



## **REPORT - CIVIL DIALOGUE MEETING** **ROME – 15 DECEMBER 2014**

The meeting was chaired by Sophie BEERNAERTS, Head of Unit, and DG COMM C2: Citizens Programme.

**1. Sophie Bernaerts welcomed participants** and thanked them for being present in Rome, despite the strike in Brussels and the end-of-the year workload.

This civil dialogue was very special for several reasons. By holding it back to back with the European Conference on Citizenship and Twinning organised by the European Council for Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Commission had not only wished enhancing the partnership approach between local authorities and civil society organisations that it was promoting. It had also wished compensating for the budgetary restrictions that had led to suppressing the Presidency events, and continuing to hold networking moments that are essential to improve the cooperation among all stakeholders.

It was also for the first time outside Brussels, as some of the participants wished.

Last but not least, this was the last civil dialogue meeting under the auspices of DG Communication, and under Sophie Bernaerts' chairmanship, since the management of the programme was about to move from DG Communication to DG Home Affairs.

Sophie Bernaerts welcomed **Floriana Sipala (Head of Unit<sup>1</sup>, DG HOME.A1)**, who was to take the reins of the Europe for Citizens programme as from the 1st of January 2015.

The proposed agenda and the previous meeting report were approved.

## **2. Policy developments linked to EU citizenship**

### **2.1. New "Citizenship" portfolio**

Floriana Sipala explained that Europe for Citizens programme's move to Commissioner Avramopoulos' portfolio (retitled "*Migration, Home affairs and Citizenship*") was decided at political level. Consequently to this political decision, the Europe for Citizens programme's team was incorporated as a new sector under her unit, renamed "Inter-institutional Relations and Citizenship".

Floriana Sipala underlined that it was not the first time that the programme management was changing of hands, without losing sight of its objectives, while enabling to find complementarities with other EU policies. In her view, there were at least two dimensions in which DG HOME and the Europe for Citizens programme would fit well together:

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<sup>1</sup> NB: Further to the reorganisation of DG HOME that took effect on 16 March 2015, the Head of this Unit is now Dragos TUDORACHE.

- **Common values:** the Europe for Citizens programme aims at improving the understanding of the Union (its functioning, its values, its history and diversity), so as to foster among EU citizens a sense of common belonging and of mutual understanding which preconditions their civic participation in the European public space. By promoting the values upon which the Union is built and by encouraging civic participation and integration, notably of those hard to reach, the programme contributes to creating a more open Union, more confident to accept differences and to combat discriminations and prejudices. On these aspects, Floriana Sipala considered that common grounds could be found with DG HOME's policies, whose ultimate goal is to build an open and safer Union with a balanced approach between security concerns and respect for fundamental rights.
- **The current context:** after the European elections, characterised by high abstention rates within many Member States, and the rise of Eurosceptic parties, populist movements, and xenophobia, Floriana Sipala deemed more necessary than ever to promote a broader approach to citizenship, based on actions of empowerment, education, remembrance and civic inclusion, like those implemented thanks to the financial support of the programme.

In her concluding words, Floriana Sipala insisted on the fact that there would be **stability and continuity** for the programme. The Programme would remain governed by the Council Regulation adopted in April 2014, with its objectives, budget and human resources. She ensured that DG HOME, on behalf of the new Commission, would be fully committed to it, with the help of EACEA that would continue to be in charge of its operational implementation. She added that the major events already scheduled for 2015 would take place as foreseen. Projects of both Strands ("European remembrance", "Democratic engagement and civic participation") would continue to be selected on the basis of the criteria laid down in the Programme Guide which remained in place.

During the discussion, it was clarified that only the team of six people dealing with the programme would move to DG HOME, while the remaining of the Unit C2 would stay in DG COMM to develop the Citizens' Dialogues, a priority for the Juncker Commission.

Floriana Sipala reminded that Commissioner Avramopoulos belonged to the cluster coordinated by First Vice President Timmermans (Charter of Fundamental Rights), in accordance with the new team working methods promoted by President Juncker.

## **2.2. Follow up to the feasibility study on the "European Civil Society House"; proposals from the floor for improving coordination and synergies.**

Cécile Le Clercq (COMM) reminded the main conclusions of the feasibility study.

On the proposed preparatory action to set up a "European Civil society House", the study concluded negatively, considering that the establishment of a new structure would entail high financial costs and require substantial set-up time as well as high long-term costs; that the added value of establishing such a structure was not evident as an ECSH might, in some cases, overlap with existing efforts ; and that this would also contradict the streamlining approach highlighted in the 2014-2020 Multi Financial Framework 2014–2020.

The study proposed an alternative scenario of strengthening existing activities and structures consisting in a **coordinated process of change** which would bring together EU institutions and CSOs focusing on European policies and rights, and active in the field of

civic participation with a view to increasing the engagement of citizens and CSOs in EU affairs. While many of these organisations are already working together in networks and projects, or have done so in the past, as part of the development of this scenario, they would endorse and engage in a coordinated process of organisational change, based on a common vision and work programme. This scenario would thus require a strong commitment by stakeholders.

In this perspective, activities could include:

- Improving the knowledge of what is currently being offered and organised – a thorough mapping of current activities by European networks of CSOs and umbrella organisations to explore opportunities for the pooling of resources and efficiency gains;
- Going local – appointing local CSOs to act as ‘local access points’ for citizens to access information or be referred to other relevant services and opportunities;
- Improving horizontal and vertical connections between CSOs; and
- Further organisation of joint events promoting policy dialogue and policy-shaping initiatives.

The floor was given to participants for discussion, starting with Alexandra Najmowicz of the European Civic Forum to present their suggestions for a new European Coordination of Civil Society organisations, named Civil Society Europe (CSE). The launching of CSE would be discussed at the specific session of the European Year of Citizens Alliance (EYCA), which was to take place the following day – as a side event to the Conference.

Sophie Beernaerts concluded that there would not be a physical house but that, in case the group considered it useful, a working group could be set up as part of the civil dialogue in order to explore other ways of coordination, as proposed in the study conclusions. In her view, it was important to ensure synergies and avoid duplications with CSE and, as pointed out by a participant, with other existing mechanisms like the EESC liaison Committee.

### **3. Europe for Citizens programme**

#### **3.1. State of play of the Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020.**

Due to procedural delays in the adoption of the Council Regulation establishing the programme, the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 could not enter into force as foreseen on 1 January 2014, but only on the date of its publication in the Official Journal on 17 April 2014, following its adoption on 14 April 2014.

In anticipation of this late adoption, the Commission took all necessary measures to ensure a smooth implementation of the programme, in particular by ensuring that the Europe for Citizens programme was included in the act establishing the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) for 2014-2020, and in the Act delegating powers to it.

Anna Cozzoli (EACEA) explained that as a result from these exceptional circumstances, the foreseen deadlines had to be shifted from 1 March to 1 June, and even to 1 September for Civil Society projects. She insisted on the fact that this shift had no big impact on the level of applications in 2014 with over 2 000 applications received in total (NB: detailed figures are now available and provided in Annex 1). She added that as from 2015, the calendar of deadlines would be back to normal.

As regards operating grants, 161 applications were received and 35 were selected for a multi-annual partnership. The EACEA said that it would continue to reflect on how to proceed with simplified forms of grants (as opposed to budget-based grants) for operating grants.

In response to the request of participants for a better use of their activities' results, the Commission explained that the new programme was planning to organise peer reviews. It added that it would also develop a "mapping" tool to disseminate the projects results, and that suggestions and contributions to this end would be welcome.

### **3.2. Evaluation of the Europe for Citizens programme 2007-2013.**

Jutta Koenig-Georgiades (DG COMM) informed that the ex post evaluation of the 2007-2013 programme had been contracted out to Coffey International further to a restricted call for tender, for an amount of EUR 106.000. She said that this evaluation was to be completed by the autumn 2015 with a view to feed into the report that the Commission would have to send to the European Parliament by December 2015. Jutta Koenig-Georgiades warned that Coffey had been mandated to contact beneficiaries for their input, and that input by the members of the Civil Dialogue would be important given the strategic and long-term nature of their participation in the programme.

#### **4. A.O.B.**

- The draft Declaration of the Conference was presented to the participants by Frédéric Vallier, General Secretary of CEMR: "*Hope for Europe! 25 proposals to revive the European project*". It was still open to amendments until the evening. (NB : the adopted Declaration is attached in Annex 2)
- Cécile Le Clercq provided a quick update on the consultation on the Commission's Stakeholder Consultation guidelines and on the European Citizens Initiative.
- As regards the agenda of the next meeting to take place before the summer 2015, Commission informed that a main item would be the discussion on the priorities for 2016, and opened the floor for suggestions. Several participants proposed to make presentations on:
  - a project supported by the programme and entitled "Horizon EU: European citizenship, and horizontal pattern" (Notre Europe);
  - a study related to anti-European phenomena (IEP);
  - a study dealing with the relationship between "Enlargement and Citizenship" (Providus);
  - a project of Volonteeurope.

## ANNEXES

### Annex 1: EFCP's follow up selection and contracts for 2014



Annex 1 EACEA  
table EFC 2014....

### Annex 2: "Hope for Europe - 25 proposals to revive the European project", 16 December 2014



Cemr\_25 proposals  
to revive the europe