Priorities of the programme for 2016

Priorities

Applicants are encouraged to develop projects in line with general and specific objectives of the Europe for Citizens programme while focusing on specific priorities defined by the European Commission after consultation of the programme stakeholders represented in the civil dialogue group and of the programme committee.

Until now, these priorities were changing annually. From 2016 on, they will become multi-annual and apply throughout the remaining period of the programme (2016-2020) so that applicants have more time to plan and prepare their projects. This is without prejudice to the possibility for the European Commission to review, adapt and/or modify the list of priorities should the need arise, at any moment, after consulting the programme stakeholders represented in the civil dialogue group and the programme committee.

For the 2016-2020 period, priorities have been designed to stimulate debates on dates of European significance and topics having a strong resonance in present times (for the European Remembrance strand) or anchored in the social, economic and political reality of the European Union (for the Democratic engagement and civic participation strand). Citizens are invited to take part in these reflections and debates through projects respecting the general features of the Programme (equal access, transnationality and local dimension, intercultural dialogue and promotion of volunteering) or through their active engagement in organisations participating in the Europe for Citizens programme.

A distinction has to be made between:
- specific priorities for "European remembrance" (strand 1);
- specific priorities for "Democratic engagement and civic participation" (strand 2).

1. *Specific priorities for European Remembrance (Strand 1)*

1.1 *Commemorations of major historical turning points in recent European history*

One of the Europe for Citizens programme's goals is to create opportunities for a debate on European history beyond national perspectives[1].

Through its Strand 1 (European Remembrance), the Programme aims to foster a common culture of remembrance and mutual understanding between citizens from different EU Member States, notably by supporting projects that reflect on major historical turning points in Europe's 20th century and on their meaning / consequences for Europe of today.

During the 2016-2020 period, the following commemorations will be eligible for projects, depending on the year of application:

Year of application	Eligible commemorations
2016	**1936** Beginning of the Spanish Civil War **1956** Political and social mobilisation in central Europe

---

[1]   COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) No 390/2014 of 14 April 2014 establishing the 'Europe for Citizens' programme for the period 2014-2020 (OJ L 115 of 17.4.2014, page 3).

	1991 Beginning of the Yugoslav Wars **1951** Adoption of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in relation with the post WWII refugee situation in Europe
2017	**1917** The social and political revolutions, the fall of empires and their impact on Europe's political and historical landscape **1957** The Treaty of Rome and the beginning of European Economic Community
2018	**1918** The end of the WWI – the rise of nation states and the failure to create a European cooperation and peaceful coexistence **1938/1939** Beginning of WWII **1948** Beginning of the Cold War **1948** The Hague Congress and the integration of Europe **1968** Protest and civil rights movements, invasion to Czechoslovakia, student protests and anti-Semitic campaign in Poland
2019	**1979** European Parliament elections – also 40 years since the first directly elected EP in 1979 **1989** Democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe and the fall of the Berlin wall **2004** 15 years of EU enlargement into central and Eastern Europe
2020	**1950** Robert Schuman Declaration **1990** German reunification **2000** Proclamation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

1.2 Civil society and civic participation under totalitarian regimes

Under totalitarian regimes, democratic concepts such as "civil society", "social movement", "engagement", "involvement", "Constitution", "freedom" and "democracy" were completely emptied of any substance. A "Popular Democracy" was all but "popular" and "democratic", for example. Political leaders were elected with plebiscitary results (more than 80%), without any real opposition.

Political demonstrations, electoral campaigns, public gatherings and debates were only travesties of democratic rituals. They were intended to legitimize the power in place and were generally neither spontaneous nor authentic, but made possible by coercion. They were used to regiment people and control them, as well as to endorse discretionary political orientations. One of the most significant act of democratic engagement, which is membership in a political party, was also diverted from its natural purpose (i.e. to participate in and influence public life); it usually served to prove loyalty toward a monolithic party, compliance with official truth, and was mainly utilised to get access to certain positions or services. Public information was also monopolised and distorted by official agencies without any independent counterbalance.

By contrast, authentic social movements emanating from the civil society were often ostracised, threatened or repressed, because they were considered unfaithful, treacherous or socially dangerous by the totalitarian power. They had to hide, resist or compromise. Any diverging view publically expressed was treated as "dissidence". Free speech was forbidden. Political decisions were to be applied without any serious discussion or deliberation. In a certain way, civil society and democratic movements were absorbed and exploited by the one-party system which characterised totalitarian regimes.

Relying on totalitarian experiences, applicants shall develop a reflection on the misuses and hijacks of democratic rituals, notably by means of propaganda and official medias. They will focus on the differences between a fake and a real democracy, and underline the benefits of a lively, strong and independent civil society.

The objective is to show that civil society organisations are an indispensable link between citizens and authorities; that they play indeed an important role in democratic regimes to reach out to citizens and make their concerns known and relayed at the political level.

Through their projects, applicants will also reflect on the significance of contemporary democratic achievements such as rule of law, public liberties, civic rights, and underline the fragility of civic rights (freedom of speech, right to vote…) without strong counterbalances. The aim is also to debate on the concrete ways and mechanisms by which public liberties and civic rights can be preserved and civil dialogue ensured at EU and national levels.

1.3   *Ostracism and loss of citizenship under totalitarian regimes: drawing the lessons for today*

20th century's totalitarianisms deprived some of their citizens from their basic rights to the point of excluding them from the society: Jews under Nazi regime; political "deviants" under Communist regimes. Those citizens were gradually prevented from debating, voting, participating in public affairs, working, residing and moving freely, accessing public goods because of their origins, beliefs or opinions.

Ostracism was used by totalitarian regimes as a way of neutralizing people thought to be a threat and as a means for strengthening their hold on the rest of the population through terror. Justified by misleading ideologies and supported by a deceptive propaganda, unfair legislations as well as repressive structures, it enabled those regimes to hide mass murders or to make potential opponents disappear.

Because of their deadly consequences, past processes of ostracism should be analysed and debated so as to inform the present. Through their projects, applicants shall address the following themes and questions: When can we consider that a category of the population is being ostracised? How to recognise a "scapegoat" and to deconstruct the discourse leading to its seclusion and marginalisation? How can we cope with political discourses that use fears, prejudices and hatred against certain categories of the population, and how can we build counter-narratives? How to struggle against hate speech propagated through social Medias and internet? What are the educational tools and legal instruments at EU and national levels to fight racism and xenophobia (such as anti-Semitism, anti-Roma, anti-Muslim feelings etc.), as well as homophobia and ostracism against other minorities?

1.4   *Democratic transition and accession to the European Union*

For many Member States that experienced in their recent history a transition to democracy, accession to the European Union played an important role in supporting and consolidating

democratisation. For example, through the system of "democratic conditionality", the pre-membership encouraged political changes and structural reforms, strengthened administrative capacity and improved minority protections.

Projects funded under the Europe for Citizens programme shall analyse how the EU accession perspective influenced democratic standards and practises of previous dictatorships or authoritarian regimes. They shall also reflect on the role of EU membership in the process of democratic transition. The projects will particularly focus on historical events, turning-points or steps which characterized this slow process of changes, and underline in what ways they contributed to overcoming the past, to achieving the end goal of "returning to Europe", and to building the future. The projects shall highlight what were the key drivers of this process, and shall underline the difficulties met or the persisting difficulties, notably after the removal of the pre-membership conditionality and the EU accession. While taking stock of the enlargements accomplished these last decades and their results in terms of democratisation, the projects shall open the discussion on the desirability of future enlargements or on other kinds of partnerships with countries of the EU neighbourhood.

2. *Specific priorities for "Democratic engagement and civic participation" (Strand 2)*

2.1 *Understanding and Debating Euroscepticism*

Euroscepticism has gained ground in Member States to the point of redrawing political maps and disrupting traditional political divisions. The term itself refers to very diverse forms of attitudes vis-à-vis the European construction, ranging from a mere criticism of its current integration modalities (Eurocriticism) to an outright hostility toward the European Union itself (Europhobia).

Given its growing influence on political agendas within Member States and European Parliament and its broader audience among certain constituencies, Euroscepticism has become a reality that requires further examination, debate and understanding. By proposing an alternative to an "ever closer Union", it challenges the way European construction is thought, conducted and implemented from its very beginning. As a truly democratic public space, the EU should consider this political reality without any prejudice and invite EU citizens who are not completely convinced by its virtues or are disappointed by its results/current orientations to make their voice heard.

In this perspective, applicants are encouraged to design projects that reflect on the understanding of Euroscepticism and foster debates on its implications for the future of the European Union. In the same time, they are invited to explain the benefits of EU policies, acknowledge difficulties met and challenges ahead, as well as to put forward EU achievements and the cost of no Europe.

In such debates, the following themes and questions may be addressed: How can we define Euroscepticism? Is it a recent political phenomenon, exacerbated by the financial crisis, or an older trend? Why is it developing? What is Euroscepticism synonymous of? Is Euroscepticism calling into question the European integration itself or simply its current modalities? Does it represent a persisting, growing and irreversible divorce between citizens and the EU? What are the consequences of Euroscepticism on the conditions of civic participation and democratic engagement at EU and national levels? Do Eurosceptics form a homogeneous group, or can we find different types of Eurosceptics? How do they disseminate their ideas? Which factors are predictive of a strong support/opposition to the European integration (social position, attitude toward globalisation, economic interest, sense of common belonging, values, impact of political cultures, attachment to social security…)? Can the EU

have an impact on these factors? To what extent the main concerns of Eurosceptic EU citizens should be addressed and taken into account in EU policies? In what ways doing this could help making the EU closer to its citizens? What are the dangers of Euroscepticism for the European integration and its future? How to make criticism towards the EU a useful and positive driver for the European construction in the long run?

2.2   *Solidarity in times of crisis*

The notion of solidarity usually refers to a mutual support within a group unified by a community of interest or by shared values. It is closely linked to the concept of generosity, but also to those of reciprocity and responsibility.

What does solidarity mean for a political entity composed of nations-states like the European Union, especially in times of crisis? What are the legal, political, economic and even ethical limits of European solidarity?

The issue of solidarity *versus* responsibility is also increasingly raised in the context of other policy areas, such as migration.

Through their projects, applicants shall highlight and assess the existing solidary mechanisms inside the EU. They shall reflect on policy areas where such common mechanisms could be useful and developed as such. They shall also consider other possible channels of European solidarity like volunteering, donations, foundations, civil society organisations, charities, crowdfunding, etc.

In these projects, citizens will be given the opportunity to better understand and discuss the added value of EU's intervention in times of crisis when national responses seem insufficient, while underlining the counterparts/limits of such solidarity mechanisms in terms of responsibility and financial cost. They will contribute to overcoming national perceptions of the crisis, by fostering a mutual understanding of the situation, and by creating fora where common solutions can be discussed in a constructive way.

2.3   *Combatting stigmatisation of "immigrants" and building counter narratives to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding*

Nowadays, stigmatisation is regularly used by extremist or populist movements against "others", "aliens", "immigrants" or "minorities" in the current political discourse.

Building upon the electorates' high levels of unemployment and social insecurity, as well as the fear of globalisation and terrorism, "immigrants" are held responsible for all ills or presented as potential threats to the preservation of national living standards, social cohesion and internal security. Their stigmatisation happens through political propaganda, hate speech and voluntary delusive rhetoric, which amalgamate separate concepts (crisis and migration; terrorism and migration), in order to unify national communities against designated scapegoats.

Such political discourses exacerbate xenophobia, intolerance and discriminations, and threaten the cohesion of EU societies. They might result in restraining the fundamental rights of minorities, erecting new boundaries, hampering integration and mutual understanding and adopting legislations contrary to the core values on which the European Union is founded. At the same time, they could foster further marginalisation among the most vulnerable or excluded people within EU societies (underprivileged and disadvantaged populations, which

often include youngsters and people of non-EU origins), and in some circumstances even provoke radicalised behaviours.

Against this background, the Europe for Citizens programme will fund projects encouraging intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding through the participation of nationals from Member States and possibly of third-country nationals legally residing in the EU. These projects shall help overcome stereotypes about immigrants by deconstructing past and present processes of stigmatisation. They shall also promote tolerance, respect of common values and promote through counter narratives a more accurate perception of third-country nationals by EU citizens. Integration being a two way process, reflection shall also be carried out on ways to foster civic participation of third-country nationals legally residing in the EU.

2.4   *Debate on the future of Europe*

Given the fact that citizens do not necessarily consider the current European Union as a vehicle for positive change, they should be questioned about the kind of Europe they want. A long term vision and a new narrative for Europe are needed that would be more engaging for the younger generation in particular, forward-looking and positive.

This debate should of course be based on lessons learnt from history and, in particular, on concrete achievements of the European Union. But it should also offer new messages and discuss possible actions undertaken by the European Union both internally – to reinforce its social, economic and political cohesion –, and internationally – to preserve its leading role in an increasingly globalised world facing global issues.

In its Communication reporting on the 2014 European Parliament elections, the Commission stressed the importance, looking ahead to the 2019 elections, "*to identify ways of further enhancing the European dimension and the democratic legitimacy of the EU decision-making process, and to examine further, and seek to address, the reasons for the persistently low turnout in some Member States. This points to a need to identify further ways in which to foster participation in the next elections, in particular through timely support for national, regional and local awareness-raising campaigns[2]*".

In this context,, citizens should also be asked and debate about concrete ways to create a more democratic Union, so as to make them re-engage with the European project. Alongside electoral participation and other channels of representative democracy, particular attention should be paid to instruments of civic participation (such as the European Citizens Initiative) as well as to innovative channels of e-participation, such as social media and information and communication technologies.

Citizens are invited to take part in this discussion through projects or through their active engagement in organisations participating in the Europe for Citizens programme. The debate should not be limited to those already supporting the idea of the European Union, but reach out to citizens who reject or put in question the European Union and its achievements or remain indifferent.

---

[2]   http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/files/report_european_parliament_elections_2014_en.pdf, p. 17.