

ON-LINE CONSULTATION

on the

Future Programme for Active European Citizenship

2007-2013

(15 Decembre 2004- 15 February 2005)

**PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS
OF THE RESULTS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This on-line consultation was carried out during two months (December 2004-February 2005) with the aim of gathering stakeholders' views and input on the future Programme for Active European Citizenship. This first step was followed by a 2-day consultation forum held in February 2005.

The **high number of responses (1057)** evidenced a high interest from both individual citizens (313 responses) and members of institutions or organisations (744 responses) on the issue of active European citizenship. In addition to answering the ten questions, nearly half the respondents chose to add free comments at the end, and five sent an additional written contribution or position paper. The consultation was thus also an opportunity to get feed-back on success-stories and experiences with the most European added-value to be built on in the framework of the new programme. These comments will also provide a most valuable input for the future implementation of this programme.

There was an overwhelming **support for a new programme, with 98% of respondents being in favour of it.** There was a strong approval of the principle of involving both citizens directly and civil society organisations. Many respondents insisted that the programme should pursue the current successful activities while introducing innovative approaches widening the range of potential activities.

Among the features providing the highest **European added-value**, over two thirds of respondents chose the strengthening of network capacities and the confrontation of ideas and approaches as the most important ones. Citizens' mobility and the transnational dimension were also considered to bring extra value by close to 60% of respondents. The transnational dimension was particularly highlighted in the free comments as one of the essential features to be offered support in the future programme, with a special attention to be given to the integration of citizens and civil society organisations from the newer member states in all the programme's activities. In their comments, many respondents stressed also that the European added-value of projects ought not to be exclusively correlated to their EU-awareness feature, but that projects involving European citizens from several countries and seeking a common goal were *per se* contributing to the emergence of European citizenship.

On the **types of activities** to be supported by the programme, 96% of respondents stressed the importance of tangible actions implemented at grass-root level in which European citizens could directly interact and participate. Town-twinning activities were supported by a vast 85% majority, with hopes expressed for the continuity of what is considered to probably be one of the activities that most involves citizens in the trans-national confrontation of diverse ideas and practices.

Support to projects submitted by civil society organisations was plebiscited by 93% of respondents. Operating grants for European level organisations also received strong support from stakeholders, with nearly 90% of respondents in favour of them. In their comments, many respondents pointed out that there was a significant correlation between the size of the eligible organisation and the benefit driven from such operating grants which have a greater impact on smaller structures. Therefore a simple first step towards a more real European public space could be to give national civil society organisations the impulse to gradually develop a transnational / European dimension to their structure from the local/regional/national level, as opposed to developing new big structures.

When asked to rank the kind of **innovative actions** that would best contribute to the objectives of the programme, the vast majority of respondents gave preference to the pooling of experience between local projects in different Member states and to the development of innovative partnerships in cooperation with new partners.

The organisation of major events with high-visibility mobilising citizens at EU level and/or all over Europe in the common celebration of festive, sporting, cultural or scientific achievements ranked third, with an overall support of almost half of the respondents.

Coming quite close, the exchange of good practices on voluntary service was a significant new dimension called for in view of the future programme, with respondents claiming that voluntary action is carried out by active and committed citizens, hence promoting participation in the public space while also creating bonds of trust and solidarity. Volunteering is thus considered a key issue for such a programme promoting active citizenship.

The networking of think-tanks was supported by nearly a third of respondents, quite a considerable result considering the very small percentage of respondents from that specific category. The opportunity for the programme to encourage cooperation with new partners, highlighted above, should particularly apply to involve think tanks.

Last but not least, many respondents called for much more comprehensive information on the various activities carried out in the field of active citizenship, and in particular on those funded by the programme. An effort should be made to that end in the future programme, with many respondents suggesting the creation of a database of good practices to help build on success-stories.

With regard to the **implementation mechanisms**, the proposal for multi-annual projects was warmly welcomed by 92 % of respondents, who insisted that this kind of funding would open the way to more diverse and ambitious projects and to gain lasting momentum insofar as stakeholders would no longer be constrained by too short a horizon. However, there was a strong consensus in the comments that this should not be detrimental to short-term projects which remain the only means of involvement for stakeholders that may not have reached the necessary critical size or for more practical, grass-root actions. Therefore, it was no surprise that short-term activities received immense support amongst respondents (93.5%).

Despite an overall satisfaction with the current programme and an overwhelming support for the future programme promoting active European citizenship, **some concerns** were raised concerning certain aspects of the programme. It is important to take them into account in order to assess properly possible improvements.

First, there was a general longing for better information and for a higher diffusion of calls for proposals in the framework of the programme for the promotion of active citizenship.

The second concern related to the range and scope of projects perceived as too narrow. Respondents considered that criteria should be more flexible in order to bring more diversity in to the content as well as amongst target groups, failing which there is a risk of standardisation of projects and of preventing fruitful innovations. Respondents considered that the programme should be open to citizens in general; however, some also insisted on the need to create the desire to get involved in those usually left outside of mainstream communication campaigns and activities.

Finally, the majority of stakeholders saw the future framework programme as a needed opportunity for rationalising and simplifying the application and funding procedures from one end to the other of the application process. Special attention should be given to establishing clear and adequate selection criteria.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

1. PRESENTATION OF THE CONSULTATION

Since January 2004, the Commission is implementing a Community Action Programme to promote active citizenship. The main purpose of this programme is to contribute to bringing citizens closer to the Union, having them involved in reflection and discussion on the Union, intensifying links between citizens of different countries, notably via town-twinning initiatives, and to stimulate initiatives in the field of civic participation. In doing so, the programme aims at addressing one of the challenges faced by the EU, namely the enduring gap between a minority of citizens deeply involved in the European design and well informed about the EU institutions, and the majority of citizens who do not feel concerned about these issues. This programme will come to an end in December 2006.

As part of the preparation of its proposal for a future programme to take over this initiative as of 1st January 2007 and in conformity with the rules applicable to the development of major legislative proposals¹, the Commission carried out an extensive consultation with a view to drawing together the opinions of citizens and civil society organisations on the overall approach of the future programme, including its objectives, the main activities and its implementation. The on-line consultation was the first stage of this exercise in which interested citizens and their organisations were invited to submit their opinions on the orientations of the future programme. The second stage took the form of a consultative Forum involving 350 representatives of interested parties in early February 2005 for a more in-depth discussion.

This on-line consultation was open to all interested organisations and individuals from 15 December 2004 until 15 February 2005. The consultation was accessible through the European Commission consultation website *Your Voice in Europe*, and through DG EAC's own website. The main strategic thrusts foreseen for the future programme were introduced and the respondents were asked for their opinion through a mix of open and closed questions. At the end of the questionnaire respondents had the opportunity to add free comments if they so wished.

With the proposal of the Commission due to be adopted in April, in time for the discussion on the financial perspectives 2007-2013, and thus at a time when no evaluation of the current programme, started just a year ago, could possibly be available, the consultation was also a great opportunity to get feed-back on success-stories and experiences from former and current participants to the programme with a view to further improving the future one.

The results of this consultation were analysed and duly taken into consideration in the Commission's proposal ([internet link](#)). This paper summarises the results of the on-line consultation. Results of the consultative forum can be found at ([internet link](#))

¹ Ref. General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission (COM(2002) 704 final).

1.1. Responses received

On-line questionnaire

With **1057 responses** to the questionnaire, the number of respondents was quite high, especially in comparison to previous public consultations launched by the Commission. This provides an indication of the degree of stakeholders' implication with regard to the promotion of European active citizenship.

Respondents can be differentiated as either **individuals** speaking on their own behalf (**29.6%**), or representatives or members of an **institution or organisation (70.4%)**, thus showing their eagerness to raising their voice in public debate.

Additional comments

Out of the 1057 respondents to the questionnaire, more than half, comprising **142 individuals and 426 organisations**, elaborated further on the issue, thus constituting a pool of insightful remarks, comments, and suggestions inspired by the experience of Community programme users and designed to contribute to the definition of the future programme. These contributions represent a most valuable resource for further defining the problems and issues to address, the target users, key objectives and potential actions to associate to the future programme. These comments will also provide a most valuable input in the future implementation of this programme.

Written contributions

In addition to the responses and comments made to the on-line survey, the Commission received **5 written contributions / position papers** from the following organisations:

- Association Française du Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe (AFCCRE)
- European Volunteer Centre
- Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund
- Niedersächsischer Städte- und Gemeindebund
- Social Platform

1.2. Profile of Respondents

Sectoral breakdown

As mentioned above, out of 1057 respondents, there were 313 (29.6%) individuals and 744 (70.4%) members of an institution or organisation. Out of this latter category, six different groups can be identified (percentages relate to the total number of institutions/organisations).

The main group (**48.1%**) was constituted by **representatives from national, regional or local authorities**, with an overwhelming **majority (97.3%) of representatives from regional and local authorities**. This huge representation rate of sub-national level political representatives is significant. It shows how the issue of active European citizenship echoes to grass-root levels of political life and merges with the preoccupations

of active citizens who are eager to raise their awareness at European level. In the majority of cases, these local representatives' comments raised issues related to town-twinning activities. As to the nature of local entities represented, 39.4% are towns or villages under 10 000 inhabitants, 39.5% are towns between 10 000 and 100 000 inhabitants, and 21.1% are above 100 000 inhabitants.

The second most important group was that of **European (6, 5%) and**, more significantly, **national NGOs (11, 5%)**, confirming these emanations from civil society to be major stakeholders in the debate around the notion of European citizenship and crucial relays of information and multipliers of action for EU initiatives.

An insightful contribution was also brought by **research institutes and think tanks (3.3%)** as they are important institutional interlocutors providing precious ideas and reflections on European issues.

European and national trade unions, together with national employers' organisations, then represented **3.3%** of the respondent organisations, thus comforting the Commission in its choice to associate them closely to its initiatives targeted to civil society.

2% of respondents were also **companies**. Acting as sponsors or playing an even more active role in town-twinning activities, companies can also play a role in the diversification of events and initiatives targeted at civil society by opening new perspectives for participants and raising the awareness of European togetherness to all aspects of daily life.

The voices of **EU institutions/associated bodies** such as the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee joined the choir of organisations, even if with only **0.4%** of contributions. It is to be pointed out that these organisations will be duly associated during the formal decision making procedure.

Lastly, numerous organisations (25.3%) did not consider themselves as matching these categories. These were for the most part non profit associations which do not identify themselves with the term "NGO" or local/regional structures such as (some) town-twinning committees.

Geographical breakdown

The respondents' geographical origin provides interesting information. Different groups can be isolated amongst the 33 different countries of origin involved.

Unsurprisingly, **94.2% of the respondents came from the 25 EU Member States**. The most represented countries were **France (28.5%)** and **Germany (22.2%)**, these two countries counting for more than half of all the replies, coming for the most part from local/regional authorities or town-twinning committees. The most significant numbers of respondents then came from Belgium (5.7%), Sweden (5.1%), Italy (4.8%), the United Kingdom (4.6%), and Finland (3.1%). All together, **newer Member States** represented **6.9%** of respondents, with an important contribution from the Czech Republic (2.4%).

Candidate countries to the EU (Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey) represented all together 1.2% of the nationalities of respondents. Lastly, 1.1% of respondents came from non-EU countries such as Azerbaijan, Iceland, India, Norway and Switzerland.

Far from being a mirror of the overall ratio of 2.4 organisations for 1 individual, the balance between individuals and organisations is subject to discrepancies depending on origin countries. These discrepancies are of two kinds: either there was an involvement of individuals much higher than that of organisations (Portugal, Italy, Austria), or the contrary (Sweden, Finland, Czech Republic and newer Member States in general).

1.3. Opportunity of the Consultation

The wide scope of the consultation was welcomed by organisations, the majority of which were, although not directly affected by, certainly very interested in the matters under discussion.

The important number of contributions not only from organisations, which logically follow what is happening in their area of concern, but also from individuals, showed that this consultation was an opportunity for many citizens to have their voice heard and demonstrated their interest to do so when it comes to policies directly aimed at them.

In addition, the consultation offered a valuable insight into the successes as well as certain weaknesses of the current programme. Furthermore, the history of town-twinning initiatives, of civil society projects organising conferences, calling for citizen meetings and setting up cross-cultural exchanges precedes by far the adoption of the Community programme in 2004. All these initiatives not only constitute a reservoir of good practices to get inspiration from, but they have also often been initiated by actors that are willing to share their experience. The open consultation has made it possible to associate them to the shaping of the future programme promoting active European citizenship, while allowing any other interested parties to take part.

The consultation was thus an opportunity not only to involve stakeholders from civil society in the preparation of the new programme but also to get feed-back on success-stories and experiences with the most European added-value to be built on in the framework of the new programme.

2. RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

The questionnaire, first, aimed at receiving feed-back on the relevance of a Community intervention and on the broad principles that should guide such action. Respondents were then asked how important the envisaged activities were to them, and to issue their opinion on key implementation issues as well as on proposed innovative actions.

At the end of the questionnaire, a free text zone allowed respondents to write free comments, which constitute an important testimony of programme-users about the benefits and difficulties that they have encountered in the course of their participation to the programme.

2. 1. Need for a Community level initiative and overall purpose of the Programme

There was overwhelming **recognition of the need for this new programme**, with **97.9%** of respondents in favour of it. There was a strong concern for the perpetuation of a programme involving both citizens directly and civil society organisations. In both cases

the current programme has shown its usefulness. From the free comments made at the end of the questionnaire, it appeared clearly that the expectations about the new programme included both calls for the further support of proven activities such as town-twinning as well as innovative approaches widening the range of potential activities.

Participants were then asked to rank the three features that would provide the highest **European added-value**. Respondents isolated two distinctive features in a quasi-consensus, with first the necessity to develop networks, thus creating bonds between European citizens by interweaving links between all civil society organisations and local government bodies at European level. Receiving 68.7% of the respondents' suffrage, the idea of a strengthening of network capacities is a clear sign of an impulse towards more activity and involvement despite borders and constraining national administrative structures, and in opposition to the traditional passive top-down flow of information and political momentum. Coming second with the approval of 66.9% of respondents, the confrontation of ideas and approaches is deemed to bring a decisive must-be European added-value to any initiative aimed at fostering active European citizenship, especially with the enlargement over, in a context of uncertainty about the next political step for Europe. Under such circumstances, the importance of exchanging, probing, discussing ideas with other Europeans was strongly reaffirmed by most respondents.

Although with a somewhat lower consensus than for the two previous ones, citizens' mobility remains, for 58.3% of respondents, a core issue with much European added-value associated to it, as does the trans-national dimension (56.7%). In the free comments, however, the trans-national dimension was particularly highlighted by a majority of respondents as one of the essential features to be given support in the future programme. Special attention should therefore be paid to projects and stakeholders fostering cross-border perspectives which not only target citizens from different countries but also constitute trans-national initiatives. This was even more important with regard to the countries in which recent history has left fresh traces of both a cultural gap and a political wound. The challenge of a unified Europe composed of citizens with a European conscience would certainly not be addressed were civil society cross-border initiatives to be only taken amongst either older Member States or newer ones. Hence the need to encourage a strong and full participation of citizens and civil society organisations of the newer Member States in the emergence of a true European public space.

Finally, the notion of multiplier effect was perceived as relatively less significant, with approximately one third (32.7%) of respondents selecting it as one of the three most important features guaranteeing a European added-value. It should be added that this was pointed out as a key selection criterion in some written contributions.

2.2. Types of actions

Actions involving citizens

Taking the European challenge to the level of each and every citizen in his or her daily life appeared crucial : **96.1%** of respondents stressed the **importance of tangible actions implemented at grass-root level** in which European citizens could directly interact and participate, as opposed to the more passive, yet important and complementary, relation that all too often consists in top-down communication. For respondents, taking part in the European design should not be a luxury but a reflex. The challenge is huge, for it is well

known that the bigger and the remoter the institutions from citizens' daily life, the harder it is for the former to be present in the citizens' horizon...

It is therefore not surprising that respondents **supported town-twinning activities** by an overwhelming majority of **84.6%**, stressing the virtues of such comprehensive exchanges that do not remain focused on a certain specific population but can be pursued in a holistic approach between two local communities.

Overwhelming support to town-twinning was also confirmed in the additional comments, although one must bear in mind that these statements came from the very large number of town-twinning committees who took part in the consultation. Many respondents underlined in their comments that this issue of citizens' involvement was well addressed in the current programme thanks to projects such as those of town-twinning, ensuring direct citizen interaction. Numerous town-twinning committees expressed their concern about the hoped-for continuity between the current and the future programme with regard to one of the activities that probably involves the most citizens in the trans-national confrontation of the diversity of ideas and practices. Few projects can offer such concrete European added-value as the town-twinning experience, where, through the confrontation with diversity, stems a feeling of unity in the course of a cultural, sporting or festive experience shared between people that language, culture and borders would have otherwise kept apart. Quoting some respondents, town-twinning constitute the most practical and efficient way to involve and promote direct exchanges between European citizens who thus get a chance to see, hear and taste foreign regions that they otherwise would only hear about.

The diversification of the town-twinning initiatives format was generally called for in order to favour the implication of all constituencies of local civil society (especially those usually left out of the scope of Europe-related activities: the poor, the old, the rural...). In addition, a strong support was given to the constitution of **good practices databases and the pooling of local projects experiences** in which, for instance, longstanding town-twinning could find ideas and rejuvenate their cooperation by developing new activities (also see under *innovative actions*).

Support to civil society organisations

Another type of action which was also privileged was the **funding of projects submitted by civil society organisations**. The even stronger support (**92.9%** of respondents) to this line of action is all the more significant since although civil society organisations represent an important proportion of the respondents, they still arrive behind the representatives of local/regional authorities. The plebiscite of these organisations is therefore an implicit recognition by local authorities of the irreplaceable role played by civil society in local governance and in cross-border activities. Such civil society projects give citizens from different countries the possibility to meet, to act together and to develop their own ideas in a European environment that goes beyond a national vision and which respects their diversity while focusing on mutual understanding, solidarity and a sense of belonging to Europe that are the main incentives for the involvement of citizens.

Operating grants for European level organisations received strong support from stakeholders, with nearly **90%** of respondents calling for the pursuit of these initiatives that relieve part of the financial pressure weighing down on civil society organisations. As pointed out by many participants, operating grants often create the conditions of a

sustained activity and of an enduring involvement of citizens in projects that would otherwise be bound to disappear or remain insignificant. In other words, there is a significant correlation between the size of the eligible organisation and the benefit driven from such operating grants which have a greater impact on smaller structures.

In their comments, many respondents deplored how little developed civil society is at EU level, as opposed to civil society at national level. By contrast also, the European dimension has been integrated much more quickly in the development of commercial international firms. If the development of such firms was probably favoured by the progress made towards the achievement of the common market, it is now time for civil society organisations to be given incentives to develop a common civil society through cooperation and involvement in cross-border activities. The solution for giving birth to a real European public space does not necessarily lie in the funding of structures of a new European type. A more simple first step would be to give national civil society organisations the impulse to gradually develop a transnational / European dimension to their structure from the local/regional/national level in a win-win situation of exporting and importing good practices on similar issues encountered all over Europe.

Innovative actions

When asked to rank the kind of innovative actions that would best contribute to the objectives of the programme, the vast majority of respondents gave preference to the **pooling of experience between local projects in different Member states** and to the **development of innovative partnerships in cooperation with new partners** (respectively obtaining **73.7%** and **61%** of respondents' votes). This demonstrates the longing for new frameworks, new possibilities of interaction among different partners, civil society organisations (including trade unions) and town-twinning initiatives, for example. In relation to town-twinning, such support was called for in favour of trans-national town-twinning committees' networks.

The organisation of **major events with high-visibility mobilising citizens** at EU level and/or all over Europe in the common celebration of festive, sporting, cultural or scientific achievements ranked third, with an overall support from **48.9%** of respondents, and given the obvious European added-value of these kinds of action, it should be taken into account as a practical tool for intercultural dialogue and for the development of a European identity. It is to be noted from the comments that this kind of action received relatively stronger support on the part of individuals. Last but not least, many respondents added a call for much more **comprehensive information on the various activities carried out in the field of active citizenship, and in particular on those funded by the programme**. An effort should be made to that end in the future programme; for instance the creation of an on-line database of good practices was suggested by an overwhelming number of both individuals and organisations.

Coming quite close to the organisation of major events, the **exchange of good practices on voluntary service** was chosen by **46.5%** of respondents. Two points were highlighted on this issue in the written contributions. Firstly, volunteering is seen as a key issue for the promotion of active citizenship: voluntary action is indeed carried out by active and committed citizens, hence promoting participation in the public space while also creating bonds of trust and solidarity. This is therefore a highly significant dimension to be taken into account in the future programme. Secondly, exchanges of knowledge and best

practice among volunteers, where different experiences and work approaches meet, are considered necessary in order to allow innovative projects to emerge.

The networking of think-tanks was supported by nearly a third (**32, 9%**) of respondents, quite a considerable result considering the very small percentage of respondents from that specific category. Given the opportunity for the programme for the programme to encourage cooperation with new partners, highlighted above, think tanks could become one of the potential new partners for NGOs or town-twinning committees.

Another innovative action, proposed with the idea of bridging the democratic deficit, was **citizen's panels**, supported by **27.8%**. This very new participatory tool has been tested at national level but not yet at European level. The selection of participants by drawing lots should ensure that "ordinary citizens" are involved. It follows that further exploration could be appropriate on this new concept.

2.3. Implementation issues

Obtaining an overall support of **91.4%**, the proposal of **multi-annual projects** is clearly one of the topical issues for stakeholders, who insisted in their comments on the fact that this kind of funding could open the way to more diverse and ambitious (in their scope and actions) projects.

Opening the way to funding multi-annual projects was seen by many as a practical means for citizen involvement to gain lasting momentum insofar as stakeholders would no longer be constrained by too short a horizon. While there were concerns raised about the danger of creating a dependency on European funds, many underlined that multi-annual funding would permit significant gains of time and resources invested year after year in the search for sponsors. However, the free comments added to the questionnaire suggest that in the mind of some respondents, there might be a confusion between the possibility of one-off support to multi-annual projects, and the funding of organisations' operating costs on a multi-annual basis.

In any event, most of the respondents were of the view, be it in the free comments or in the position papers submitted, that taking multi-annual projects into consideration should not be detrimental to short-term projects which remain the only means of involvement for stakeholders that may not have reached the necessary critical size. As a consequence additional funds should be provided for this new dimension. Indeed, multi-annual projects are perceived as better suited to the needs of civil society organisations than to those of involved citizens. Many comments insisted on a fair distribution of funding towards smaller but more practical, grass-root actions with immediately tangible outcomes for citizens involved, in opposition to ambitious projects targeted at audiences already fully aware of the stakes of European construction.

Short-term activities received **immense support amongst respondents (93.5%)**, with, as in town-twinning, the request for a bank of good practices of some kind to help citizens build on success-stories (*see above innovative actions*). Many respondents stressed the fact that the European added-value of projects ought not to be so strongly correlated to their EU-awareness feature, but that projects involving European citizens from several countries in the pursuit of a common goal (be it an artistic event, or a humanitarian aid campaign...) were *per se* contributing to the emergence of European citizenship.

3. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS MADE BY RESPONDENTS

Success-stories

Besides responding to the questionnaire, many respondents were eager to **expose their achievements** with regard to the objectives of the programme, implicitly expressing their interest in pursuing similar actions under the future programme. The current programme is permitting the constitution of a toolbox of instruments, initiatives and good practices helpful to the development of the future programme for active European citizenship

Amongst the success-stories were also the testimonies of intercultural and cross-border projects with the development of strong and efficient links usually stemming from a town-twinning and evolving into rich and dense partnerships, but not only. Professional seminars serving as exchange platforms of practices were described as turning into fruitful networks. Several comments concerned successful projects related to the young, which seem to have already capitalised a fair amount of ideas and good practices, from school-twinning to sports events, by way of professional training abroad. When distances can still be a quite serious issue – for cost-inducing –, the use of ICTs was pinpointed as the most practical way to abolish them, although it should be noted that the mentioned predilection for ICTs can simply be little more than a reflection of an *on-line* consultation in which respondents are necessarily familiar with ICTs.

Application criteria and procedures

Despite an overall satisfaction with the current programme and an overwhelming support for the future programme promoting active European citizenship, some concerns were raised concerning certain aspects of the programme. It is important to take them into account in order to assess properly the adaptations to be done to the current programme.

First, there was a general longing for **better information and for a higher diffusion of calls for proposals** in the framework of the programme for the promotion of active citizenship. Respondents insisted that the crux of the issue is to make sure that all categories of potential stakeholders can have the opportunity to be informed.

The second concern related to **the range and scope of projects** perceived as too narrow and constraining in the current programme, whereas a certain amount of flexibility would bring more diversity to the content as well as amongst target groups. Notably, the European added-value criteria do not always correspond to the reality of the projects that they wish to set up, thus forcing them to mould their initiatives on the requirements listed in the calls for proposals. A certain lack of flexibility in the criteria would then lead to a standardisation of projects and prevent fruitful innovations, especially in town-twinning activities and with meetings of citizens. In order to meet the objective of enhanced citizens' participation, the respondents pointed out that a diversification of activities within the framework of the programme is needed, especially to further involve all constituencies of civil society that are related to citizens.

Regarding **the target groups**, there were three parallel trends in the comments: on the one hand, the programme should be open to all or “ordinary citizens”, of all ages and groups; on the other hand, projects involving young people were considered by many respondents of crucial importance for fostering European citizenship; at the same time, respondents also expressed their concerns about the need to widen the reach of the programme to those belonging to less often targeted groups to whom the notion of European identity is less significant and called for specific attention to be given to older generations, populations affected by poverty, rural populations and immigrants, with the idea that European identity has to be shared by all in order to become effective. In the view of respondents, the efficient dissemination of the objectives and values of the EU is therefore not only an issue of proper information but also of creating the desire to get involved in those usually left outside of mainstream communication campaigns.

Another aspect of the constraining framework in which projects have to mould in order to get funding relates to the **period of time** over which projects are to be organised as stated in the eligibility criteria. Many respondents were of the opinion that a considerable improvement in the delivery of actions with European added-value could reside in the opening of the possibility of multi-annual funding (see above).

There was a wide agreement among the respondents about the necessity to reform application processes and grants delivery towards shorter, simpler and less time- and resources-consuming practices. Based on a sometimes broad experience of applications for European grants they observed a noticeable trend towards more complexity combined with a lack of clarity in the evaluation of applications. **The effort of simplification** could be carried out **from one end to the other of the application process**:

- Respondents called for a reasonable delay between the publication of calls for proposals and the deadlines for submission. Even in the optimistic hypothesis of an efficient circulation of information about the call for proposals, the time span remains often perceived as too short to set up a coherent project proposal.
- On the contrary, the time between the grant decision and the actual transfer and deposit of the grant has been characterised by many as far too long; or in other cases, the reply of the Commission came too late and the partnership could not be implemented.
- Then, with its complexity, the application file *per se* introduces discrimination between big organisations that can put at least one staff member to work full time on applications and who thus gets used to the handling of such files, and smaller ones in which members are likely to be motivated volunteers rather than actually trained and skilled administrators.
- In this regard, the issue of taking volunteer work into account as in kind contribution needs to be addressed in the future application files, so as not to discriminate against organisations that make extensive use of this kind of human resource.

In their written contributions, some respondents also suggested some **selection criteria** for the award of grants, such as:

- Representativity, democratic structures, transparency
- Established direct and active involvement of citizens
- Outreach, multiplier effect
- Lasting impact
- Accountable work programme

These suggestions will be duly taken into consideration, together with those made at the consultation forum, during the next phase, when the Commission will start preparing the implementation of this programme.

The majority of stakeholders saw the future framework programme as an opportunity for rationalising and simplifying the application and funding procedures. This concern meets the policy orientations given in the Commission's communications of 10 February and 9 March 2004 on the importance of profiting from the review of legal instruments to significantly simplify the design and implementation of Community instruments and to rationalise the new programmes as much as possible.

Building on European Values

Addressing the issue of the definition of European core values that projects should aim at developing and fostering among participants is considered as a key objective in the achievement of active European citizenship. Now that the internal market is well on the way to completion allowing Europeans to freely exchange goods and share consumerist tastes, it is urgent to create a symmetrical political space in which common values would be the shared goods. What, then, are these fundamental values for the development of active citizenship and for the success of the future programme?

Based on the respondents' input, the most rated value is **democracy**. Only the achievement of fully democratic participatory processes can send to stakeholders the signal that their voice will be taken into account and that it is worth them investing actively in the European design. Democracy as a regime, of course, but also democracy as a set of rules ensuring citizens' participation and safe-guarding transparency. The rule of democratic law is a prerequisite to any activity pursued towards and in the name of citizens. And at European level it implies an open dialogue with civil society. Furthermore, respondents underlined that democracy conveys a certain idea of equal opportunities for all citizens. In the context of the recent EU-enlargement to ten new countries, it is important to watch for any potential breach in equal treatment of citizens, which means that special attention is to be given to citizens' empowerment and to the involvement of civil society organisations situated in these countries.

Then, respondents stressed the need for a continuous effort on **cultural understanding** and exchange, so as to give its full meaning to the EU motto: "United in diversity". The difficult emergence of a positive European identity is linked by many to the persistence of prejudices resulting from decades, if not centuries, of constitution of national identities in sometimes violent opposition to neighbouring cultures and identities. The purpose of the

promotion of European citizenship is to put an end to these destructive trends inherited from the past and to open the way to enduring peace in Europe. Only through cultural exchanges and experiences of cultural differences and similarities can European citizens understand that there cannot be any cultural hierarchy and that all local, regional and national particularities are rooted in a layer of common European values.

Widely commented on among respondents were also closely related values such as **social inclusion and solidarity**. In order to ensure the rooting and development of European citizenship's core values, the pre-existence of links between citizens, of a minimal social fabric, is a requirement. One of the objectives of the future programme should be to further weave this social fabric. The need for an enhanced social solidarity stemmed out of the observation made by respondents stressing the fact that no efficient integration policy can succeed if it does not strengthen the overall social link. In the foggy context of post-enlargement and pre-ratification of the Constitutional treaty, there is a noticeable anxiety about the future of the European social model. Commitment to inclusiveness and solidarity ought therefore to be a both structural and substantial feature of EU policies with the objective of leaving no citizen outside targeted audiences.

The last value that respondents deemed essential to be widely shared amongst present and future European citizens is the concern for **sustainable development** and more generally the preservation of natural resources and the environment. By doing so, respondents echoed a collective concern that is gaining momentum about the impact of human activities on ecosystems and on the climate. To some extent, it is related to the value of solidarity and inclusiveness but applied to successive generations instead of constituencies of society. Although a bit more distant from the issue at stake than previous values, it conveys the idea of a global awareness of interactions which is at the root of the self-conscious existence of a society. Reciprocally, the account taken of each and every citizen's environment at European level cannot but help meeting the objective of a closer identification of European citizens to EU institutions.

Information in general

Finally, both individuals and organisations took the opportunity to emphasise the **importance of information** for developing mutual understanding among citizens. The stress on the need for a Europe that "talks" to citizens was mostly expressed in the comments made by individual respondents, whereas all respondents wished to see more information not only on European Union issues, but also information about what is happening in the other Member States. They pleaded for information delivered by specific European media to be much further developed and more closely interwoven into media networks.

Many proposals were made to that end in the comments, but most of them related to the communication strategy to be launched by DG Press rather than to the support to active European citizenship through civil society initiatives. However, some proposals were perfectly in keeping with the subject of the consultation, such as that of creating EU support groups in small villages based on what had been done to promote the creation of the UN.

4. CONCLUSION

As one of the initial steps followed, the consultation has been a major source of inspiration in the preparation of the Commission's proposal for a future programme. The large turn-out in the consultation has resulted in the accumulation of a dense and insightful material in which there is also much to be taken in the coming years of programme implementation.

With examples of good practices and suggestions for improvements to the existing structures and texts, the overall message that stems out of the consultation is a strong support to the activities carried out under the current programme and a firm will to see them continued on a solid basis over the years 2007-2013. One must, however, not be blind to some limits of the current programme that the new programme should aim at curtailing: need for a more flexible definition of projects, for a simplified application-process...

Besides this overall support to the pursuit of most of the current activities, many respondents came with new ideas and suggestions intended to advance further the objectives of the programme.

As it has been designed by the Commission, the new programme "Citizens for Europe" aims at meeting these concerns by achieving an adequate balance between:

- the current programme's acknowledged achievements and new ways and areas of interaction and cooperation among citizens and their organisations;
- activities involving citizens directly and support to civil society organisations;
- providing a clear overall framework and preserving flexibility to adapt to future circumstances in a fast evolving area;
- the need to simplify procedures while complying with the Financial Regulation.

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