool for collecting opinions, but an instrument to improve the civic life.

Maria Teresa GIMENEZ BARBAT agreed on EUROPEAN ALTERNATIVES' proposal for a broader understanding of European remembrance and ensured that she would include neighbouring countries in her evaluation report.

In response to the EUROPEAN HOUSE, she acknowledged that Euroscepticism was effectively taking ground in the European Parliament, and that it had been a shock for her to experience this Euroscepticism once elected. She insisted however on the fact that the

selfishness that was noticeable at EU level among Member States (blaming the European Union for all evils while disregarding national responsibilities) also existed at national and regional levels.

By contrast, she said that she considered her role as defending the European general interest, and not as representing partial, private or national interests.

She found important that the EFCP could continue to help small projects, involving local authorities and not only well-established civil society organisations.

She advocated for a specific strategy for the Youth, taking into account their new habits and ways of thinking, and helping them to open their minds to what happens at EU level.

She shared the views expressed by some Civil Dialogue members that the EFCP was a key instrument to get the EU closer to the citizens by giving them opportunities to discuss and debate on European issues. In that respect, she considered that other budget cuts of the programme would be tantamount to reduce the freedom of expression of EU citizens.

She said that the European Remembrance Strand was indeed very important, insofar as the past can be a vaccination against reproducing the same mistakes and against populism.

She finally insisted on the need to create a common narrative for Europe that would transcend national, communitarian or religious narratives. As a truly "secular humanist", she believed that it was possible to build citizenship on mutual trust and solidarity, and to prevent the development of particularisms and populisms by sticking to the mere facts and by adhering to shared values.

Marta CYGAN wrapped-up the discussions by putting forward the many positive comments made about the EFCP (its user-friendliness, its unique support to small projects and small organisations, etc.), as well as its criticisms (challenging times, small budget, need for additional tools and funding) – many comments that would feed the mid-term evaluation of the EFCP 2014-2020, and contribute to its improvement.

b. Mid-term evaluation of Europe for citizens by European Commission

Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADIS (DG HOME, Unit A1, "Europe for Citizens") informed the Civil Dialogue members that the mid-term evaluation of the EFCP was a legal obligation set out in Article 15.4 of its establishing Regulation. According to this legal basis, such report was to be submitted to the European Parliament, the Council, the EESC and the Committee of the Regions by 31 December 2017.

Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADIS explained that this evaluation report was aiming to evaluate the ongoing programme implementation with regard to its general and specific objectives, and to start a reflection on the future of the EFCP.

She added that this report would have to draw conclusions on the implementation and results of the two strands of the EFCP, and the horizontal action "Dissemination and exploitation of results" across the different target levels (citizens, participants, civil society organisations and municipalities).

She said that an Interservice steering group (ISSG) composed of DG HOME, JUST, EAC, COMM, SG and BUDG had already agreed on a roadmap for this evaluation, as well as on the Terms of Reference for the recruitment of a consultant in charge of the evaluation study.

Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADIS presented briefly the roadmap adopted by the ISSG for this mid-term evaluation report and underlined the important role of Civil Dialogue members in that context, as they would be contacted in their quality of programme stakeholders by the external consultant for interviews and focus groups meetings in Autumn 2016. She invited them to participate actively.

2.2. **State of play on the implementation of the programme and exchange with the Civil Dialogue members and beneficiaries**

Amaya PEREZ DE ALBENIZ (EACEA, Acting Head of Unit C1, "Europe for Citizens") presented the 2015 results and gave a general feedback on the first round selection results for 2016 (as the selection results were not official at that moment; see Annex n° 5).

Questions/Answers session

During the ensuing discussion with the Civil Dialogue group, the following comments were made:

- IEP BERLIN wondered why the Agency had changed the budgetary rules for the operating grants, claiming that this change had contributed to making the financial reporting technically more difficult, and asked whether there was a possibility to go back to the previous system of lump sums.
- Amaya PEREZ DE ALBENIZ acknowledged that the Agency had been obliged to change the previous financial reporting concerning operating grants in order to comply with the revision of the financial regulation. She ensured that the Agency was aware of this problem and would implement a new system of annual flat rates for operating grants the following year.
- ECAS insisted on the importance to improve the knowledge of organisations in Member States on funding opportunities offered by the EFCP. Given that it is sometimes difficult for newcomers not based in Brussels or not experienced in EU funding to get access to potential partners and implement their project, ECAS asked the Commission whether it was possible to fund a partners' search tool through the actions of the programme in order to facilitate their networking.
- Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADES replied that the European Commission had no intention to fund such a database through the Programme, as this partners' search tool already existed *via* the platform VALOR, implemented by DG EAC and the Executive Agency, which gives access to all information concerning projects funded under the EFCP. She also put forward the excellent database of the CEMR about municipalities involved in town-twinning projects.

2.3. **Consultation on the renewal of multiannual priorities 2016-2020 within the discussion on the draft Work Programme 2017**

Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADES (DG HOME, Unit A1, "Europe for Citizens") first reminded the Civil Dialogue members that "multiannual" priorities had replaced "annual" priorities as from 2016 in order to enable applicants to better plan and prepare their projects, and to ensure a better thematic follow-up.

She also reminded that a first version of the multiannual priorities had been examined during the last Civil Dialogue meeting held in Brussels on 15 June 2015 through working groups. Further to the comments expressed on that occasion by Civil Dialogue members, these multiannual priorities had been modified accordingly before being presented to the Programme Committee on 6 October 2015, and adopted on 18 December 2015.

Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADES informed that this switch from annual to multiannual priorities had been well-perceived by beneficiaries, and that the first round of selection in 2016 had gone very well with excellent projects submitted, according to the feedbacks from the Executive Agency at point 2.2.

She added that there was no apparent need to activate the flexibility clause that enables the Commission to add further priorities in light of political developments. Therefore, she

proposed to keep the current priorities for 2017 for the remaining period of the programme (2017-2020) as they were:

- for strand 1: List of 13 commemorative dates; "Civil Society and civic participation under totalitarian regimes"; "Ostracism and loss of citizenship under totalitarian regimes: drawing the lessons for today"; "Democratic transition and accession to the European Union";

- for strand 2: "Understanding and Debating Euroscepticism"; "Solidarity in times of crisis"; "Combatting stigmatisation of 'immigrants' and building counter narratives to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding"; "Debate on the future of Europe".

Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADES also indicated that the programme budget would increase slightly of 600 000 euros from 2016 to 2017, amounting to EUR 23 231 000 in 2017, despite the transfer of EUR 840 000 to the new budget line dedicated to the implementation of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). She explained that the slight increase of budget in 2017 would signify concretely: +1 European remembrance project; +1 network of towns; + 1 Civil Society project; +3 town-twinning.

Questions/Answers session

Consulted on the proposed multiannual priorities 2017-2020, the Civil Dialogue members approved tacitly their renewal.

3. Current Commission initiatives in the area of citizenship and civic participation

3.1. Findings of the 2015 Commission consultations on EU Citizenship

Marta CYGAN gave the floor to Marie-Hélène BOULANGER (DG JUST, Head of Unit C2, "Union Citizenship and Free Movement"), in charge of the EU Citizenship Inter-Service Steering Group on the preparation of the 2016 EU Citizenship Report.

Marie-Hélène BOULANGER presented the main findings of the 2015 Commission consultations on EU citizenship (reproduced in Annex n° 6). During her presentation, she also referred to the forthcoming citizenship report and the organisation by the Commission of a colloquium on "Media Pluralism in a Democratic Society" in November 2016.

Questions/Answers session

Then, the floor was given to the Civil Dialogue members to get their feedback on these findings. During the ensuing discussion, the following comments were made:

- EUROPEAN HOUSE noticed that the EU Citizenship Report had evolved in its layout over the years to become more digestible for citizens. It greeted this evolution and pleaded for going even further for the 2016 edition. It also encouraged the Commission to continue translating this report in all official EU languages and giving an overview of progresses made in the implementation of EU citizens' rights since the previous report.
- Marie-Hélène BOULANGER confirmed that the Commission was doing its best to make this report as user-friendly as possible, ensuring its translation in all EU languages and using plain language. She indicated that the follow-up to actions recommended in the previous report should be provided, as it was already the case in the report published in 2013.
- EURODEMOS (programme beneficiary from Romania) underlined that only 2 170 persons from a few "old" EU countries (Italy, UK, Germany and Greece) had responded to the public consultation presented by Marie-Hélène BOULANGER, which made the results of this kind of survey not representative. Taking the example of Romania, it said that communication about the EU had decreased and almost stopped since its accession. It

judged that support from programmes like the EFCP was more necessary than ever to raise people's awareness on their rights as EU citizens and to diversify their sources of information on European issues.

- Marie-Hélène BOULANGER pointed out that the findings relied on a solid basis: several different sources (public consultation carried-out by the Commission between September and December 2015; and representative figures from the Eurobarometer Standard n° 83; and Eurobarometers n° 430 and 431 on EU citizenship and Electoral rights; studies and dedicated workshops) mixing quantitative and qualitative studies, which ensured that results were consistent and representative. She also noted that the Commission had at its disposal many other tools including the feedback provided to the Commission directly by citizens (requests for information, complaints, Your Europe, Solvit, EDCC, etc.) to measure the effectiveness of EU citizens' rights in Member States.
- Marta CYGAN suggested transmitting EURODEMOS' remarks to the EU representation in Romania to remedy its difficulty to get information about the Union.

3.2. **ECI implementation, Better Regulation and REFIT Platform**

Tomas SORIA ESTEBAN (SG, Unit C4, "Work Programme and Stakeholder Consultation") presented the current state of play of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) implementation, and informed the Civil Dialogue members about the Better Regulation package adopted on May 2015, including ongoing work on the REFIT Platform (see his presentation in Annex n° 7).

Questions/Answers session

During the ensuing discussion with the Civil Dialogue group, the following comments were made:

- ECAS said it was participating in the "Stakeholder group" of the REFIT platform, and had been invited to suggest improvements of current pieces of European legislation in different policy areas, including ECI implementation. It informed the Civil Dialogue members that the REFIT platform had received more than 300 suggestions from the stakeholders and tried in further meetings to prioritise them by policy areas so as to produce by the end of June 2016 a set of proposals that would be taken into account in Commission Work Programme for 2017. ECAS also said that during that consultation process, stakeholders underlined shortcomings and challenges in the ECI implementation and supported the revision of its Regulation.
- IEP BERLIN deemed very important the Better Regulation package, as it was a solid argument against the populist chorus on "EU over-regulation". It found the figures presented on ECIs quite disappointing: after 4 years of existence and over 6 million citizens' signatures collected, only 3 out of 36 registered ECIs had been able so far to complete the whole process and reach 1 million signatures with no significant legislative outcome. According to IEP Berlin, these results make it particularly difficult to sell the idea of more citizens' participation in EU Affairs. Considering that the threshold for making this instrument effective was very high, it pleaded for softening the requirement of 1 million signatures from 7 Member States.
- In order to prevent criticism of technocracy and centralism, EUROPEAN ALTERNATIVES asked whether it would be possible to make available to the public the contributions from Member States and stakeholders to the REFIT platform.
- EUROPEAN HOUSE remembered having thought, five years earlier, that ECI would become a success story. Based on figures provided by SG, it concluded that so far only 3

out of 36 registered ECIs were able to reach the one million threshold necessary to be submitted to the Commission, and that none until then had resulted in a Commission's legislative proposal. It found that trend particularly discouraging, as well as the Commission position that time was not appropriate to improve the functioning of this instrument through a revision of the ECI Regulation. To the contrary, and in line with the resolution of the European Parliament dated 28 October 2015, EUROPEAN HOUSE wished this instrument to be improved without waiting for a Treaty revision because it was important that this innovative provision of the Lisbon Treaty ends as a success story.

- CEV noted that organisations able to collect one million signatures were mostly big structures, whereas the ECI had been conceived as a democratic tool for lay citizens. Therefore, it asked whether it was possible to provide smaller organisations with other kinds of support than financial support (through legal, logistical and technical assistance for instance), and if links could be established between ECIs and the EFCP (extra-points in the selection criteria could be given to projects related to ECIs for example).
- ETUCE said that its member organisations (mainly Trade Unions in the Education sector) were not favourable to the REFIT platform and expressed serious doubts as to whether this measure would really reduce bureaucracy. ETUCE also expressed concerns about its future impact on social and labour standards, notably in the education sector. Given that the REFIT Platform often reduced to deregulation, ETUCE claimed that the Commission should focus more on the quality of legislation rather than on cutting blindly the so-called "red tape".
- Considering that local authorities were ultimately entrusted the implementation of public policies and legislation, CEMR asked for an institutionalised participation of local authorities and associations in the impact assessment of European legislation.

Tomas SORIA ESTEBAN explained that the contributions to the ECI Regulation review process carried out in 2015 from EU institutions, bodies and civil society stakeholders had been very comprehensive and useful for the assessment of the implementation of the ECI instrument, with numerous suggestions expressed by civil society stakeholders and ECI organisers.

He admitted that ECI implementation was facing a set of challenges that had been also identified in the first triannual report on the application of the ECI Regulation (adopted in March 2015). He reiterated that the Commission was working on this assessment and already working on a set of actions to improve the functioning of the ECI instrument, also taking into account the views expressed by other EU institutions, bodies and stakeholders. He stated that these views were converging in a set of areas where this instrument could be improved under the current legal framework.

He explained that the Commission deemed a revision of the ECI Regulation too early at this stage as many difficulties put forward by the European Parliament and other EU bodies and stakeholders could also be addressed already under the current rules. Before envisaging such a revision, improvements can be implemented in several of the areas identified such as communication on ECI; advice and assistance to organisers; increase efficiency of the process of collecting signatures; or improvements in the ECI online collection software provided by the Commission.

Tomas SORIA ESTEBAN advised to visit the official website of the REFIT platform (http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/refit/refit-platform/index_en.htm) in order to consult the work in progress and access suggestions grouped in the different thematic policy areas. He also invited the members to consult the "Lighten the load - Have your say!" site, where the Commission publishes the contributions received.

As regards the proposal for increasing links with the EFCP, he considered that indeed more cooperation could be envisaged between ECI and the EFCP.

Jutta KÖNIG-GEORGIADIS claimed that some links already existed, inasmuch as a couple of projects about or related to ECI were funded under the current EFCP.

Tomas SORIA ESTEBAN also stressed that "deregulation" is not the objective of the Better Regulation agenda, which has rather for goals to increase the transparency of the EU decision-making process and to improve EU legislation and policy throughout the policy cycle (strong performance evaluation, impact assessment, reduction of regulatory burden, stakeholders' consultation) so that the EU legislation delivers its objectives at the least cost.

Concerning participation of local authorities to the REFIT Platform, Tomas SORIA ESTEBAN explained that this platform comprises two groups: the "government group", with one representative per Member State; and the "Stakeholder group", made up of representatives from business, social partners and civil society, and also one representative from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and one from the Committee of the Regions. He emphasized that the representation of regional and local authorities in the Platform was therefore ensured through the representative of the Committee of the Regions.

4. Workshops

4.1. Workshops A and B

Marc RICHIR introduced the topic "*Combating immigrants' stigmatisation and promoting intercultural dialogue in a context of rising populism*" by saying that the perception of immigration as a problem, measured through opinion surveys, fuelled by populist discourses and amplified through medias, needed to be rebalanced. He claimed that civil society organisations and think tanks, especially those belonging to the Civil Dialogue group, had a special role to play in this regard and that it was the rationale for these workshops.

After the screening of a [short video related to the topic](#), participants split into two workshops animated respectively by IEP-Berlin (Mathias JOPP) and Volonteuropé (Oonagh AITKEN). During 1h15, the abovementioned topic was discussed under the prism of the three following sub-questions (communicated a few days before to all Civil Dialogue members).

- 1) *On the basis of your own experience, what are the core arguments or defamatory statements used in order to stigmatize immigrants?*
- 2) *Through your projects or your activities, how do you cope with such populist discourses and what are your counter-arguments?*
- 3) *In your opinion, what can be done by civil society organisations to combat hate speech against immigrants and promote intercultural dialogue?*

4.2. Workshop C

Bruno DENIS (DG HOME, Unit A1, "Europe for Citizens") introduced the topic "*Reaching out to Union citizens in times of Euroscepticism*" by saying that there was a growing need for innovative ways to reach out to citizens and involve them in European Affairs. He explained that Civil Dialogue members and beneficiaries had developed such tools and methodologies through their activities or projects, and that this workshop was aiming at highlighting these best practices and setting guidelines.

Thereafter, participants took part in a workshop animated by European Alternatives (Niccolo MILANESE), whose objective was to discuss the abovementioned topic during 1h15 under the prism of the three following sub-questions (communicated a few days before to all Civil Dialogue members):

- 1) *In your opinion, is Euroscepticism really scepticism about the European Union or does it hide other issues?*
- 2) *Through your projects or activities, how do you encourage informed and inclusive political debate about the policies of the European Union?*
- 3) *On the basis of your best practices, what can be done to reach out to those often excluded from discussion of the European Union's policies?*

5. Wrap-up by rapporteurs and closing remarks by the Commission

5.1. Wrap-up by the rapporteurs

At the end of the workshops, Marc RICHIR asked animators to present their conclusions in a plenary session.

Main conclusions of workshops A and B

1) Core arguments or defamatory statements used for stigmatizing immigrants

Participants debated on core arguments and defamatory statements used for stigmatizing immigrants with a number of personal reports on experienced discrimination.

Examples of defamatory statements against immigrants:

- "Immigrants stink, are lazy and do not fit by color or religion into our societies"
- "They don't have the same respect for human life as we do"
- "They steal our jobs and take our benefits"
- "Their religion might change our traditions and threaten our EU values"
- "They are criminals or terrorists and bring insecurity"
- "They bring down the value of real estate"
- *Etc.*

2) Funded activities coping with such populist discourses and actions recommended to combat hate speech against immigrants and promote intercultural dialogue

Participants exchanged about their projects or activities, and on that basis, suggested the following actions to combat hate speech and promote intercultural dialogue, while distinguishing different levels of intervention.

a) Individual level:

Uncover and follow individual cases of hate speech and defamatory statements or discriminatory practices:

- by making them public and cooperating with internet media or newspapers;
- by following such cases if necessary up to the court level;
- by organizing public pressure for changing the law should it not be sufficient.

b) Local level:

Strengthen the role of Municipalities in the fight against stigmatization of immigrants through:

- forming groups of traditional inhabitants and immigrants, also able to exercise pressure on local government;
- raising one's voice through local groups against hate speech and stigmatization, using even populist words against populists; resorting to local projects such as 'stop the rumours' in Barcelona and elsewhere;
- starting neighbourhood initiatives for fiestas and meetings to have an exchange of views and experiences;

- asking for local integration programmes for immigrants and offer good offices in their implementation;
- asking for housing programmes preventing the ghettoization in one's city.

c) Networking at regional and national levels:

- build up and strengthen ones network;
- enlarge the network by involving people from other networks;
- exchange counter-arguments against racism and defamatory statements in the network;
- report on one's daily activities or negative events and include immigrants into one's networks;
- try to get access to com.net media networks for enhancing impact.

d) Specialized activities:

- try to influence the educational system, in particular schoolteachers (one participant suggested “integration at school” as a topic);
- better value migrants skills – e.g. second or third language as an advantage;
- develop communication strategies for the wider population to combat fear of the other and of the unknown;
- use migrants' stories to combat negative messages in the media;
- do research as think tanks for developing counter-arguments and for being able to the further understanding of what and why is ongoing in the society at large;
- promote relevant legislation at state level to make stigmatization and discrimination a crime;
- promote intercultural dialogue through seminars, workshops or public events involving immigrants; organise multicultural festivals, sports activities where migrants' stories can be told;
- develop activities or create conditions where people of different descents or origins can meet, discuss, agree or disagree.

e) Top level:

- de-legitimize and fight racism, hate speech and discrimination at the top of society, institutions or official bodies;
- top level must organize or participate in solidarity marches for freedom, equality, human rights and human dignity.

Main conclusions of workshop C

1) Euroscepticism

Participants agreed on the fact that Euroscepticism was a multiple phenomenon, ranging from:

- fear of abandonment;
- fear of losing control over one's life/sovereignty;
- feeling of paying the consequences of technocratic decisions taken in Brussels;

up to:

- dissatisfaction with current EU policies;
- mere expression of national interest;
- political strategy of populists and sovereignists;
- hold EU responsible for local issues whose solution lies in reality in the Member State's remit.

2) *Actions to encourage informed and inclusive political debate about the policies of the European Union and to reach out to those often excluded from this discussion*

Participants put forward two sets of recommendations.

a) toward the civil society organisations:

- Continue to organise activities and debates at local level on European issues, while extending them to secluded or rural areas;
- involve opinion leaders;
- start from people's concerns so as to show what the EU can do for them, instead of trying to sell EU legislation;
- target people who are undecided or indifferent to the EU, as they form an increasing part of the population;
- increase the presence of European contents in social Medias;
- improve the media literacy of citizens when it comes to European news, as these are often distorted by national or mainstream Medias;
- better anticipate the consequences and future shocks of Euroscepticism in Member States through a mobilised and organised network of pro-European civil society organisations;
- improve civic competencies of participants on EU issues through dedicated activities;
- develop a culture of subsidiarity in our democracies;
- better assess the role and capacities of civil society organisations to pass messages from local to EU level;
- share best practices on how to reach out to disadvantaged groups;
- start a reflection on how to bring together those who want to positively contribute to shaping Europe;
- involve through funded activities people from neighbouring countries wishing to access the EU, as they are sometimes more attached or aware of the meaning, advantages and benefits of the EU than older Member States;

b) toward the EU institutions:

- not dissociate the legal components of EU citizenship from the material aspects of people's everyday lives or well-being;
- trust the citizens in a context of crisis and provide them flexibility to take initiatives;
- leave space for and recognise citizens' current initiatives;
- communicate in a different way so as to make EU added values relevant to people's everyday life;
- show that the EU institutions listen to the citizens and do not only communicate in a vertical way;
- not only inform people, but also help them to engage in EU Affairs in order to transform reality.

5.2. **Closing remarks**

Marc RICHIR reminded that this meeting was taking place in the larger context of a conference involving stakeholders from both strands of the EFCP so that they can meet and get to know each other's activities, and develop possible synergies.

Based on feedbacks that citizenship initiatives were too scattered at the Commission level and handled by too many different DGs, he acknowledged that there were indeed room for improvement. He pointed out however that "Membership", "Protection", "Participation" had been chosen as main themes of the first day conference because they could help outlining a more consistent and comprehensive approach to EU citizenship. He also highlighted three windows of opportunities to further discuss such an approach, and more specifically to reflect

on the future of the EFCP: 1) the evaluation report on the EFCP implementation to be published by the European Parliament by the end of 2016; 2) the mid-term evaluation report on the EFCP implementation to be presented by the European Commission by December 2017; 3) the preparation of the future EFCP beyond 2020.

Marc RICHIR considered that this interesting discussion had already started with this two-day conference, and he ensured that this exchange would be pursued through a regular and valuable dialogue with the programme stakeholders in the following months.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 List of participants



Civil dialogue
meeting 1.6.2016 Att

Annex 2 Supporting documents sent to participants

*Adopted Report of last Civil Dialogue
meeting*



Final Report_Civil
Dialogue_15 June 20:

*Adopted roadmap on mid-term
evaluation of the programme*



FINAL ROADMAP
mid-term evaluation I

Proposed priorities for 2017



Draft 2017
WP_forCivil Dialogue.

Annex 3 Speech of MEP Maria Teresa GIMENEZ BARBAT

Speech in Spanish



Discurso Teresa LUN
3 - versio 3 - def.doc

Speech translated in English



EU Citizenship in
Challenging Times - Sj

Annex 4 Document for discussion co-signed by ALDA, EMI and Social Platform



European migration
policy beyond the hur

Annex 5 2015 results and first feedback on 2016 first selection round



Results 2015 and
State of play 2016.dc

Annex 6 Presentation by DG JUST



MHB Presentation -
freemov and demopa

Annex 7 Presentation by SG



ECI Implementation
and BR REFIT Platform