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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING PAPER
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE COUNCIL establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme "Europe for Citizens" to promote European citizenship

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. Problem definition

Encouraging and facilitating citizens' wider involvement in the European Union and what it stands for is of great significance and importance. This ranges from the need to increase their involvement in current affairs right back to the need of ensuring a broader understanding of the history of the Union and its origins in the aftermath of two horrific world wars. Previous citizens' programmes have tackled these challenges with success and there is a substantial need for the continuation of this work at EU-level to address these issues.

The problem which the programme addresses is the lack of capacity of citizens' organisations - general interest organisations, different types of NGOs, stakeholder organisations, different groups of intermediaries - to launch and/or influence genuine debates on EU related issues at local, regional and national levels, which can be translated into a pan-European perspective. As long as this persists, citizens are not encouraged to link and to upscale their commitment and their engagement for democratic principles to the European level. Increased understanding about the EU, acquaintance with the historical foundations and values on which the Union is built, and knowledge about the impact of EU policies on people's daily lives allows citizens to fully benefit from the advantages of European citizenship and to connect with the mission of the EU.

The challenge is to reach out through intermediaries to large groups of citizens who would normally not seek to influence or take part in EU affairs and to facilitate the first steps towards involvement in EU related topics across national borders or with a European dimension. There is a need for a horizontal approach that does not aim to replace specific dialogues or consultation processes at the EU level, but to mobilise citizens at local level to debate concrete issues of European interest.

The current Europe for Citizens programme 2007-2013 is an important instrument which provides a framework for greater citizens' participation in EU affairs. However, it needs to be built upon by further intervention so as to provide the incentive for civic participation in EU affairs, and a real catalyst for European citizens' associations to become more involved in such matters.

The ambitious challenge that the new "Europe for Citizens" Programme proposes to tackle is three-fold:

- (1) develop civil society capacity to participate in the EU policy making process;
- (2) develop supportive structures to channel the results of such debates to policy-makers at the relevant levels; and
- (3) offer opportunities for citizens to participate in debates and discussions on EU-related issues, including from an historical perspective.

The programme aims to address the need for more genuine debates on EU related issues at the local, regional and national levels, which can be translated into a broader European perspective. It seeks to reach out to a large number of citizens – those who would normally not seek to influence or take part in EU affairs – through a broad set of organisations to take a

first step towards involvement, whatever the (EU related) topic or format, as long as it is transnational or has a European dimension. With its horizontal approach, its aim is not to replace other initiatives, or to duplicate consultations at EU-level, but to mobilise citizens at "grass roots" level to debate concrete issues of European interest and to develop a deeper involvement in EU affairs.

The programme will build on the analysis of the strengths and the weaknesses of the current "Europe for Citizens" programme (2007-2013), as regards its future programme design, targeting, out-reach and visibility in societal and geographical terms, impact analysis and valorisation/dissemination mechanisms.

1.1.1. Financial framework

The proposed financial frame was set on 29 June 2011, when the European Commission presented its multi-annual financial framework (MFF) for the period 2014-2020. The indicative budget adopted for the future Europe for Citizens programme was €203 million with an estimated distribution of €29 million per year.

1.2. Subsidiarity

Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) stipulates the EU institutions' tasks of giving citizens and representative organisations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action. The same article refers to the institutions' duty to have an open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society, the Commission's obligation of carrying out broad consultations with stakeholders, and introduces the Citizen's Initiative. Moreover, Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) describes the rights deriving from Union citizenship. In order to empower citizens to fully enjoy these rights a better understanding of the EU is an important precondition.

Appropriate means to ensure the achievement of these Treaty provisions require to be provided. The "Europe for Citizens" programme represents one of these means, just as, Regulation 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the citizens' initiative, represents another.

The Treaties call upon the EU "to give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known their views in all areas of Union action" and to "maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society". While a broad range of programmes and EU practice ensure dialogues in sectoral policy areas, the Europe for Citizens programme provides this opportunity at a horizontal level. By this, the Programme respects the subsidiarity principle. These tasks can only be met by the EU, and not at the Member State level.

The Programme also respects the proportionality principle. A programme (as opposed to a recommendation) provides a flexible instrument, is open to all actors on equal terms, delivers on capacity building and addresses a changing political situation.

1.3. Objectives of the initiative

The general objective of a future programme will be to: "strengthen remembrance and enhance capacity for civic participation at the EU level". It answers to the need for a genuine debate on EU related issues at the local, regional and national levels that can be translated into a pan-European perspective, and the related need for supportive structures to channel the results of such debates to policy-makers at the relevant levels. In this regard, the programme

would contribute by developing the capacity of citizens' organisations to engage their members and a broader public in the democratic life of the EU. The specific objectives will comprise:

- (1) Stimulate debate, reflection and cooperation on remembrance, EU integration and history;
- (2) Develop citizens' understanding and capacity to participate in the EU policy making process and develop opportunities for solidarity, societal engagement and volunteering at EU level.

1.3.1. Operational objectives

Following the narrowed down specific objectives proposed for the new Programme (above), a new set of operational objectives should be applied. The latter will increase the capacity of the Commission to set more firm indicators and subsequently be able to objectively, and more in detail, establish progress and impact.

- (1) Support organisations to promote debate and activities on remembrance, European values and history;
- (2) Support organisations of a general European interest, transnational partnerships and networks to promote citizens' interactions on EU matters;
- (3) Horizontal dimension: Analysis, dissemination & valorisation of project results through internal and external activities.

1.4. Policy options

(4) Following the first stakeholder meeting held on 22 June 2010 and in the period leading up to the Impact Assessment report, a number of different responses to the problem defined in Section 1 have been analysed. Three basic policy options with their respective sub-options have been retained, and given rise to further consideration:

- (1) Continue the "Europe for Citizens" programme in its current form;
- (2) Continue the "Europe for Citizens" programme in a modified, "re-vamped", form. Four sub-options have been considered:
 - Mixed approach
 - Support for larger grants only
 - Wider geographical coverage
 - Consultation tool
- (3) Decentralise of the "Europe for Citizens" programme, where no EU-wide programme would follow after the current programme comes to an end on 31 December 2013. Four alternative, decentralised approaches have been considered:

- Member State based approach
- Communication approach only
- Sectoral approach
- Merger with other programme

1.5. Comparison of options

A comparative assessment of the three options including their respective sub-options has been carried out. The results are detailed below.

1.5.1. Continue the Programme in its current form

This option is likely to be considered insufficient in the context of the Commission's commitment to put citizens at the centre of the European process, the new democratic principles introduced by the Lisbon Treaty and in light of existing criticism on the too limited means of the current programme. To continue the programme – without structural change to the programme leading to increased efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability – would not help to overcome the current situation of unmet demand and of un-realised synergies.

1.5.2. Adopt a re-vamped Programme

Option 2 presents a modified programme. It would be implemented through a more efficient programme architecture and strengthened exploitation of results. This new architecture would consist of two "strands"– Remembrance and European citizenship" and "Democratic engagement and civic participation" – that would provide for a better exploitation of synergies among the broad variety of participating organisations, for more flexibility for applicants in terms of developing their proposals for a project or an initiative (abandoning the 4-action-approach of the current Programme). A new cross-cutting feature "Valorisation" would respond to the overarching concern for optimising results. Four sub-options have been considered:

Sub-option 1 "Mixed approach" would put overall priority on outputs by:

- (1) reducing pure one-off town-twinning projects to a minimum and transforming town-twinning projects into multi-partner projects which have a clear thematic orientation, some policy impact and a longer-term validity;
- (2) mainstreaming innovative citizens' projects and support measures into the general multi-partner project part of the programme;
- (3) striking an adequate balance of the operating grants provided to think tanks and EU civil society organisations as regards the number and level of subventions given;
- (4) increasing the strategic focus of civil society projects by selecting bigger and longer-term projects which foresee a concrete contribution and ensure the feeding in of concrete ideas to the decision-making process;

- (5) increasing available resources for projects on remembrance (and broadening the scope of actions carried out in this area) and providing opportunities for projects on EU values and the history of EU integration.
- (6) developing visibility/valorisation actions as a cross-cutting programme feature.

Sub-option 2 "Support for larger grants only" (300,000 – 500,000 €/project) would mean economies of scale and chance for more structured work programmes, but has a considerable draw-back: there are only a limited number of organisations which have the necessary technical and organisational capacity to run big-scale projects.

Sub-option 3 "Wider geographical coverage" would extend the scope of discussion to "universal values/human rights" and also invite neighbouring countries. This sub-option has two draw-backs: It would require a substantially bigger budget. Moreover, "universal values/human rights" might lead to such a wide scope that specific objectives could no longer be defined.

Sub-option 4 "Consultation tool" would use the programme as a testing board for main EU policies and/or challenges, for example setting up and funding citizens' panels that would comment on given issues. Through such an approach, the EU institutions would gain a better understanding of the issues at stake, and how to communicate more efficiently its intentions to citizens. It would also provide a concrete link between the programme and policy making. Draw-back: it would require a substantially bigger budget or pump out resources of other channels of participation.

1.5.3. Option 3: Decentralisation of the Programme

In comparison with Options 1 and 2, Option 3 "to decentralise the programme" would have the weakest impact on the needs identified under Section 1. Several sub-options have been analysed but discarded.

Sub-option 1: "Member State based approach" would leave it up to the Member States to develop political participation and civic engagement around common EU values. This would mean total decentralisation, and simplification in terms of EU administration. It would also mean an opportunity to fully tailor the EU debate to national concerns and perspectives. But it would also mean a serious risk of limiting the scope to issues which are of purely national interest. There would be no policy input for the EU institutions from EU-wide umbrella organisations and think tanks organised at EU level. Nor would there be a possibility to stimulate EU-wide debates.

Sub-option 2 "Communication approach only" would mean to limit the general objective to communication only - to provide information on EU mission and policies, and leave the participation dimension to local levels. This approach would have limited implications on the EU budget. At the same time, it would risk leading to a "nationalisation" of the policy issues, and would not respond to the need for a more participatory approach with bottom-up input to better respond to citizens' needs.

Sub-option 3: "Sectoral approach" would mean that information and consultation objectives would continue to be attained exclusively via sectoral dialogues: individual DGs consult their respective stakeholders. The debate would be focused on the sectoral issues within each policy field. In the absence of a horizontal instrument, this option would limit policy input

from EU-wide umbrella organisations and think tanks organised at the EU level. There would also be limited scope for supporting capacity building for civic participation, and no possibility to support EU-wide debate on reference points in European history.

It should be noted that the Europe for Citizens programme is a horizontal instrument that does not seek to replace existing forms of dialogues or consultation, but to complement them.

Sub-option 4: "Merger with other programme". A merger with the future programme of DG JUST covering justice and citizenship has been explored but was discarded after careful examination by the two DGs as there was no evidence of possible synergies due to their different objectives and target groups.

Although a decentralisation of the Programme has not been automatically discarded, it must be underlined that it would come at a price – and would be in contradiction to the Commission decision on the MFF 2014-2020 – facing not only strong opposition from different sectors but also leaving a vacuum in the promotion of civic participation and participatory citizenship at a European level. It would mean the loss of an important instrument for the fostering of civic participation, where no similar, existing horizontal instrument can cater for these needs. Several other instruments aim at enabling dialogue between the EU institutions and citizens, but within the limits of their respective sectoral policies.

In conclusion, Option 2 "Re-vamped programme", sub-option 1: "Mixed approach", is the preferred option.

1.6. Assessment of impacts

1.6.1. Cost implications of the programme

On 29 June 2011, the European Commission presented its multi-annual financial framework (MFF) for the period 2014-2020¹. The indicative budget adopted for the future Europe for Citizens programme was €203 million with an estimated €29 million per year. It represents a slight reduction from the current Programme (€215 million). These amounts do not take into account future correction by indexation.

1.6.2. Expenditure-related outputs

The programme outputs will cover project grants (approx. 600 per year to an estimated cost of €15 million/year), operational grants (approx. 90 per year to an estimated cost of €10 million/year) and service contracts (approx. 5 per year to an estimated cost of €1 million/year). The main reason for proposing an "even" distribution of outputs over the programme period (2014-2020) is the fact that the "Europe for Citizens" programme is a "mature" programme – no known or expected "peaks" to take into account. The need for further engaging and involving citizens in EU matters is constant.

¹ COM(2011)500 I A Budget For Europe 2020 - Part I - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions; COM(2011)500 II A Budget For Europe 2020 - Part II - Policy Fiches - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

The estimated amount of €29 million/year will also cover the administrative costs (approx. €3 million/year) for an executive agency to manage the programme.

1.6.3. Impact on staff

Based on the experience from running the current Europe for Citizens programme, it is estimated that the new instrument would require:

- 9 officials or temporary staff
- 1 Seconded National Expert

In total 10 persons would be assigned to the management of the actions.

1.6.4. Simplification and reducing the administrative burden

Simplification is already of key importance in the current programme and will be further developed in the new one. The use of an executive agency for the running of the full programme cycle already saves considerably in terms of administration and human resources. In addition, the recourse to lump sums, flat rates and unit costs, e-applications, and efficient on-the-spot checks by grouping visits to organisations in the same region, further reduces the administrative burden as well as saves in real budgetary terms. The ECORYS midterm evaluation indicates (p. 39) that "there is some evidence from beneficiary and stakeholder interviews that the Executive Agency is efficiently administering the programme, making significant procedural improvements about finance, eligibility criteria, harmonisation of processes and the development of e-forms for applications". It also highlights the synergy effects with other programmes managed by the Executive Agency.

1.7. Monitoring and evaluation

The general objective to "strengthen remembrance and enhance capacity for civic participation at the EU level" will be measured against the number and quality of initiatives promoted by citizens' organisations that aim to: 1) have an impact on the EU policy making process, 2) strengthen cohesion in society, and 3) enhance the understanding of the role of the EU. The long term target would be an enhanced capacity of civil society to influence the European project. Milestones would be contributions to the European Years in the form of intellectual input or activities to link the Years with the local and regional realities, and contributions to political platforms in the run-up to European elections 2014-2019. A baseline will have to be established as the general objective is new to the programme.

There are two specific objectives: 1) "Stimulate debate, reflection and cooperation on remembrance, EU integration and history" and 2) "Develop citizens' understanding and capacity to participate in the EU policy making process and develop opportunities for solidarity, societal engagement and volunteering at EU level". The first objective will be measured against the number of projects and the quality of results, and the percentage of first time beneficiaries. The second objective will be measured against the number of directly involved participants, number of participating organisations and number of transnational partnerships and networks, the geographical coverage of the activities, and the percentage of first time beneficiaries.. The new programme will have to establish baselines for several of these result indicators.

The first report will be drawn up three years after the start of the programme (31 December 2016 at the latest). The objective of this report will be to provide an initial assessment of the results obtained at the half-way stage so that any changes or adjustments that are deemed necessary may be made for the second half of the programme (31 December 2017 at the latest).

The ex-post report on the impact of the action in question will be drawn up at the end of the 7-year-programme (1st July 2023). The objective of this report will be to assess the comparative results of the support mechanisms in light of the programme objectives.

Evaluation measures will be carried out by means of external and internal studies and surveys, missions and meetings. The costs relating to these measures are standard expenditure under an EU programme and will be covered out of the administrative budget of the future programme.