



Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020

European Implementation
Assessment

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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Author: Katharina Eisele

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Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020

In-Depth Analysis

On 14 September 2015, the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) decided to undertake three implementation reports, namely on Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the Europe for Citizens Programme. This decision was approved by the Conference of Committee Chairs at its meeting of 27 October 2015. Such implementation reports are routinely accompanied by European Implementation Assessments.

This European Implementation Assessment on the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 has been drawn up by the Ex-Post Impact Assessment Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, within the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services. Its aim is to improve the understanding of the subject by providing evidence of the specific benefits that are currently being achieved through the implementation of the scheme.

Abstract

The Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 is a European Union funded programme that aims at contributing to a better understanding of the EU by citizens, as well as promoting European remembrance and civic participation in Europe. This programme is the third of its kind, following the 2004-2006 Active European Citizenship Programme and the 2007-2013 Europe for Citizens Programme.

Since the current programme underwent a number of changes and adjustments, including a reduction in funding, a first examination of its functioning and implementation seems appropriate. Against this background, this European Implementation Assessment seeks to provide an initial assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 under the new structure, and presents some preliminary findings and recommendations in chapter 5.

AUTHOR(S)

Katharina Eisele, Ex-Post Impact Assessment Unit

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

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To contact the Unit, please email: EPRS-ExPostImpactAssesment@ep.europa.eu

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Executive summary

Bringing the European Union closer to its citizens has long been a key objective of European policy makers. Major importance is attached to engaging citizens and involving them at EU level in a different number of ways. In addition to improving conditions for active civic and democratic participation, the EU encourages action to contribute to a broader understanding of the EU among citizens, including its history and its diversity, as well as fostering European citizenship. The idea also extends to enhancing an open dialogue between the European institutions, civil society and local authorities.

Against this background, the Europe for Citizens (EFC) Programme 2014-2020 provides EU financial support for a wide variety of projects and activities, including town twinning and civil society projects, networks of towns (municipalities and associations cooperating on a common theme in a long-term perspective) but also projects and events related to European remembrance. The EFC Programme has proven to be relevant to different policy areas, including justice, freedom and security, employment and social policy, and education, training and youth. The EFC Programme 2014-2020 is implemented by the DG for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission, and directly managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

Funding which promotes and enables citizens to engage in European matters is of vital importance, especially in times when euroscepticism is on the rise. The EFC Programme is a unique European platform for promoting civic engagement among European citizens, either directly or through organisations targeting them. The European Commission's ex-post evaluation of the EFC Programme 2007-2013 found that the programme's objectives and activities are relevant, complementary with other initiatives, as well as having a clear EU added value.

Whilst still in the early stages of implementation, and despite a number of challenges, the EFC Programme 2014-2020 is likely to prove a unique and successful EU-funded programme, engaging citizens and building on the achievements of its predecessors. A major challenge is the reduced funding planned under the current EFC Programme. Participation has become very competitive and the overall quality of the projects has been high.

Taking stock of the first two years of the current programme leads to the conclusion that its implementation and management is sound and stable. The rise in the number of applications shows that there is a clear need for the EFC Programme, making it distinct from other funding programmes. The projects selected for funding appear to respond to the principal concerns of citizens, providing room for diversity while also taking the European Commission's priorities into account. According to EACEA, 2 000 organisations in Europe are directly involved in the projects supported, and the programme reaches around one million citizens directly and indirectly.

Introduction

Bringing the European Union closer to its citizens has long been a key objective of European policy makers. Major importance is attached to engaging citizens and involving them at EU level in a number of different ways. In addition to improving conditions for active civic and democratic participation, the EU encourages action to contribute to a broader citizens' understanding of the EU, including its history and its diversity, as well as fostering European citizenship. The idea also extends to enhancing an open dialogue between the European institutions, civil society, and local authorities. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, citizens were provided with new means to engage in policy making at Union level in terms of participatory democracy.

To recall, according to Article 11 TEU, the EU institutions are bound, using appropriate means, to give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views on all areas of Union action. This provision also stipulates the EU institutions' obligation to have an open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society; the Commission's duty to carry out broad consultations with stakeholders; and introduces the European Citizens' Initiative.¹ Furthermore, Article 20 TFEU establishes the fundamental status of Union citizenship and details the rights attached to it. As the European Commission explained, in order to empower citizens to enjoy fully these rights, a better understanding of the EU is an important precondition.²

The Commission has taken action to actively engage citizens and organisations in cross-border cooperation activities and exchanges, with the objective of strengthening European identity and promoting European integration by means of funding programmes.

The current Europe for Citizens (EFC) Programme 2014-2020³ is the successor to the 2007-2013 EFC Programme and the previous 2004-2006 Active European Citizenship Programme.⁴ A wide variety of projects and activities have been funded in the past, including town twinning and civil society projects, networks of towns, and also projects and events related to European remembrance.⁵

¹ For more information, see I. Anglmayer, [The European Citizens' Initiative: the experience of the first three years](#), EPRS In-Depth Analysis, April 2015.

² European Commission, 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', SEC(2011) 1562, 14 December 2011, p. 20.

³ Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 of 14 April 2014 establishing the Europe for Citizens' programme for the period 2014-2020.

⁴ For a broader discussion of the Europe for Citizens Programme as a means to promote European citizenship and identity, see A. Kutay, *Governance and European Civil Society*, Routledge 2014, pp. 83-86; see also K. Mäkinen, *Constructing Europe as an Area via EU Documents on Citizenship and Culture*, in: *The Meanings of Europe* (ed. C. Wiesner and M. Schmidt-Gleim), Routledge 2014, pp. 130-143.

⁵ For a selection of projects funded under the 2007-2013 EFC Programme, see European Commission, *The citizen's effect - 25 features about the Europe for Citizens Programme*, 2012.

The EFC Programme has proven to be relevant to different policy areas, including justice, freedom and security, employment and social policy, and education, training and youth. Funding which promotes and enables citizens to engage in European matters is of vital importance, especially in times when euroscepticism is on the rise. The EFC Programme has been described as providing ‘a unique European platform for promoting civic engagement among European citizens’, either directly or through organisations targeting them.⁶

The European Commission’s ex-post evaluation confirmed in September 2015 that the EFC Programme’s objectives and activities were relevant, complementary to other initiatives, as well as having a clear EU added value since the programme allowed activities to be implemented that could not have been financed elsewhere, in addition to promoting best practices.⁷

The current EFC Programme is implemented by the DG for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission and directly managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Associations, local authorities and institutions located in all 28 EU Member States, as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia can apply for grants offered by the programme.

While it is not possible to carry out a fully-fledged evaluation at this point (the current EFC Programme was only adopted in April 2014), this European Implementation Assessment will offer an initial assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020. The Commission’s interim evaluation of the Programme is planned for December 2017.

This European Implementation Assessment will first present the achievements and shortcomings of the previous EFC Programme before examining the current EFC Programme running from 2014 to 2020.

⁶ Coffey International and Deloitte, Ex-post evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-2013 - Final Report prepared for the European Commission, September 2015, pp. 22-23.

⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

1. Achievements and shortcomings of the EFC Programme 2007-2013

Overall, the EFC Programme running from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013⁸ was evaluated as a success.

1.1. Surveys on activities and impact (2008 and 2009)

The European Commission has carried out a number of studies with the objective of measuring the activities and the impact of the EFC Programme. A sample survey of town-twinning meetings conducted in 2008 showed that 'participation in these kinds of activities contributes strongly to increased knowledge of the EU, a greater sense of feeling European and of solidarity.'⁹ Subsequently, in 2009, another survey on the Europe for Citizens Programme was commissioned by DG Education and Culture (EAC) regarding impact indicators.¹⁰ The survey suggested the following main conclusions: taking part in a Europe for Citizens event is likely to have an impact not only on participants' opinions, but also on their future actions; participants most enjoy learning about people's lives in other countries or making new friends and contacts; and while most are aware of the EU's role in these events, learning about the EU is of lesser importance for most participants.

1.2. Mid-term evaluation (2011)

The European Commission carried out a mid-term evaluation of this EFC Programme in 2010, in the form of a study, with the help of external expertise.¹¹ The study concluded that the objectives of the EFC Programme remain valid and relevant to the overarching aim of 'giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever-closer Europe, thus developing citizenship of the European Union.'¹² The study pointed out that an estimated 2.8 million citizens took part in funded activities between 2007 and 2009, suggesting that there is a significant level of demand. In terms of coherence, the study found that the EFC programme mostly complements other EU programmes, such as in the areas of promoting inter-cultural dialogue and developing participation and democracy in Europe, and that the EFC programme has a clear EU added value in terms

⁸ Decision No 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 establishing for the period 2007 to 2013 the programme 'Europe for Citizens' to promote active European Citizenship.

⁹ See European Commission, DG EAC, Report on the activities under the 'Europe for Citizens Programme' 2008, EFCC/120/2009-EN, p. 2; the survey was carried out in February 2008. The Commission states that an online questionnaire was sent to 632 town twinning beneficiaries, 169 of whom replied, giving a response rate of 29%.

¹⁰ Ecotec, Europe for Citizens Survey 2009 - Developing impact indicators for the Europe for Citizens programme and adapting them to the 2009 Annual Management Plan, Final technical report, October 2009.

¹¹ Ecorys, Interim Evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-13 - Final Report prepared for the European Commission (DG COMM), 2010; see also European Commission, Report on the mid-term evaluation of the 'Europe for Citizens' Programme 2007-2013, COM(2011) 83, 1 March 2011.

¹² Ibid., Ecorys, p. 76.

of its direct impacts on the scale and scope of activities. Demand for the programme was assessed to remain strong with the budget not meeting actual demand. The study indicated that it is difficult to assess cost-effectiveness because of the varying scale of projects and the range of outcomes. Regarding efficiency, the study also concluded that programme spending to support projects is consistent with expectations. While the study admits that the extent to which the programme seems to influence policies and practices at national and EU level is difficult to assess, it stresses that there is scope for reinforcing that impact. Finally, the study concluded that the dissemination of results could be enhanced.¹³ The main recommendations for the remainder of the programme and the successor programme have been summarised under four headings:¹⁴

- (1) Achieving stronger understanding and ownership of the EU by strengthening links between the programme, highlighting major societal issues and issues identified by citizens as being of direct and current interest, and by identifying ways to uphold EU major strategic goals and political priorities;
- (2) Further improving and adjusting programme implementation, among other things by finding a better balance between supporting major stakeholders and small-scale participants, increasing the level of funding for Active European Remembrance and Active Civil Society Actions, and facilitating the application process;
- (3) Achieving more balanced participation by making an effort both to counterbalance existing geographical discrepancies, manifest in a distinct underrepresentation of countries from Northern (United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden) as well as Southern Europe and the Balkans (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and increase the involvement of 'hard-to-reach' groups, including disabled persons;
- (4) Increasing the policy and media impact of activities supported by the programme, notably by exploiting the links between local government capacity-building and town twinning activities supported by the programme, by exploring the possibility of organising events, press meetings etc., that bring together policy-makers, thematic experts and organisations benefiting from the programme, and by forging stronger links with other EU programmes and initiatives such as the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship programme, Youth in Action, or Culture.

1.3. Study on measuring impacts (2013)

In May 2013, the Commission (DG COMM) published a study on measuring the impact of the EFC Programme.¹⁵ This study was aimed at finalising the evaluation of the previous generation programme, discussing the monitoring indicators for the following

¹³ Ibid., Ecorys, pp. 76-84.

¹⁴ See M.J. Prutsch, [Europe for Citizens \(2014-2020\)](#), European Parliament, Policy Department B, September 2012, p. 16.

¹⁵ Public Policy and Management Institute and Eureval, *Measuring the Impact of the Europe for Citizens Programme*, prepared for the European Commission (DG COMM), May 2013.

one, proposing an evaluation grid for the next generation of the programme, and exploring the final impacts.

The study concluded with a number of recommendations:

- first, regarding the surveying strategy, the study proposed some changes to the content of the questionnaire (such as the inclusion of action-specific questions and a 'before and after' question, using the survey to identify the amount of directly and indirectly reached beneficiaries); as well as changes to the implementation process of the survey (such as using online surveying for dissemination in the form of emails and carefully considering the timing of the survey);
- second, the study provided insights from the project coordinators on the implementation of the projects, which reflect 'the realities at the project level.' Such insights concerned the importance of social networks (for the dissemination of project results and awareness raising of activities); hard to reach groups (which are project specific and very much connected to the objectives of the project or specifics of geographical location); social contacts (which are the main source for sustainability of project results); as well as follow-up events.

1.4. Ex-post evaluation (2015)

1.4.1. Findings

In September 2015, the Commission (DG HOME) issued the ex-post evaluation of the EFC Programme 2007-2013.¹⁶ The scope of the evaluation was to assess the results and implementation of this programme. For this purpose, the evaluation successively assessed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the EFC Programme 2007-2013, and in addition provided a number of recommendations for improving the subsequent programme. The evaluation was based on desk research, interviews, a focus group with key stakeholders, a survey of unsuccessful applicants, case studies of selected projects and a benchmarking exercise that allowed comparison with other EU spending programmes.¹⁷

The evaluation came to a number of overarching conclusions. The evaluation served to confirm the relevance of the EFC programme's objectives and activities in light of prevailing conditions, such as increased euroscepticism and diversion of resources towards initiatives focused on the economy. The EFC Programme was also judged to be sufficiently distinct from other programmes in terms of its scope, objectives, activities and target groups to offer complementary action. With regard to EU added value, the evaluation found that the EFC Programme enabled activities that could not have been funded elsewhere and that it promoted the spread of best practices.

In addition the evaluation concluded that the types of projects funded by the EFC Programme 'could potentially make an impact in numerous ways, depending on their particular mechanisms, target groups and methods. High potential impact tended to

¹⁶ Coffey International and Deloitte, Ex-post evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-2013 - Final Report prepared for the European Commission (DG HOME), September 2015.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

draw on factors such as involving children and hard to reach groups, establishing sustainable networks and linking to policy-making.’¹⁸ Overall, the evaluation found that the projects had a clear rationale, a well-delineated scope and set of objectives, a plausible intervention logic and that the involvement of relevant partners delivered meaningful results.

Due to the short timeframe for projects funded by the EFC Programme, follow-up initiatives and financing, as well as wider applicability and replicability of projects, outputs were flagged as crucial for producing lasting results. To maximise the impact of the EFC Programme, it was pointed out that ‘it would need to leverage its relatively small budget, identifying specific areas where it can add the most value and complementing larger initiatives.’¹⁹ The benchmarking analysis conducted for the evaluation showed that the offer of the EFC Programme was unique, 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.’²⁰

The evaluation suggested that the programme’s potential impact could be increased if it consolidated its emphasis on its specific focus areas (citizenship, town twinning and remembrance activities), leaving the remaining issues, such as youth, to be covered by other programmes. Also, the evaluation emphasises that effectiveness could be enhanced if the EFC Programme placed greater focus on citizen driven projects.

While the evaluation points out that the various action strands cannot easily be compared regarding their cost-effectiveness (due to their complex and diverse configuration), costs per participant varied considerably between action strands. Furthermore, the evaluation emphasised that projects which exhibited the identified key success factors, provided better value for money than those which did not. From the monitoring data it was concluded that there was a clear mismatch between the relatively small budget (€215 million for seven years) for the EFC Programme and its ambition and goals.

Finally, it was stated that the programme made a real, although unquantifiable, contribution to its objectives. Sustainable outcomes can be achieved if projects display the key success factors, and provide for credible follow-up plans.

1.4.2. Recommendations

On the basis of its findings, the evaluation makes eight recommendations for the EFC Programme running from 2014 to 2020.

- (1) Focus and scope: while the programme has been assessed as unique in its ability to reach ordinary citizens, it was suggested to narrow the scope of the next programme so that it can deploy its limited funding more strategically and focus on citizen driven activities.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 5, 31-47.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁰ Ibid.

- (2) Draw more on theory: considering that projects addressing certain types of activities, target groups and topics (such as young people, social inequality and civic education) are more likely to generate impacts on civic engagement, it was recommended to commission research to maximise the programme's cost-effectiveness.
- (3) Improve programme and project monitoring: the evaluation acknowledges that the monitoring of this programme, which deals with a complex theme such as active citizenship, proves difficult. However, it is considered vital that the lack of monitoring data is tackled. To overcome this lack, it is suggested to put standardised monitoring provisions in place for projects as well as the integration of indicators developed in the 2013 study on measuring the impact of the EFC Programme (referred to above).
- (4) Increase support for first-time applicants and underrepresented Member States: the evaluation found that the discrepancies in Member State participation were due more to divergent success rates in applying for funding than in the amount of interest in the programme. To increase balanced participation, it was suggested that the Commission could fund some remedial sessions with European Contact Points (ECP), which play an important role in raising awareness and provide support for first-time applicants and potential applicants in target countries.
- (5) Consider more involvement for ECPs: Communication between ECPs and the central programme management could potentially be enhanced by putting goals in place that would demonstrate the purpose of this cooperation.
- (6) More insistence on, and scrutiny of, purposeful, outcome-oriented planning: the evaluation points out that most of the projects were competently delivered, but that tangible outcomes and impacts were thin on the ground. This was attributed to differing project and activity purposefulness. Successful projects moreover were characterised by outcome-oriented thinking, plausible intervention logic, and credible plans for follow-up.
- (7) Maximise synergies by intensifying consultation with other Directorates-General: the evaluation states that good practices could be learned from other programmes, and that for this purpose more formal links could be established.
- (8) Encourage remembrance projects to look more towards the future: since remembrance projects tended to be more salient when taking practical implications for the present and the future (in addition to the past) into account, the evaluation suggested integrating this aspect into the projects scoring process.

1.4.3. European Commission report

On the basis of this evaluation, in its Report of 16 December 2015,²¹ the Commission gave account of the implementation, results and overall assessment of the EFC Programme 2007-2013. The Commission emphasised that over the 2007 to 2013 period, the EFC Programme had approximately seven million direct participants, reached almost 25 000 towns and cities in Europe, and created 350 networks of towns around common issues. The EFC Programme moreover mobilised 4 250 civil society organisations to meet citizens' concerns and more than 500 organisations were involved in remembrance activities.

The Commission emphasised that the EFC Programme 2007-2013 provided a unique forum to engage citizens in the EU, and triggered a lot of interest among citizens, evidenced by the steady growth in the number of applications.

The programme has effectively fostered civic participation and democratic engagement, even if its long-term impact is difficult to assess. According to the Commission, in the last three years of the programme the quality of the projects increased, projects were larger in scale and more first-time applicants were involved; this increased the programme's impact.²²

2. The EFC Programme 2014-2020

The EFC Programme 2014-2020 was established from 1 January 2014 (Article 17 of the Regulation), although Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 on the EFC Programme 2014-2020 was only adopted on 14 April 2014. The late adoption of this regulation was due to prolonged negotiations on the legislative proposal. Thus, at the time of writing, the programme has effectively been in place for about two years, with grant awards decisions being taken as of 6 June 2014. To assess the implementation of the EFC Programme 2014-2020 to date is thus challenging in light of this rather short period. Therefore, this European Implementation Assessment seeks to provide some preliminary findings on the functioning and transposition of the current EFC Programme.

This section provides background information on the EFC Programme 2014-2020, in particular regarding its origin and evolution, its objectives, the legal framework, structure and budget, the selection of projects as well as the rules concerning the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme.

²¹ European Commission, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 'Europe for Citizens' Programme 2007-2013, COM(2015) 652, 16 December 2015.

²² Ibid., p. 10.

2.1. Origin and evolution

The Commission published its proposal on the Europe for Citizens Programme for 2014-2020 on 14 December 2011.²³ The Commission proposal was accompanied by an ex-ante impact assessment.

2.1.1. European Commission impact assessment

The impact assessment (IA) report²⁴ prepared by the Commission built on the results of the interim evaluation of the EFC Programme 2007-2013 and integrated findings based on a number of consultations with stakeholders, including an open public online consultation that ran from 27 October 2010 to 5 January 2011.²⁵ The IA presented three options: Option 1 is the baseline with no changes; Option 2 consists of a revamped programme with two 'strands' and a third cross-cutting feature; Option 3 sets out a decentralisation of the programme (both Options 2 and 3 foresee several sub-options). The IA assessed the positive and negative impacts of the three options and comes to the conclusion that a revamped programme (Option 2) is likely to be the most effective one (and represents the Commission's preferred option). Differing from the Commission proposal (which indicates a budget of €229 million), the IA considers an indicative budget of €203 million.²⁶

The Impact Assessment Board (now called 'Regulatory Scrutiny Board'), which evaluated a draft version of the IA report of 24 August 2011, requested significant improvements in several important aspects.²⁷ These concerned in particular: a problem analysis based on a better assessment of the EFC Programme 2007-2013, taking into account evaluation results and the stakeholders' different views; more specific objectives clearly linked to the identified problems; policy options, which improve the content and architecture of the EFC Programme; as well as progress indicators.

Despite the fact that the opinion of the Board was neither positive nor negative, it was clearly indicated that 'unless considerable improvements are made to address the recommendations [...], the IA report cannot be considered to provide the evidence base to support decision-making that is normally expected from impact assessments.'²⁸ It appears that some of the critical comments of the Impact Assessment Board have been addressed in the final IA report, while others could have benefited from further attention.

²³ European Commission, Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme 'Europe for Citizens', COM(2011) 884, 14 December 2011.

²⁴ European Commission, 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, SEC(2011) 1562, 14 December 2011.

²⁵ See Ecorys, Online Consultation on the Future of the Europe for Citizens Programme - Final analysis of responses, March 2011.

²⁶ European Commission, 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, SEC(2011) 1562, 14 December 2011, p. 32.

²⁷ European Commission, Impact Assessment Board Opinion: DG COMM - Impact assessment on the 'Citizens for Europe' Programme 2014-2020, 23 September 2011, Ref. Ares(2011)1013171.

²⁸ Ibid.

For instance, it is not readily apparent from the IA report which stakeholders supported which options. Moreover, the range of options seems rather limited.

2.1.2. Negotiations and Council position

Negotiations on the legislative instrument took two and a half years and were concluded in the second quarter of 2014; Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 was adopted on 14 April 2014. The legal basis was subject to intense discussion between Commission, Parliament and Council, as discussed in more detail below. The Commission proposal was generally welcomed by Council, emphasising the balance achieved between simplifying the EFC Programme and providing more detailed information on both initiatives that could be supported under each of the three strands (remembrance, civic participation and valorisation) and on the management and monitoring of the Programme.²⁹ The Council proposed changes regarding four points, namely:

- 'Types of activities funded (Article 3 (2))
The activities to be funded under the programme were organised according to the type of the activities, rather than thematically. Within this restructuring, a visible place was given to the national contact points for Europe for Citizens as the principal advice and information structures that implement the Programme.
- Access to the programme (Article 6)
Delegations have endorsed the idea proposed by the Commission that the Programme should be open to all stakeholders promoting European citizenship and integration, whilst enlarging access to regional authorities and organisations, and to cultural and youth organisations.
- Implementing provisions (Articles 8 and 9)
Delegations supported the view of the Commission that, given the small size of the programme budget, the implementation phase should be as light and fast as possible, and as a consequence they have agreed with the use of the advisory procedure. Nevertheless, in order to balance this flexibility with appropriate Member State involvement during the implementation of the programme, two main changes have been made. Firstly, an indicative budgetary breakdown between the three strands has been included in the regulation itself, and secondly, a new article on communication was introduced according to which the Commission will provide ex-post information to Member States on selection decisions (Article 13a).
- Indicators
Delegations have supported the need for indicators as a means to measure the impact of the programme and assess its progress towards the objectives set out. However, the proposed structure of indicators has been simplified, qualitative indicators have been added, such as the quality of projects applications, and the description of indicators has been made more precise. Particular attention was paid to the

²⁹ Council of the EU, Revised Report from the Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1) to Council: Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme 'Europe for Citizens', 9095/1/12, Brussels, 4 May 2012.

geographical indicator which was modified so that it can be shown clearly how many submitted and selected projects come from a given country.³⁰

Regarding the proposed budget by the Commission (€229 million), the Council stated that, since the Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020) had not been finalised, the financial envelope was not included. As has been pointed out, it seemed that the Council had no reservation against the amount proposed at this point in time, although the budget was considerably reduced later (see section on budget below).³¹

2.1.3. What about Parliament's involvement? The legal basis

The Commission proposal for the EFC Programme for 2014-2020 was based on Article 352 TFEU. The fact that the proposal was exclusively based on the latter provision caused some surprise in the European Parliament's lead committee for the file, the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT).³² Under this legal basis, the consent procedure endows the Council with the main law-making role, whereas Parliament can merely consent to or reject the proposal.

The Commission suggested basing the proposal on Article 352 TFEU, indicating in the impact assessment that no other provision can serve as a legal basis for the EFC Programme, but without providing any further explanation (either in the impact assessment or in the explanatory memorandum to the Commission proposal).³³ Further clarification from the Commission as to why the legal basis used in the EFC Programme 2007-2013 (namely Article 352 TFEU, in combination with Article 167 TFEU, providing for the full participation of the European Parliament) could not serve as a legal basis for the successor programme, should have been provided. The Commission's statement in the impact assessment that 'the involvement of national parliaments and the European Parliament would enhance the democratic nature of the proposal'³⁴ lacks some credibility and appears almost ironic in this context.

The European Parliament proposed to use Article 167 TFEU together with Article 352 TFEU, as was the case for the previous EFC Programme.³⁵ However, contrary to Parliament's position, Commission and Council did not agree, arguing that the two objectives were not of equal importance and that it was legally impossible to combine the two provisions mentioned above. At the time, it appeared as if no agreement could be found despite negotiations at the highest political level.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

³¹ See M.J. Prutsch, [Europe for Citizens \(2014-2020\)](#), European Parliament, Policy Department B, September 2012, p. 26.

³² Ibid.

³³ European Commission, 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, SEC(2011) 1562, 14.12.2011, p. 21.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See the minutes of the CULT Committee meeting of 29 February 2012, point 16; see also Letter of the Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs, Mr Klaus-Heiner Lehne, addressed to the Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education, Ms Doris Pack, of 28 March 2012, Subject: Opinion on the legal basis of the proposal for a Council regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme 'Europe for Citizens' (COM(2011)0884 - 2011/0436(APP)), PE486.126v01-00.

With a view to preventing a complete procedural deadlock and to ensure the programme's launch, Parliament accepted Article 352 TFEU in the end as the sole legal basis. Rather than rejecting the proposal entirely, within the CULT Committee it was decided 'to proceed with the deliberations of the legislative proposal as in the case of an ordinary legislative procedure, to prepare a formal report, and make recommendations for modifications and amendments. Depending on the Council's readiness to comply with the EP's wishes [...] Parliament reserved its right to eventually approve or discard the entire proposal.'³⁶

In its Report of 12 December 2012 on the proposal for a Council regulation regarding the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 (Rapporteur: Hannu Takkula),³⁷ the CULT Committee reiterated its views regarding the dual legal basis upon which the programme should be based. The report further called for, inter alia, an increase in the financial envelope; the strengthening of the remembrance part of the programme; improved access to the programme for citizens; the importance of geographical balance in the allocation of funds; and the valorization and transferability of results for enhanced impact and long-term sustainability.

On 19 November 2013, the European Parliament adopted by 565 votes to 84, with 36 abstentions, a legislative resolution by which Parliament gave its consent to the draft Council regulation establishing the programme 'Europe for Citizens' for the period 2014-2020.³⁸ The text agreed in this draft Council resolution was a compromise between Parliament and Council. In the Annex to its legislative resolution the European Parliament stated that it:

'reaffirms its conviction that this Regulation [on the EFC Programme 2014-2020] pursues also the objectives linked to culture and history as enshrined in Article 167 TFEU. Therefore a dual legal basis entailing the ordinary legislative procedure should have been applied to this dossier. The only reason for the European Parliament to give up its position on the dual legal basis, and hence its claim on codecision, and accept the consent procedure - in accordance with the Commission's proposal based on Article 352 TFEU - was its desire to avoid a complete procedural deadlock and a consequent delay in the entry into force of the programme. The European Parliament draws attention to its determination not to allow such a situation to arise again [emphasis added].'

³⁶ M.J. Prutsch, [Europe for Citizens \(2014-2020\)](#), European Parliament, Policy Department B, September 2012, p. 27.

³⁷ European Parliament Report of 12 December 2012 on the proposal for a Council regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme 'Europe for Citizens' (Rapporteur: Hannu Takkula), A7-0424/2012.

³⁸ European Parliament legislative resolution of 19 November 2013 on the draft Council regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme 'Europe for Citizens' (12557/2013 - C7-0307/2013 - 2011/0436(APP)) (Special legislative procedure - consent).

2.1.4. The positions of the EESC and the CoR

Both consultative EU institutions, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR), have in general terms endorsed the continuation of the EFC Programme.

The formal opinion of the EESC on the Commission proposal was adopted on 11 July 2012 at the EESC's 482nd plenary session, by 140 votes to 1 with 5 abstentions (Rapporteur: Andris Gobiņš).³⁹ In this opinion, the EESC, which has always described itself as a 'bridge between Europe and organised civil society',⁴⁰ strongly welcomed the Commission proposal on the EFC Programme 2014-2020 with a view to encouraging and facilitating the active participation of citizens in political and public life and mutual solidarity and cooperation. At the same time, however, the EESC called for a greater role for the European Parliament, the EESC, the CoR and the partners in the structured dialogue in terms of framing, monitoring and evaluating the programme. The EESC shared the fears of civil society organisations that the annual work programme may weaken the EFC Programme's focus on long-term issues or even obscure them completely.

Furthermore, the EESC called for better coordination of the EFC Programme with other programmes; an increased budget that reflects the importance given to public involvement in decision-making and of decision-makers' ability to honour their commitments to implement the Lisbon Treaty; a decentralised programme administration; a programme with improved effectiveness, sustainability, and which yields on resources committed. Also, it should be noted that some of the members of the EESC Liaison Group,⁴¹ a group established with the objective to interact with European civil society organisations and networks in a more coordinated and structured way, are beneficiaries of the EFC Programme.

The CoR considered the Commission proposal on the EFC Programme 2014-2020 along with two other proposals, namely dealing with the Justice Programme as well as the Rights and Citizenship Programme in the Opinion on 'EU financial instruments in Justice and Citizenship' of 18 July 2012 (Rapporteur: Giuseppe Varacalli).⁴² In its opinion, the CoR stresses the importance of the proposed programmes and welcomes the more flexible structure of the EFC Programme 2014-2020.⁴³ The CoR calls on the Commission and the Member States to involve local and regional authorities in implementing the

³⁹ EESC, Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme 'Europe for Citizens', COM(2011) 884 final – 2011/0436 (APP) (2012/C 299/22), 11 July 2012.

⁴⁰ See Foreword by Anne-Marie Sigmund, President of the EESC (2004–2006) and of Group III (1998–2004), in: EESC, Group II – 'Various Interests' Compendium – Participative Democracy and Civil Dialogue: a retrospective overview, EESC, 2010.

⁴¹ See [EESC Liaison Group website](#).

⁴² CoR, Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'EU financial instruments in Justice and Citizenship' (2012/C 277/06), 18 July 2012.

⁴³ Ibid., under points 1 and 40.

programme, particularly in developing the annual work programmes.⁴⁴ According to the CoR, the proposals comply with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. When considering proportionality, the CoR points out that 'the total financial envelope for the three programmes appears sufficient for their effective implementation [...]'.⁴⁵ The CoR calls for a good part of the budget of the EFC Programme to be allocated to activities that take place in the context of town twinning.⁴⁶

In its 2015 Opinion on 'Reconnecting Europe with its citizens – more and better communication at local level' of 3 December 2014 (Rapporteur: Christophe Rouillon),⁴⁷ the CoR welcomes initiatives to improve the context of civic and democratic participation at EU level on the one hand, but explicitly regrets that the budget of the Europe for Citizens programme has been cut under the new multiannual financial framework.⁴⁸

2.2. Programme objectives

Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 establishing the EFC Programme 2014-2020 (Article 1) specifies that, under the overall aim of bringing the Union closer to its citizens, the general objectives of the EFC Programme are:

- firstly, to contribute to citizens' understanding of the Union, its history and diversity and,
- secondly, to foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level.⁴⁹

It is further stipulated that the EFC Programme has the following two specific objectives which shall be implemented through actions at transnational level with a European dimension:

- (1) to raise awareness of remembrance, the common history and values of the Union and the Union's aims, namely to promote peace, the values of the Union and the well-being of its people, by stimulating debate, reflection and the development of networks;
- (2) to encourage the democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level, by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy-making process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Ibid, under point 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid, under point 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., under point 42.

⁴⁷ CoR, Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Reconnecting Europe with its citizens – more and better communication at local level' (2015/C 019/09), 3 December 2014.

⁴⁸ Ibid., under point 6.

⁴⁹ See Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 of 14 April 2014 establishing the 'Europe for Citizens' programme for the period 2014-2020.

⁵⁰ See Article 2 of Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014.

2.3. Structure and budget

2.3.1. Structure

The current EFC Programme is divided into two strands: Strand 1 on 'European remembrance' and Strand 2 on 'Democratic engagement and civic participation':

- Strand 1 aims to support projects reflecting on the causes of totalitarian regimes in Europe (especially, but not exclusively, Nazism) and to commemorate the victims of their crimes. Preference is given to actions, which encourage intercultural dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual understanding as a means of building the future.⁵¹
- Strand 2 supports activities that cover civic participation in the broadest sense, with a particular focus on activities directly linked to Union policies. Likewise, this strand aims at financing projects that promote mutual understanding, intercultural learning, solidarity, societal engagement and volunteering at Union level.⁵²

The two strands are complemented by horizontal actions for analysis, dissemination and use of project results ('Valorisation' action). It is further laid down that, in order to achieve its objectives, the Programme shall finance, inter alia, the following types of action, implemented at transnational level or with a European dimension:

- mutual learning and cooperation activities;
- structural support for organisations;
- Union level analytical activities;
- awareness raising and dissemination activities designed to use and further valorise the results of the supported initiatives and to highlight good practices.⁵³

The programme is open to all stakeholders promoting European citizenship and integration, in particular local and regional authorities and organisations, twinning committees, European public policy research organisations (think tanks), civil society organisations (including survivors' organisations), as well as cultural, youth, educational and research organisations (Article 6 of the Regulation). Such stakeholders must be based in one of the participating countries, which include all 28 EU Member States and accession countries, candidate countries and potential candidate countries, as well as EFTA countries party to the EEA Agreement, provided the latter have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission (Article 5 of the Regulation). At the time of writing, the following third countries participate in the EFC Programme 2014-2020: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The EFC Programme funds two types of grants: first, action grants for actions of limited duration, during which proposed specific activities are implemented, and, second,

⁵¹ See European Commission, EACEA Annual Work Programme 2014, p. 52.

⁵² Ibid., p. 52.

⁵³ See Article 3 of Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014.

operating grants, which provide financial support for the regular and usual activities of an organisation.⁵⁴

Until now, the EFC Programme stipulated specific annual priorities for the two strands. From 2015 onwards, priorities are set for the remainder of the programme 2016-2020 in the form of multiannual priorities. This way, it is argued, applicants can better plan and prepare their projects. The Commission retains, however, the right to review, adopt and/or modify the list of priorities should the need arise.

The priorities of the EFC Programme for the period 2016-2020⁵⁵ are:

- for 'European Remembrance' (Strand 1):
 - (1) Commemorations of major historical turning points in recent European history;
 - (2) Civil society and civic participation under totalitarian regimes;
 - (3) Ostracism and loss of citizenship under totalitarian regimes: drawing the lessons for today;
 - (4) Democratic transition and accession to the European Union.

- for 'Democratic engagement and civic participation' (Strand 2):
 - (1) Understanding and debating euroscepticism;
 - (2) Solidarity in times of crisis;
 - (3) Combatting stigmatisation of 'immigrants' and building counter narratives to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding;
 - (4) Debate on the future of Europe.

2.3.2. Budget

Regarding the allocation of the budget, the Annex to Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 establishing the EFC Programme 2014-2020 specifies that approximately 20% of the total budget of the programme will be devoted to Strand 1; approximately 60% of the total budget of the programme will be devoted to Strand 2; approximately 10% of the total budget of the programme will be devoted to horizontal action (valorisation); and approximately 10% of the total budget of the programme will be allocated to programme management.

The budget for the EFC Programme 2014-2020 is set at €185 468 000 for the seven years. The annual appropriations shall be authorised by the European Parliament and the Council within the limits of the multiannual financial framework (Article 12 of the Regulation).

The budget of the current EFC Programme was thus considerably reduced, taking into account that the financial envelope of the previous programme was set at €215 000 000.⁵⁶ A reduction was requested by the United Kingdom government, as is apparent from a

⁵⁴ See Article 4 of Decision No 1904/2006/EC as well as European Commission/EACEA, Programme Guide 'Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020' (version valid as of January 2014), p. 7.

⁵⁵ See [EACEA website of the EFC Programme](#).

⁵⁶ See Article 11 of Decision No 1904/2006/EC.

report of the UK House of Commons' European Scrutiny Committee regarding the EFC Programme 2014-2020, and backed in the Council.⁵⁷ The latter report states that 'in his letter of 31 October 2013, the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries (Ed Vaizey) informed us that the Government had succeeded in securing a reduction in the budget of the programme (down from €229 million in the Commission's original proposal to €185 million)[...].'⁵⁸

Attempts by the European Parliament to prevent the cut in funding, which include the Parliament resolution of 23 October 2012 on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020,⁵⁹ as well as the Report of 12 December 2012 on the proposal for a Council regulation regarding the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 (Rapporteur: Hannu Takkula)⁶⁰ adopted by the CULT Committee, remained fruitless.

The reduction in budget for the EFC Programme 2014-2020 was approved in Council, although the mid-term report of the previous programme found that 'removing or reducing the level of funding would impact the scale of activities and numbers of participants, but it would also affect the international dimension of activities, with less networking and travel. Stakeholders suggest that of all the different types of activity, civil society projects would be least likely to continue if funding under Europe for Citizens was withdrawn or reduced.'⁶¹

The mid-term report of the EFC Programme 2007-2013 reads further: 'only a very small number of respondents said that their activities would cease completely, suggesting that the majority of activities would be likely to continue, albeit on a reduced scale, with fewer participants, or with a more limited geographical reach. Six percent said their activities would continue unchanged with significant numbers saying they would seek to obtain replacement funding, would subsidise activities themselves or ask their members or participants for larger contributions.'⁶²

2.4. Programme management

The EFC programme 2014-2020 is implemented by the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME – previously DG COMM) of the European Commission and directly managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

⁵⁷ House of Commons – European Scrutiny Committee, Twenty-fifth Report of Session 2013-14 (HC 83-xxii), pp. 5-6.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁹ See European Parliament, resolution of 23 October 2012 in the interests of achieving a positive outcome of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 approval procedure, P7_TA(2012)0360.

⁶⁰ European Parliament Report of 12 December 2012 on the proposal for a Council regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme 'Europe for Citizens' (Rapporteur: Hannu Takkula), A7-0424/2012.

⁶¹ Ecorys, Interim Evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-13 – Final Report prepared for the European Commission (DG COMM), 2010, p. 83.

⁶² Ibid., p. 83.

DG HOME is in charge of the development and smooth running of the EFC Programme. DG HOME also manages the budget and defines objectives, strategies and priority areas of action for the programme, including, targets and criteria, on an ongoing basis, after consultation of the Programme Committee. EACEA is responsible for the implementation of the majority of activities of the Programme. EACEA is responsible for the management of the complete life cycle of these projects, including drawing up calls for proposals, selecting projects and signing grant decisions/agreements, financial management, monitoring of projects, communication with beneficiaries, and on the spot controls.⁶³

The programme will develop the principle of multi-annual partnerships based on agreed objectives, building on the analysis of the results achieved, in order to ensure mutual benefits for both civil society and the Union. It is indicated that 'in general, preference is given to grants for projects irrespective of their size but with a high impact, in particular those which are directly linked to Union policies with a view to encouraging participation in the shaping of the Union political agenda. As far as possible geographical balance will be taken into account.'⁶⁴ DG HOME and EACEA jointly decide on the award of action and operating grants according to the criteria specified in the programme guide of the EFC Programme (see selection of projects below).⁶⁵

In accordance with Article 11(2) TEU and Article 10 of the Regulation establishing the EFC Programme 2014-2020, a 'civil dialogue group' was established (formerly 'structured dialogue group').⁶⁶ The group's tasks are:

- to hold a regular dialogue on all matters relating to the Europe for Citizens programme, including 'Remembrance' and 'Democratic and civic engagement', and to its implementation;
- to bring about exchanges of experiences and good practices in those fields;
- to contribute to the dissemination of the programme's results;
- to contribute to the preparation and implementation of any events or activities organised under the Europe for Citizens programme;
- to monitor and discuss policy developments in related fields.

Two meetings of the group are envisaged per year, depending notably on the Europe for Citizens programme agenda, and on the European political agenda, including the annual priorities of the EU. The group is composed of the following organisations:

- Organisations which have been selected to receive an operating grant under the
- 'Europe for Citizens' Programme 2014-20, under Strand 1 'Remembrance' and under Strand 2 'Democratic engagement and civic participation';

⁶³ See European Commission/EACEA, Programme Guide for the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 (version valid as from January 2014), p. 6 and European Commission, EACEA Annual Work Programme 2014, p. 53.

⁶⁴ See Annex to Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 establishing the EFC Programme 2014-2020, under point II on Programme Management.

⁶⁵ See European Commission/EACEA, Programme Guide for the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 (version valid as from January 2014).

⁶⁶ See European Commission, [Framework for civil dialogue in matters covered by the 'Europe for Citizens' Programme 2014-2020](#).

- Organisations which have received an operating grant under the former 'Europe for Citizens' Programme 2007-13 and have expressed their continued interest in taking part in the dialogue;
- Some organisations/think tanks which have expressed an interest in the Europe for Citizens programme and/or work in this policy area – but not necessarily supported by the programme.

The Commission established Europe for Citizens Contact Points⁶⁷ in the Member States with a view to more effective dissemination of information on the EFC Programme to stakeholders and to provide them with practical guidance regarding programme implementation, activities and funding opportunities.

2.5. Selection of projects

Applications for the EFC Programme must comply with criteria relating to eligibility (applicants and partners, project nature and dimension, and application), exclusion, selection (financial and operational capacity) and award criteria. The award criteria allow the evaluation committee (composed of Commission and EACEA officials) to assess the quality of the applications in relation to the objectives of the EFC Programme.

The award criteria are the following:

% of points available	
30%	Consistency with the objectives of the programme and programme strand
35%	Quality of the project activity plan
15%	Dissemination
20%	Impact and citizen involvement

For more detail, see Programme Guide of EFC Programme 2014-2020, pp. 15-16.

Most emphasis is given to the quality of the activity plan of the project as well as the consistency, with the objective of the EFC Programme and programme strand (65% together). In contrast, impact and citizen involvement and dissemination jointly are attributed less weight (35%).

⁶⁷ See [EU citizenship portal website for the EFC Programme Contact Points](#).

European Remembrance in Action

The European Remembrance Action supports initiatives that reflect on the causes of European totalitarian regimes, aiming at contributing to a better understanding of the EU, its history, diversity, and the strengthening of EU values. The European Commission broadened the scope of the 'European Remembrance' strand so that it is now designed to commemorate victims of all European totalitarian regimes.

One flagship project selected for funding in 2015 is 'Mobilising Society against Genocide Denial, Racism and Anti-Semitism in Europe' by EGAM (the European Grassroots Anti-Racist Movement), which tackles the current rise in xenophobic and genocide denial discourses. The project seeks to educate citizens on histories that were discredited, denied or marginalised in contemporary European societies, including the Holocaust, and the Roma, Armenian, and Srebrenica genocides. The project will bring together 17 NGOs from 14 European countries to help raise awareness and promote a more inclusive Europe.

Source: European Commission and EACEA, Connexion on European Remembrance

2.6. Rules of implementation, monitoring and evaluation

The Commission is in charge of implementing the EFC Programme (Article 8 of the Regulation) and shall for this purpose adopt the annual work programmes in line with the advisory procedures. The annual work programme shall set out the objectives pursued, the expected results, the method of implementation and the total amount of the financing plan. In addition, the annual work programmes shall contain a description of the actions to be financed, an indication of the amount allocated to each action and an indicative implementation timetable. In relation to grants, the annual work programmes shall include the priorities, the essential evaluation criteria, and the maximum rate of co-financing.

Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 establishing the EFC Programme 2014-2020 specifies rules concerning monitoring and evaluation in its Article 15. The Commission shall ensure that the programme is regularly monitored against its objectives using performance related indicators (see also Annex to Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014, Section III on monitoring). It is further laid down that the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament, the Council, the EESC and the CoR:

- by 31 December 2017, an interim evaluation report on the results obtained and on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the programme;
- by 31 December 2018, a communication on the continuation of the programme;
- by 1 July 2023, an ex-post evaluation report.

The performance-related indicators for the first specific objective (to raise awareness of remembrance, the common history and values of the Union and the Union's aim, namely

to promote peace, the values of the Union and the well-being of its peoples, by stimulating debate, reflection and the development of networks) are:

- the number of participants who are directly involved;
- the number of persons indirectly reached by the programme;
- the number of projects;
- the quality of the project applications and the degree to which the results of selected projects can be further used/transferred;
- the percentage of first time applicants.

The performance-related indicators for the second specific objective (to encourage the democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level, by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy-making process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level) are:

- the number of participants who are directly involved;
- the number of persons indirectly reached by the programme;
- the number of participating organisations;
- the perception of the Union and its institutions by the beneficiaries;
- the quality of project applications;
- the percentage of first time applicants;
- the number of transnational partnerships including different types of stakeholders;
- the number of networks of twinned towns;
- the number and quality of policy initiatives following-up on activities supported by the programme at the local or European level;
- the geographical coverage of the activities.

On 2 May 2016, the Commission published an evaluation roadmap for the mid-term evaluation of the EFC Programme 2014-2020.⁶⁸ Next to elaborating on the subject, scope and evidence base of the mid-term evaluation, the roadmap specifies that the Commission will launch a public consultation, which will feed into the evaluation.

3. The European Parliament's role and position

Due to the choice of the legal basis of the Regulation on the EFC Programme 2014-2020, the European Parliament's official role and involvement in the legislative process of the current programme has been limited. This does not mean, however, that the Parliament's requests have not been taken into account. For instance, as requested, the remembrance part of the programme was strengthened, citizen access to the programme was improved and greater importance given to geographical balance in the allocation of projects.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ European Commission, [Evaluation Roadmap: Mid-term evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020](#), 2 May 2016.

⁶⁹ See European Parliament Report of 12 December 2012 on the proposal for a Council regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme 'Europe for Citizens' (Rapporteur: Hannu Takkula), A7-0424/2012.

Nevertheless, the fact that the European Parliament was not fully involved in the legislative design of the EFC Programme 2014-2020 under the ordinary legislative procedure is remarkable for at least two reasons:

- first, the European Parliament is the only directly elected EU institution currently representing about 508 million inhabitants and covering a territory of more than four million km². Excluding the European Parliament in its role as EU co-legislator from the legislative design of the EFC Programme seems somewhat contradictory. The EFC Programme was specifically created with the objective of encouraging the engagement of citizens and organisations in cross-border activities, increasing citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity. It raises questions as to why an EU, which genuinely aims to reach out to its citizens with such a unique funding programme, has not fully involved Parliament in the law-making process;
- second, the fact that the EFC Programme 2007-2013 had a legal basis allowing for full participation of the European Parliament demonstrates that developing the programme on the basis of the ordinary legislative procedure had earlier been considered possible and feasible. As indicated above, the Commission should have provided some explanations regarding the sudden change of the legal basis for the EFC Programme 2014-2020.

The 'virtuous codecision procedure'⁷⁰ (meaning Parliament participates in the legislative process **as if** the ordinary legislative procedure applied, without, however, actually having it in place) can certainly not stand as a precedent and should be considered as an exceptional once- only solution.

In January 2016, the European Parliament called in a resolution for 'renewed attention to be paid to the promotion of a solidarity-based and intercultural society, especially among young people, through the implementation of the Europe for Citizens Programme, using adequate funding to enable the fulfilment of its objective of building a more coherent and inclusive society and fostering an active citizenship open to the world, respectful of cultural diversity and based on the common values of the EU.'⁷¹

In this context, Parliament reaffirms the special strength of the EFC Programme, namely the capacity to promote a solidarity-based and intercultural society in Europe, particularly among young people.

4. The EFC Programme 2014-2020: implementation to date

The EFC Programme 2014-2020 runs for the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020. Since Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 was only adopted on 14 April 2014, we are obviously at an early stage of the implementation of the EFC Programme.

⁷⁰ M.J. Prutsch, [Europe for Citizens \(2014-2020\)](#), European Parliament, Policy Department B, September 2012, p. 27.

⁷¹ European Parliament, resolution of 19 January 2016 on the role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values (2015/2139(INI)), P8_TA(2016)0005, para. 24.

However, this section offers some statistical data regarding the Programme for 2014 and 2015, as well as an initial assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the current Europe for Citizens Programme.

4.1. Statistical data

4.1.1. Kicking-off: 2014

According to the EACEA 2014 Annual Activity Report, 412 applications were selected for grants in 2014, with an average success rate of only 20%.⁷² The 412 projects selected for funding concerned: 252 town twinning citizens meetings; 36 remembrance projects; 35 networks of twinned towns; 29 civil society projects. Under Strand 1, six projects were selected for structural support for think tanks and organisation at European level (framework partnerships), whereas 29 projects were selected for this category under Strand 2. By contrast, under Strand 3 ('Valorisation') 25 projects on information structures in Member States and participating countries were selected for funding. None of the applications were ineligible. The success rate of projects differed significantly: while 38% of the town twinning citizens meetings were selected, only 5% of the civil society projects were granted funding under Strand 2.⁷³

The selection process (period from submission deadline to the award decision) took approximately two months, while the total time from the award decision to the time to contract was about three months and ten days. Pre-financing payments were carried out in less than five days.⁷⁴

The year 2014 was considered as 'exceptional' because of the delayed start of the EFC Programme 2014-2020. The deadlines for project submissions for town twinning, networks of twinned towns and remembrance were postponed three months to 4 June 2014. The deadline for project submissions for civil society projects was set at 1 September 2014. According to the annual report, such changes were widely advertised to programme stakeholders.⁷⁵

As a result of the reduced funding, 24.3% fewer projects were supported in 2014 than under the previous EFC Programme in 2013, although the late start of the Programme in 2014 must be taken into account. In the same vein, dissemination activities in 2014 were reduced to a minimum.⁷⁶ The programme was implemented in 31 eligible participating countries (28 EU Member States as well as Montenegro, Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Generally speaking, the geographical spread of projects was enhanced in 2014, although the town twinning measure was identified as lagging behind in this respect. According to EACEA, the projects were more structured and they had a

⁷² European Commission, EACEA 2014 Annual Activity Report, Ref. Ares(2015)1413559, 31 March 2015, pp. 35-36.

⁷³ Ibid., see table p. 35.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

⁷⁵ European Commission, EACEA 2014 Annual Activity Report, Ref. Ares(2015)1413559, 31 March 2015, p. 36.

⁷⁶ Information provided by DG HOME, European Commission.

stronger thematic focus. At national level, 25 Europe for Citizens Contact Points were operational in 2014. The Commission organised two civil dialogue meetings with programme stakeholders in June and December, in Brussels and Rome respectively, that year.⁷⁷

4.1.2. Well underway: 2015

Implementation of the EFC Programme in 2015 was considered more stable than in the previous year. According to EACEA, cooperation between DG HOME and EACEA was consolidated, allowing for the smooth management of the programme. In 2015, the number of applications increased by 43% in comparison to 2014. Out of 2 791 applications submitted in 2015, a total of 408 projects was selected for funding, resulting in an average **success rate of about 15%**.⁷⁸ As anticipated in the EACEA 2014 Annual Activity Report, the decrease in payment appropriations led to a reduction of the pre-financing rate.⁷⁹

In 2015, the 408 projects selected for grants concerned: 252 town twinning citizens meetings; 33 remembrance projects; 32 networks of twinned towns; 27 civil society projects. Under Strand 1, six projects were selected for structural support for think tanks and organisation at European level (framework partnerships). Under Strand 2, 31 projects were selected for this category. 27 projects on information structures in Member States and participating countries were selected for funding under Strand 3 ('Valorisation'). Four applications were ineligible.⁸⁰

Pre-financing payments were executed in 2015 in an average of eight days, and final payments in approximately 30 days; the time to the decision amounted to an average of about two months and ten days. Approximately 2 000 organisations were directly involved in the EFC Programme in 2015, and 50% of the projects concentrated on topics such as migration, social inclusion and integration policies.⁸¹

With the exception of Estonia, all Member States were project beneficiaries in 2015. Hungary had the greatest number of applications selected (17%) followed by Slovakia (13%) and Italy and Germany (11%). Projects have an average of eight partners, with almost 30% of the partners being Eastern European. Balkan countries which signed an international agreement with DG HOME were eligible for project funding, and could in addition participate in a restricted call for operating grants in 2015. Two organisations, one Serbian and one Macedonian, were awarded operating grants for the period 2015-2017.⁸² In 2015, the programme was implemented in 33 eligible participating countries (28 EU Member States as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Two events were organised, including 'Holocaust Remembrance Day 2015' in January and the 'European Remembrance

⁷⁷ Information provided by DG HOME, European Commission and EACEA.

⁷⁸ Information provided by EACEA.

⁷⁹ European Commission, EACEA 2014 Annual Activity Report, Ref. Ares(2015)1413559, 31 March 2015, p. 37.

⁸⁰ Information provided by EACEA.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Networking Meeting in April 2015. Some 29 Europe for Citizens Contact Points provided guidance with regard to the programme at national level. One civil society meeting was organised in June 2015 in Brussels.⁸³

As indicated, the financial envelope for EFC Programme 2014-2020 is €185 468 000 (commitments), which amounts to 0.0171% of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework.⁸⁴ Table 1 below provides an overview of the EFC Programme budget in terms of commitments and payments for the years 2014 to 2016.

Table 1 – Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 Budget (in EUR)

	Outturn 2014	Appropriations 2015	Appropriations 2016
Commitments	23 393 356.95	21 894 000	22 977 000
Payments	12 610 600.00	11 355 206	18 650 000

Source: adopted EU budget for the financial year 2016, OJ L48 of 24 February 2016, see budget line: 18 04 01 01, former budget line: 16 02 01

Tables 2 and 3 below give an overview on the number of the selected projects and the total amounts awarded under EFC Programme in the first two years of operation.

Table 2 – Number of projects granted (total amount awarded)

	2014	2015
Strand 1: European remembrance	36 (€3 104 000)	33 (€3 021 560)
Strand 2: Town twinning citizens meetings (Rounds 1 and 2)	252 (€3 890 000)	252 (€4 138 000)
Strand 2: Networks of towns (Rounds 1 and 2)	35 (€4 522 000)	32 (€4 067 500)
Strand 2: Civil society projects	29 (€3 593 250)	27 (€3 322 750)
Total	352 (€15 109 250)	344 (€14 549 810)

Source: EACEA and DG HOME, European Commission

⁸³ Information provided by DG HOME, European Commission.

⁸⁴ See G. Sgueo, [Europe for Citizens \(2014-2020\)](#), EPRS Briefing - How the EU budget is spent, July 2015.

Table 3 – Number of think tanks and civil society organisations at European level supported (total amount awarded for multi-annual operating grants for the years 2014-2017)

	2014	2015
Structural support for Strand 1	6 (€1 213 966)	6 (€1 213 466)
Structural support for Strand 2	29 (€5 474 702)	31 (€5 627 984)
Total structural support for Strands 1 and 2	35 (€6 688 668)	37 (€6 841 450)

Source: EACEA and DG HOME, European Commission

4.2. Strengths and weaknesses

4.2.1. Initial overall assessment

While still being in the early stages of implementation and despite a number of challenges, the EFC Programme 2014-2020 is likely to be a unique and successful EU-funded programme, engaging citizens and building on the achievements of its predecessors. Taking stock of the first two years of the current programme leads to the conclusion that its implementation and management is sound and stable. The projects selected for funding appear to respond to the principal concerns of citizens, providing room for diversity, while also taking into account the European Commission's priorities.

The selected projects mainly deal with topics relating to migration, social inclusion and intercultural issues and they are capable of bridging local and European dimensions. Depending on the project in question, the type and intensity of the follow-up activities differ. Established partnerships in projects may lead to future and/or follow-up cooperation, contributing to creating synergies at local, national and European level.

As required by the programme, European remembrance projects now appear to be designed in a more forward-looking way, with the objective of linking past and present. It seems that the recommendations of the evaluation of the EFC Programme 2007-2013 have, to a large extent, been taken into account in view of designing the current programme.

4.2.2. Reduced funding

The considerable cut from the envisaged €229 million in the Commission's original proposal down to €185.5 million in the final Regulation (Article 12) is one of the main challenges to be tackled. The reduced funding has undoubtedly entailed serious consequences for the functioning of the EFC Programme as a whole. According to EACEA, there has been some streamlining, which was effective in the implementation of the programme.

The number of staff working on the EFC Programme was reduced from 24 to 21 persons at EACEA. In 2015, approximately 2 800 applications were submitted. The average success rate for projects in 2014 was merely 20%, and even lower in 2015, at 15%. These figures demonstrate how competitive participation in the EFC Programme has become, although the exceptional circumstances prevailing in 2014 should be borne in mind. EACEA confirmed that selection was difficult, due to the high overall quality of the projects. The reduced funding inevitably led to the rejection of a number of very good initiatives.

4.2.3. New structure

The new structure, from a rather broad set-up that includes four general actions (Active Citizens in Europe; Active Civil Society in Europe; Together for Europe; and Active European Remembrance), to a more streamlined two-strand programme focusing on 'European remembrance' and 'democratic engagement and civic participation', appears reasonable. Indeed, this streamlining allows for a narrower, but more focused scope, as suggested in the evaluation.

In addition, the multiannual priorities allow for more stability and visibility. Whether, and to what extent, the new structure has enabled the programme's limited funding to be deployed more strategically remains to be seen. Today, the large majority of projects selected are 'small projects' (with funding under €60 000). An initial assessment seems to suggest that the current projects concentrate more on citizen driven activities.

The EFC Programme stipulates that approximately 20% of the total budget should be devoted to Strand 1 and approximately 60% of the total budget to Strand 2. The figures from 2014 and 2015 reveal that this allocation has not been entirely upheld (with the budget execution for Strand 1 being under the 20% mark). Strand 1 on 'European remembrance' has thus received less funding than foreseen, although the allocation as indicated refers to the entire programme, running from 2014 to 2020.

4.2.4. Delayed start in 2014

Another challenge was the delayed EFC Programme start in mid-2014. EACEA, in collaboration with the Commission, managed to swiftly adapt to such changes by, in particular, postponing submission deadlines and informing programme stakeholders widely, through the EACEA website.

4.2.5. Application and selection process, payment transfers

The application process was considerably improved with applicants completing a digitalised eForm in one of the EU's 23 working languages. The paperless application is easier and faster to handle for applicants as well as for the Commission and EACEA. This new application process has, moreover, significantly reduced the number of ineligible applications.

In addition, the project selection process was expedited. This concerns both the award decision and the time period until the contract is prepared. Likewise, pre-financing and

regular payments are transferred to the beneficiaries much faster, allowing for projects to start without delay due to cash flow problems.

4.2.6. Geographical balance

Overall, the geographical balance of the current EFC Programme has been improved. The programme was implemented in 31 eligible participating countries in 2014 and in 33 eligible participating countries in 2015.

4.2.7. Cooperation between EACEA and DG HOME

EACEA and DG HOME consider their cooperation to be strong. Following the structural reorganisation under the Juncker Commission, the EFC Programme was transferred from DG COMM to DG HOME, which is led by Commissioner Avramopoulous, responsible for migration, home affairs and citizenship as of 1 January 2015.

However, the question arises as to whether the transfer proceeded as smoothly as described. To recall, the 'citizenship' portfolio was originally envisaged to be in the hands of the Hungarian Commissioner, Tibor Navracsics – now in charge of education, culture, youth and sport. This move was, however, rejected by the European Parliament's CULT Committee, and the Juncker Commission had to reshuffle portfolios. It is understandable that the Commissioner responsible for citizenship (as well as for migration and home affairs) would be entrusted with the EFC Programme. However, the programme also promotes civic education and remembrance in Europe, considering the programme's general objectives (to contribute to citizens' understanding of the Union, its history and diversity; to foster European citizenship; and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level).

4.2.8. Monitoring and evaluation

In terms of monitoring and evaluation (Article 15), the Commission is bound to submit an interim evaluation on programme implementation in 2017, a communication on the continuation of the programme in 2018, and an ex-post evaluation in 2023.

In addition, it is positive to note that (as suggested in the evaluation of the previous EFC Programme) performance-related indicators have been integrated into Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 (see Article 15 and Section III on monitoring). These indicators will help to provide important quantitative and qualitative information on the evaluation and continuation of the programme. The performance-related indicators concern, inter alia, the programme results, the number and quality of projects, applicants and participants, geographical coverage, and partnerships, as well as beneficiaries' perception of the EU and its institutions.

5. Preliminary findings and recommendations

From the initial experiences of two years of running, it seems that the EFC Programme 2014-2020 is likely to tie in with previous successes providing for a unique opportunity to engage citizens in Europe and beyond. It appears that the implementation of the

programme is on track and its management stable in the hands of EACEA and DG HOME.

The fact that many projects focus on issues such as migration, social inclusion and interculturality corresponds to the realities and challenges European societies are confronted with today.

According to EACEA, 2 000 organisations in Europe are directly involved in the projects granted and the Programme reaches approximately one million citizens directly and indirectly.

As stressed by the European Parliament, the use of **adequate** funding is necessary to attain the programme's objectives. However, the substantial reduction in funding represents a major challenge with serious consequences for the functioning of the EFC Programme as a whole.

Considering the current political climate, in which an increasing number of citizens question the foundations of the EU, decisive action is indispensable. It is for this reason that the reduction in funding for the EFC Programme is a serious handicap to successful implementation: to reiterate, the budget for the current EFC Programme is €185 468 000 (down from €215 000 000 under the previous programme), which amounts to merely 0.0171% of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework.

The rise in the number of applications shows that there is a clear need for the EFC Programme, making it distinct from other funding programmes. In 2015, approximately 2 800 applications were submitted, out of which 408 projects were selected for funding. Participation in the EFC Programme has thus become very competitive. EACEA confirmed that the selection has been difficult due to the high overall quality of the projects.

The new structure of the EFC Programme, based on two strands with a more focused scope, and the multiannual priorities, allow for more stability and visibility. It appears that projects submitted during the last two years were more structured and had a stronger thematic focus. The projects selected for funding seem to respond to the principal concerns of citizens, providing room for diversity, while also taking into account the European Commission's priorities.

The application and selection processes have been improved and expedited, respectively. Beneficiaries received pre-financing payments, and faster regular payments for projects. EACEA, together with the Commission, managed to adjust to the programme's delayed start in mid-2014.

The selection of projects seems well-balanced geographically: all Member States except one were project beneficiaries in 2015. The largest number of applications selected were from Hungary (17%), followed by Slovakia (13%), and Italy and Germany (11%). In addition, a Serbian and a Macedonian project have been selected for operating grants for the period 2015-2017.

Finally, it is encouraging to note that the Commission has identified and integrated performance-related indicators, which are useful for obtaining crucial information to assess the implementation and continuation of the EFC Programme. The Commission plans to carry out an interim evaluation at the end of 2017, as well as an ex-post evaluation of the programme in 2023.

In conclusion, the following recommendations regarding the EFC Programme can be made:

- in light of the EU institutions' duties under Article 11 TEU and 20 TFEU, the funding of the EFC Programme should be considerably increased, with a view to attaining the programme's objectives and guaranteeing its smooth functioning and proper implementation.
- the budget should be allocated as stipulated in Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014, meaning approximately 20% of the total budget should be devoted to Strand 1; approximately 60% of the total budget to Strand 2; approximately 10% of the total budget of the programme should be devoted to horizontal action (valorisation); and approximately 10% of the total budget of the programme should be allocated to programme management.
- guarantees should be sought that funding envisaged for the EFC Programme is actually attributed to and used for EFC Programme objectives and implementation.

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The Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 is an EU-funded programme that aims at contributing to a better understanding of the EU among citizens, as well as promoting European remembrance and civic participation in Europe. This programme is the third of its kind, following the 2004-2006 Active European Citizenship programme and the 2007-2013 Europe for Citizens Programme.

As the current programme underwent a number of changes and adjustments, including a reduction in funding, a first examination of its functioning and implementation seems appropriate. Against this background, this European Implementation Assessment therefore seeks to provide an initial assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020 under the new structure, and presents some preliminary findings and recommendations in this context.

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