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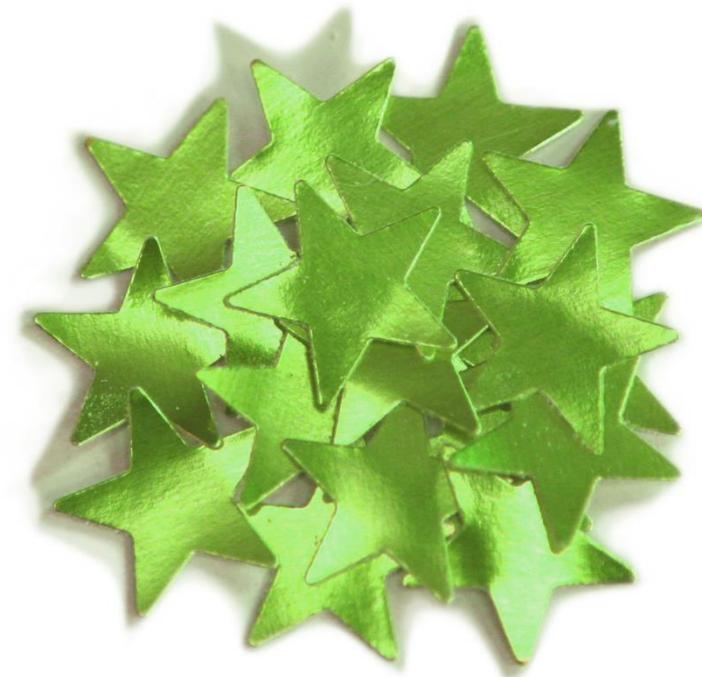
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Mid-term evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The Europe for Citizens Programme (EfCP or 'the Programme') 2014-2020 promotes fundamental values, the knowledge of Europe's shared history, and fosters citizens' responsible, democratic civic participation and the feeling of belonging to the EU. A mid-term evaluation of the EfCP covering the period 2014-2016 was mandated by the European Commission to Deloitte to assess whether the programme is on track.

The budget for the Programme for the period 2014-2020 is EUR 187.7 million, of which EUR 67 million have been spent. The Programme is implemented primarily through project-based Action Grants and Operating Grants.

To qualify, applicants apply under one of two Strands: 1. European remembrance, and 2. Democratic engagement and civic participation. Three types of measures are funded under Strand 2: Town-Twinning; Networks of Towns; Civil Society Projects. There are annual priorities for each Strand.

The Programme is heavily over-subscribed. Applications exceed projects funded in a ratio of some 6 to 1. Many good quality projects cannot be financed. Over the period in scope, applicants have come from all Member States and from four of the five candidate countries for EU membership, which are also eligible to participate. The countries with the largest number of lead beneficiaries are France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, with the four Central and Eastern European countries on this list disproportionately represented relative to their population. At the same time, Spain and the UK are proportionately under-represented.

The strands are complemented by a Horizontal Action which funds the analysis, dissemination and use of project results, including the support at national level via National Contact Points (co-funded by Member States) and meetings of a Civil Dialogue Group made up of members of civil society. This Group has an advisory role.

To evaluate these results, the study team gathered and analysed data from a number of sources:

- desk research (including internal and external programme documentation, relevant legislation, Eurobarometers, EACEA and Commission websites, project websites);
- interviews with EU officials and with beneficiaries of Operating Grants;
- a web-based survey targeting both beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants;
- a workshop with members of the Civil Dialogue Group;
- Three online focus groups with National Contact Points;

- case studies of action grants;
- public consultation run by the European Commission about this mid-term evaluation.

A summary by evaluation topic is provided below, the more detailed conclusions to be found in the main body of the report.

1.1. Summary of Conclusions

1.1.1. Relevance

Given the arguably unprecedented challenges faced by the EU at present, there is still an important need to enhance citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity as well as to encourage debate and reflection on citizens' understanding of the EU. Thus **the general objectives** of the programme, i.e. to contribute to citizens' understanding of the Union, its shared history and diversity on the one hand, and to foster European citizenship and improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at the Union level, on the other, **were and remain relevant** to the problems to be addressed. This is based on finding that the original needs the Programme was designed to contribute to are still relevant. In both strands, activities also contribute to the two specific objectives of the programme. .

Together, the activities under both strands can provide **a continuum for understanding the past, present and future**, how they relate to each other, and the role European integration has played and is playing in shaping them.

1.1.2. Effectiveness & Sustainability

The Programme has been **effective in achieving its objectives and** the activities have contributed to the enhancement of civic participation and the overall debate on the past, present and future of the EU. The way in which individual citizens are involved in the activities is one of the Programme's strengths.

The broad definition of eligibility for Town-Twinning is a weakness. With so many applicants relative to the number of successful applications, there is therefore a case for ensuring that the preference for an EU dimension be strengthened in order to ensure what are currently largely one-off activities contribute to fulfilling the objectives of the Programme and that these projects result in sustainable outcomes.

There is a need to investigate how it would be possible to improve the geographical balance of Town-Twinning projects. Four countries consistently dominate the selection of Town-Twinning projects. Ways have to be found in order to encourage towns from other countries to engage with Town-Twinning. Further, the one-off nature of town twinning activities means in many cases that the outcomes are unlikely to be lasting, which makes these activities less effective than the Networks of Towns.

Dissemination activities have individually been effective but there is scope for a more strategic approach based on an overarching communication and dissemination strategy.

The principle of **using NCPs** to support the Programme **is sound**, but a formal evaluation of the NCPs would assist the Commission in better defining their role. Dialogue between the Commission and both NCPs and the Civil Dialogue Group shows room for improvement.

At mid-term of the programming period, the Programme has the potential to deliver **sustainable outcomes** in relation to the Programme's objectives.

1.1.3. Efficiency

The funds are being disbursed at an even rate and are broadly in line with an even spread over the seven years of the programme. This is helpful both to those administering the programme and the beneficiaries. Individual activities are providing value for money and the amounts are **proportionate** to the ambitions of the beneficiaries and cost-effective in fulfilling the objectives of the Programme through the type of beneficiary and activity they fund.

The current structure of the EfCP, with **the two strands and a Horizontal Action is working satisfactorily**, but greater clarity is needed as to whether the strands are truly stand-alone or a relationship is intended in order to establish a continuum between past, present and future.

Both **Action and Operating Grants** are being disbursed and utilised efficiently for the separate functions they fulfil and in pursuit of the Programme's objectives. Providing funding via lump sums particularly suits the Action Grants, although three years' experience of the system has demonstrated the need to review whether variations in costs of living and travel could be better taken into account within the overall budget without modifying this approach.

Expenditure on **support activities**, including NCPs, is cost-effective, but there is scope for more transparency in the selection and evaluation process through enhanced feedback to applicants, for a more strategic approach to communication and dissemination about the Programme. Ten years after the funding mechanism for NCPs was set is an appropriate time to review the role of NCPs and this funding mechanism in anticipation of the next Programme.

The **simplification** carried out over the last two years has been a major, and beneficial, leap forward, with only some fine-tuning possibly required.

1.1.4. Complementarity and Synergies

The EfCP complements other EU funding programmes in the field of EU citizenship, education and culture. The EfCP is also coherent with EU policies and tools dedicated to increasing EU citizen participation in civil society and providing them with information, as well as with other instruments in the areas of volunteering, youth, and research and innovation.

There is some evidence of **limited direct overlap** between the EfCP and other funding programmes, notably Erasmus+ and Creative Europe's Culture sub-programme in terms of content, objectives and target groups. Nevertheless, the EfCP has a unique programme offer

and reaches beyond the target groups it shares with these other funding programmes through the potential of a broad range of activities for all citizens, including the most disadvantaged.

There is at the same time **scope to do more to exploit synergies**, both at central level across Directorates-General and at national level with Creative Europe Desks and Erasmus+ National Agencies. Given that the European Solidarity Corps initiative has only been launched recently, the synergies with the EfCP are not yet optimised.

There is also scope to do more to **develop synergies between Strand 1 and Strand 2** on the basis of the natural connection between lessons learned from the past and plans made for the future of Europe.

1.1.5. Added value

The EfCP was set up as a horizontal pathway to informed sectoral dialogue on policy areas of interest to citizens and in addressing needs that only an EU intervention can address. Testing its added value, the EfCP succeeds in filling this gap.

The Programme demonstrates **added value** at the EU level both in the aggregate effect of its impact on participants and its complementarity with other EU funding instruments and policy initiatives. Importantly, there is very strong evidence that the Programme is overall unique, given that funding at national or regional level to achieve the same or similar objectives is at very best limited, notably if considered that the transnational element is a strong feature of successful projects.

There is a demonstrated need for EU action in the area of remembrance and civil society and **the positive impacts achieved by the programme are not likely to be attained by other means should it not be continued.**

1.2. Recommendations

Recommendations have been formulated for two different timelines:

1. for execution within the **current programming period**; and
2. to be implemented for the **next programming period**.

1.2.1. Recommendations for the current programming period

Governance

- Establish mechanisms, with adequate administrative support, for **structured dialogue with beneficiaries, the NCPs, the Civil Dialogue Group and the European Parliament** for discussion inter alia on policy developments in the fields of democratic engagement, civic participation and citizenship, synergies with other programmes and policies, exploitation and dissemination of results, monitoring and procedures.

- **Share more information with NCPs** on good practices in applications to enable them to provide better assistance to future applicants. This should include increasing the benefits of Horizontal Action by requiring NCPs to disseminate project results (more) and therefore add to the replicability of good practices and encouraging knowledge sharing.
- Carry out a **formal evaluation of the NCP network** with a view to implementing the recommendations in the next programming period. The evaluation should look at the NCPs role in dissemination and assistance to applicants based on an assessment of needs for communication and capacity-building, at complementarity and synergies with other EU networks at national level with similar roles, use of technology and innovation to reach beneficiaries, and potential for efficiency gains.

Programme Operation

- Consider how, by modifying the Programme Guide, but without needing to modify the Regulation:
 - the preference for projects to have **an EU dimension** contained in Annex I to the Regulation be strengthened in practice in order to ensure that this is always taken into account in Town-Twinning projects;
 - preference is given to **Town-Twinning projects which have in-built plans for sustainable outcomes**;
 - preference is given to projects which can situate their projects on a **continuum, which recognises the link between past, present and future**, irrespective of whether they are applying for Strand 1 or 2;
 - preference is given to **projects in which citizens are active and engaged participants** rather than passive beneficiaries of an activity;
 - further clarify the **synergies between the EfCP and the European Solidarity Corps** and how these will be taken into account in award criteria.
- Improve the **transparency of the selection process**, including information on the evaluation process, and the feedback per award criterion to rejected applicants.
- Review the **impact and performance monitoring indicators** of the Impact Assessment and the Regulation to establish baselines, clear targets based on existing experience of realistic outcomes, select the most appropriate indicators (in consultation with beneficiaries and NCPs) segmented by target audiences and establish an online relational reporting tool which collects quantitative and qualitative data, including data from site visits and feedback surveys.
- Review in anticipation of the next Programme the equity of the **lump sum** approach given the range of costs of living and distances to cover to meet project partners.

Communication/awareness-raising

- Develop a **communication strategy** for activities funded from the Horizontal Action, including those organised centrally and by the NCPs. Include strategies for identifying

potential beneficiaries who could further increase the quality of applications and for making the VALOR platform more user-friendly.

- Consider whether there are **replicable recommendations from the forthcoming evaluation of the Dissemination and Exploitation of Erasmus+ and Creative Europe Results on the VALOR platform** commissioned by DG EAC.
- Consider whether and when there are benefits in **reaching out beyond stakeholders** (including policymakers) to the general public.
- **Improve the understanding of why applications from some countries are consistently more successful**; incorporate the lessons in the communication strategy.
- Place **greater emphasis in the selection process on dissemination of results** by beneficiaries and on sustainable outcomes.

1.2.2. Recommendations for the next programming period

- **Continue the Europe for Citizens programme.**
- **Maintain the general and specific objectives unchanged.**
- **Carry forward any improvements proposed for and implemented in the current programming period** where not overtaken by changes recommended below.
- **Implement any pending improvements proposed for the current programming period and not implemented**, embedding them in a future Regulation where desirable and where not overtaken by changes recommended below.
- Establish **more structured cooperation between EfCP, the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, Creative Europe and Erasmus+** in order to facilitate dialogue on future policy developments affecting the Programme and to maximise the potential for **synergies at central and national level**, including between NCPs, Erasmus+ National Agencies and Creative Europe Desks.
- Recognising the challenges the EU faces which make the Programme arguably more relevant than ever, **increase the budget** in order to reach a larger number of citizens.
- Ensure that projects are clearly situated on a **continuum of past, present and future**, while recognising that civil society organisations specialising in Remembrance tend to be distinct from those specialising in active citizenship.
- Merge **the Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns activities**, permitting Town-Twinning, but giving preference to Networks of three or more towns and projects with plans for sustainability.