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“Europe for citizens”

A mixed outlook

The European Parliament adopted on 19 November 2013 the new “Europe for Citizens” programme, aimed at improving EU citizens' knowledge of the EU and its history. The programme will support activities such as public conferences, targeted at fostering remembrance of the EU's past and increasing debate and citizens' interest and involvement with EU issues at EU level. However, although Greens support and will vote in favour of the programme, the group believes that the budget is too small to respond to the challenges faced by the European Union. The aim of the new programme is to enable citizens to contribute to EU policy making, in fostering a better understanding of the Union’s functioning, its history and diversity. The ultimate goal is to make citizens aware of their common European identity. The regulation foresees two strands of actions: "European remembrance" and "Democratic engagement and civic participation". The Greens regret however that “Europe for Citizens” has seen a 26 per cent decrease, or 30 million euros, compared to the last programme. It is clearly a victim of austerity imposed on Member States these past years. This is a very negative signal for local actors with regards to the importance the EU gives to democratic participation and European citizenship.

Structure of the Programme

Remembrance will support activities encouraging reflection on European cultural diversity and common values, reflection on the causes of totalitarian regimes in Europe's modern history and commemoration of the victims. One fifth of the budget should be reserved for this. Democratic engagement will support activities covering civic participation, giving priority to initiatives and projects linking up to the EU’s political agenda. Sixty per cent of the budget is allocated to this strand. Union Support will be given through operating grants or action grants.

Scope

Even if the result is too modest in terms of budget and ambition it seems crucial to Greens to safeguard such a possibility for citizens to get involved (and receive direct support) in the Unions' action. **Helga Trüpel**, vice-president of the Committee on Culture and Education explained: *“The programme is extremely valuable as it allows for the citizens to engage across borders and to play an active role in the construction of an integrated Europe. It fosters tolerance and intercultural dialogue and a truly European citizenship and will help us to bridge the gap between the citizens and the EU institutions which are often seen as alien and detached.”* In the section on "European remembrance", the Greens wanted to expand the text relating to crimes of colonialism. Following the vote, Greens/EFA MEP and Member of the Committee on

Culture and Education, **Malika Benarab-Attou**, said: *"I regret that the history of colonialism is not explicitly stated in the chapter on European remembrance, which focuses almost entirely on totalitarian regimes. The EU must play a part in the acknowledgment of colonialism and must take responsibility."*

Procedure for Parliament

The Commission proposed the text under the "consent" procedure, which means that contrary to the other regulations - "Creative Europe" or "Erasmus+" - the European Parliament can only say "yes" or "no" and cannot add any amendment or negotiate the text. This makes no sense for the Greens. Greens/EFA MEP and Member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee, **Gerald Häfner**, said: *"It is intolerable that MEPs were not given the opportunity to express themselves under the ordinary legislative procedure (codecision) on the only programme devoted to citizens."* Even if the reduction to a minimum of actions and a downsized budget make this programme a small attempt at what a real policy for citizens could be, the Greens do agree on its continuation and want to work on another legal basis for issues related to European citizens.

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Responsible MEPs



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