Ex-post evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-2013

Executive summary

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0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

0.1. The Europe for Citizens Programme

Based on the experience of a prior programme for Active Citizenship, in December 2006, the **Europe for Citizens Programme** (hereafter referred to as the programme or EFCP) was established for the period 2007-2013[1]. The Decision establishing this Programme underlined that, to enhance citizen support for European integration, one must place greater value on "common values, history and culture as key elements of a European society founded on the principles of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights, cultural diversity, tolerance and solidarity".

With a **budget of EUR 215m**, the purpose of the programme was to give citizens a greater role in constructing Europe, develop a sense of European identity, foster a sense of citizens' ownership in the EU and enhance tolerance and mutual understanding. Three mechanisms of co-funding were possible under the programme, namely project grants, operating grants and service contracts.

Through these mechanisms, the programme provided financial support for a wide range of projects, which were further grouped under **four action strands**:

- **Action 1**: Active citizens for Europe - Funds for organising town citizens' meetings and networks of twinned towns, as well as citizens' projects of a trans-national and cross-sectoral dimension. These activities are all aimed at strengthening mutual knowledge and understanding between citizens from different municipalities and cultures. This action also included support measures with the purpose of making town-twinning and citizens' projects work better.

- **Action 2**: Active civil society in Europe – Structural support for European think tanks, civil society organisations and projects initiated by civil society organisations. This action was aimed at strengthening their ability to operate at European level and (thereby) to contribute to achieving the overall objectives of the EFCP.

- **Action 3**: Together for Europe – Support for high visibility events organised by the European Commission (in partnership with others) aimed at raising awareness of European history and values. This includes studies to provide a better understanding of citizenship; information and communication tools; and a network of Europe for Citizens Contact Points that provided practical information to applicants and beneficiaries.

- **Action 4**: Active European remembrance – Funds for projects aimed at preserving sites, memorials, archives, as well as for the commemoration of victims of mass extermination and deportations.

The programme was **jointly managed** by the European Commission, the Education, Audio-visual and Cultural Executive Agency (EACEA) and the Programme Committee, comprised of representatives appointed by the Member States.

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[1] Decision No 1904/2006/EC establishing for the period 2007 to 2013 the programme Europe for Citizens to promote active European Citizenship (EU OJ L378/32, 27.12.2006)

0.2. Background to the evaluation

The **purpose of this evaluation**, defined in the Terms of Reference produced by the Commission, was as follows:

- Assess the results and measures of the EFPC compared to its objectives;
- Assess qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the programme;
- Provide examples of good practice and successful model projects under each action of the programme;
- Provide recommendations on how to further develop the EFCP as an instrument for the development of a European Citizenship Policy.

The **scope of the evaluation** was to assess the results and implementation of the EFCP 2007-2013. To evaluate the programme without repeating earlier work, we sought to maximise the use of existing sources while collecting additional data to fill gaps and delve into areas that were previously underexplored.

The **approach to the evaluation** was underpinned by a series of principles. These included a need to build on (extensive) previous research, emphasis on providing the Commission with findings and recommendations that could be used to improve the next iteration of the programme and focus on explaining whether the theory of the programme (as illustrated in the intervention logic above) was realistic in practice.

With regard to the **explanatory focus** of the evaluation, the diversity of programme activities alongside its relatively small size relative to the many factors affecting citizenship and civic engagement meant that it was not possible to measure the impact of the programme in any quantitative sense. Rather, we sought to shed light on the pathways to impact and likely contribution of given programme activities to objectives at different levels. The limited size of the evaluation led us to rely on samples of projects, their key features, success and failings and, especially, the reasons behind these.

The evaluation used several **methodological tools** including desk-based research, interviews and a focus group with key stakeholders, a survey of unsuccessful applicants, case studies of a selection of projects and a benchmarking exercise that allowed comparison with other EU spending programmes.

0.3. Results

Based on the data collected, we drew the following overarching conclusions about the EFCP.

Relevance

The EFCP aimed to engage citizens with the EU, develop a sense of European identity, foster a sense of ownership of the EU and enhance mutual tolerance and understanding. The evaluation served to confirm the relevance of the programme's objectives and activities. Prevailing conditions (e.g. declining favourability towards the EU and increased Euroscepticism, diversion of resources towards initiatives focused on the economy) created a need for a platform for civic participation related to the EU that the EFCP could potentially fulfil. That the level of interest in the programme, as well as the quality of applications for participation, progressively increased indicates a good match between the programme and target groups.

In terms of complementarity with other initiatives, the EFCP was sufficiently distinct from other programmes in terms of its scope, objectives, activities and target groups to provide a complementary offering. Even those initiatives that were the closest to the EFCP, such as the Youth in Action programme,[2] focused on different audiences, while the EFCP was unique in bringing together CSOs and local authorities to develop citizenship activities, and in supporting town twinning and remembrance activities. At the same time, the evaluation also uncovered the potential for further synergies and scope to reduce overlap. This highlighted the importance of the (sometimes-insufficient) communication between DGs; where there was evidence of good communication (e.g. the European Years[3] and Fundamental Rights programme[4]), then value was demonstrated through institutional learning and the sharing of good practices. Where discussion was more limited (e.g. between the EFCP and Youth in Action and Jean Monnet[5] programmes), such opportunities were missed.

Finally, an examination of the EU added value of the programme showed that it enabled activities that could not have been funded elsewhere, in addition to promoting the spread of best practices. In some cases, the evaluation found evidence of such practices actually being implemented, and of being scaled up across wider groups of countries and stakeholders. However, many projects also produced relatively little evidence to show whether and to what extent shared practices were actually applied in practical terms. Partly this was due to the short timescales of projects, as well as the evaluation's reliance on reports compiled shortly after individual projects were completed (before best practices could have been implemented). It can also be attributed to the lack of concrete plans for follow-up. Considering the complexity of tailoring given practices to new contexts and the relatively short timeframe of individual projects, follow-up action is vital for this aspect of EU added value to be achieved.

Effectiveness

The evaluation found that they types of projects funded through the EFCP could potentially make an impact in numerous ways, depending on their particular mechanisms, target groups and methods. High potential impact tended to draw on factors such as involving children and hard to reach groups, establishing sustainable networks and linking to policy-making. While the projects examined in depth for case studies were generally implemented and delivered successfully, the presence of these factors varied significantly among individual projects.

In general, meaningful results were achieved for projects that were grounded in a clear rationale, with some feasible change in the medium-term. Also crucial were a well-delineated scope and set of objectives, a plausible intervention logic and the involvement of relevant partners. Given the short timeframe for EFCP projects in comparison to the sustained engagement needed for to effect change in a complex area like civic engagement, wider applicability / replicability of project outputs and credible plans for follow-up efforts (including funding) were of vital importance. Examples drawn from the case studies show how the presence or absence of these

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[2] Web page of the Youth in Action Programme: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/tools/youth-in-action_en.htm.

[3] Web page of the European Years of Citizens 2013 and 2014: http://europa.eu/citizens-2013/

[4] Web page of the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/programmes-2007-2013/fundamental-citizenship/index_en.htm

[5] Web page of the Activities Jean Monnet: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/jean-monnet_en

factors influenced the ability of projects to produce lasting results. In line with the more strategic approach pursued during the second half of the programme (as reflected in the annual priorities), there is some evidence to suggest that these factors were concentrated among the projects selected and implemented during that time. However, other examples demonstrated that even relevant and well-implemented projects sometimes failed to generate tangible outcomes in the absence of clear follow-up plans.

At a higher level, for the programme to maximise its impact at a wider level, it would need to leverage its relatively small budget, identifying specific areas where it can add the most value and complementing larger initiatives. The evidence collected for the evaluation suggests that improvements would be possible in each of these areas. The programme's relatively small budget is spread across a vast spectrum of subject areas and funding mechanisms, creating a risk that the programme's achievements will be diluted in a sea of other factors and initiatives. The benchmarking analysis conducted for the evaluation showed that the EFCP's offer was unique in some areas, namely where it provided a first entry point for ordinary citizens to discuss and engage with the EU and where it brought together CSOs and local authorities to develop citizenship activities. Town twinning and remembrance activities were also found to be areas of focus specific to the EFCP. It could be argued that the programme's potential impact would be greater if it consolidated its focus on these areas, leaving the remaining issues such as youth and values of intercultural dialogue to be respectively covered by other programmes like Youth in Action and the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship that already address them to a large extent.

Similarly, as the only EU programme that targets citizens directly, the EFCP provides a unique outlet to involve ordinary citizens in the EU through a bottom-up approach. Since around 45% of the programme budget is also devoted to CSOs, which could plausibly benefit from EU funding from other sources, it could be argued that the contribution to these objectives could be increased by focusing more on citizen-centric projects, and / or ensuring that CSO-led projects were comprised of strong citizen-centric components.

Efficiency

The diversity and complexity of the EFCP does not allow for simple comparisons between the cost-effectiveness of the various Action strands. At the same time, it is worth noting (as illustrated above) that costs per participant varied considerably between Action strands, with CSO projects and remembrance projects reaching greater numbers of people for less funding than town twinning meetings or (in particular) networks of twinned towns.

In addition, the case studies showed that the effectiveness (and requisite cost-effectiveness) of individual projects varied; projects displaying the key success factors outlined above provided better value for money than those lacking them. The evaluation also noted the potential for a greater proportion of the budget to be allocated towards citizen-led projects, and / or that CSO-led projects could be structured as to ensure the direct involvement of citizens.

Turning to the achievements at European and national levels, the scale of the problems falling within the programme's scope is immense, particularly in light of its relatively small (EUR 215m for seven years) budget and the myriad demographic, social and cultural factors affecting citizenship and civic engagement. Leading from this, a greater strategic focus on the target audiences, types of actions and guidance for applicants / beneficiaries would increase the ability of the EFCP to provide value for money. The mismatch between the programme's budget and ambition was also clear

from the monitoring data, which should persistently fierce competition for funding despite growing application quality.

Sustainability

The programme made a real, if unquantifiable, contribution to its objectives. In the presence of key success factors, particularly credible plans for follow-up action, individual projects led to sustainable outcomes at the local and organisational levels. With regard to the higher-level objectives, successful projects were able to foster lasting cooperation among CSOs and help preserve the memory of Europe's past. Contributions relating to EU integration and active citizenship were harder to pin down beyond the level of specific projects and participants, especially given overarching trends relating to the economic crisis and nationalist sentiment.

0.4. Recommendations

The following recommendations provide evidence-based suggestions for improving the programme during the 2014-2020 funding period.

1. **Focus and scope**: the evaluation found that the one of the distinguishing features of the EFCP is its unique ability to reach ordinary citizens. Despite this, much of its budget is devoted to activities redolent of more traditional spending programmes. Moreover, the broad scope of the programme dilutes its already limited ability to make a lasting impact in an extremely complex and crowded environment. The next review of the EFCP's scope should therefore narrow it so the programme can deploy its limited funding more strategically and focus on citizen-centric activities, either through boosting the proportion of the budget for Action strand 1-type activities or taking steps to ensure funding aimed at CSOs involves citizens directly.

2. **Draw more on theory**: the systematic review found that projects addressing certain types of activities, target groups and themes, particularly young people, civic education, social inequality and tolerance towards and of migrant groups are more likely to generate impacts on civic engagement. The Commission should consider commissioning comprehensive research in order to inform the setting of annual priorities and refine selection criteria in order to maximise the cost effectiveness of the programme's limited budget.

3. **Improve programme and project monitoring**: monitoring a diverse programme that addresses a subject as complex as active citizenship is inherently difficult. However, the lack of monitoring data beyond activity level holds the programme back, making it difficult to compare projects in a meaningful way and establish with certainty which types of projects are working well and less well. Part of the solution should involve more standardised monitoring provisions for projects (e.g. that help beneficiaries distinguish between reached individuals) and the integration of indicators developed as part of a recent study on the monitoring system,[6] commissioned through the programme. This could possible take the form of a long list of

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[6] Measuring the impact of the Europe for Citizens programme, Euréval, 2013, url: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/final_report_efc_may_2013_eurevalppmi.pdf.

output- and outcome-level indicators that beneficiaries could be encouraged to apply to their projects.

4. **Increase support for first-time applicants and underrepresented Member States**: the evaluation found that vast discrepancies in participation between Member States were due more to divergent success rates in applying for funding than in the amount of interest in the programme, while first-time applicants reportedly had trouble breaking into the EFCP. To increase participation, the Commission could fund some remedial sessions with ECPs, who have an important role to play in raising awareness and providing support and guidance to first-time applicants, and potential applicants in target countries, potentially using real (but anonymised) successful applications as guides.

5. **Consider more involvement for ECPs**: Feedback from ECPs suggested that communication channels between ECPs and the central programme management were not fully open. Steps should be taken to increase the collaboration between these two crucial actors in the ECFP's implementation, potentially by putting in place some goals that would demonstrate the purpose of this collaboration (including, for example, increasing participation among hard to reach groups) and ensure that mutual interests are in place.

6. **More insistence on, and scrutiny of, purposeful, outcome-oriented planning**: while the majority of case study projects were competently delivered, tangible outcomes and impacts were thin on the ground. This was attributed to differences in the purposefulness of projects and activities within them, including dissemination plans. Successful projects also demonstrated outcome-oriented thinking, plausible intervention logics and credible plans for follow-up. Potential beneficiaries should therefore be required to demonstrate their thinking in these areas, with a set of criteria developed to score them accordingly.

7. **Maximise synergies by intensifying consultation with other DGs**: the benchmarking analysis showed that more could be gained from using good practices developed within other programmes, such as Youth in Action, to support issues where the EFCP is active. In addition, if the EFCP continues to fund projects in areas that are also addressed by larger programmes, more formal links could be established. Among other things, it would be worth exploring in more depth whether the dynamic observed for one case study project, whereby the EFCP functioned as a kind of laboratory for a small project that was then scaled up through the Creative Europe programme, could be applied more widely to identify and scale up innovative projects.

8. **Encourage remembrance projects to look more towards the future**: the case studies showed that remembrance projects tended to be more salient when they considered practical implications for the present and future, in addition to the past. The Commission should therefore encourage potential participants to demonstrate such links in funding applications and take them into account as part of the scoring process. This would allow the programme to continue to preserve the memory of Europe's past while applying lessons learned to the issues facing citizens today.

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