



**EVALUATION OF THE 2013 EUROPEAN YEAR
OF CITIZENS
*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***



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1. INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of the 2013 European Year of Citizens (EYC 2013) was commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM). It was launched after a tender procedure for evaluation services that was won by a consortium of evaluators lead by the Public Policy and Management Institute (Lithuania) in association with Euréval (France) and Occurrence (France). This executive summary provides a brief overview of the main conclusions of this evaluation.

Implementation context of the 2013 European Year of Citizens

The Decision of the European Parliament and the Council setting up the European Year of Citizens 2013¹ was adopted five weeks before it was due to start. Although a direct budget of EUR 1 million was originally allocated to fund the Year's activities, on 15 March 2013 an additional EUR 1 million² was added to increase their scope. The Commission also mobilised other sources of funding, so that a total amount of EUR 3,842,849.92 was made available from various sources for their implementation. The allocated budget was therefore significantly lower compared to previous Years³. This evaluation concludes that the European Year of Citizens was implemented with a budget that did not match the Year's ambitions as set out in the Decision. The late adoption of this Decision, as well as changing financial circumstances during the Year itself, were additional external challenges - beyond the control of DG COMM- that affected planning and implementation of the activities of the Year.

The implementation strategies and choices made by the Commission's EYC2013 team during the course of the Year were therefore coloured by these challenges and the need to make the most of the limited resources available. Fully aware of the difficult economic context and need for budgetary restraint, the Commission deliberately limited its demand for specific, additional financial means for the European Year's campaign, preferring instead to exploit synergies and use existing resources to maximum effect. It decided to focus on involving and collaborating with multipliers and partners at the EU, national, regional and local levels, and from the government, civil society and business sectors.

The evaluation showed that substantial efforts were made by the Commission to seek synergies among the stakeholders involved, which helped increase the scope and impact of the Year by creating complementarities with other EU programmes

¹ Decision No 1093/2012/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 November 2012 on the European Year of Citizens (2013)

² Commission Decision C (2013) 1409 final

³ By comparison the 2011 European of Volunteering was implemented with a total budget of EUR 14.5 million. EUR 3 million for a preparatory action targeting the European Year were available already in 2010.

and initiatives, many of which have sustainable effects beyond the end of the Year.

Five main groups of activities implemented during the 2013 European Year of Citizens were analysed during this evaluation:

- An EU-wide information and communication campaign to inform citizens about their EU rights;
- Activities implemented by civil society organisations (CSOs) through the European Year of Citizens Alliance (EYCA);
- Citizens' Dialogues implemented in various European cities in all Member States;
- The events and activities related to the topic of the Year, which were implemented at national level by various national actors (including in particular the EYC2013 National Contact Points);
- Various events and activities to promote the topic of the Year, including events fostering complementarities with other EU-level initiatives.

79% of the EYC budget were used for the implementation of the EU-wide information and communication campaign. The remaining share of the EYC2013 budget covered the costs of EYCA activities (8%), implementation of EYC2013-related presidency events (10%) and other expenses (3%).

2. CONCLUSIONS OF THE EVALUATION

The terms of reference of the evaluation provided four general evaluation questions on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the European Year. These evaluation questions were divided into narrower sub-questions, which were further operationalised through success criteria and linked with methods and tools of the evaluation. A detailed description of the evaluation methodology can be found in the final report of the evaluation. We provide hereafter a brief summary of the conclusions of this evaluation.

Relevance of the 2013 European Year of Citizens

The European Year of Citizens was chosen at a very relevant time. The effects of the financial crisis and the growing mistrust in the EU were an appropriate context to remind EU citizens about their EU rights and have them engage in the debate on the future of the EU. The topic of the 2013 European Year of Citizens was very wide compared to those of previous European Years and was open to different interpretations. The messages of the Year were meant to reach a general audience – the citizens of the EU. And the wide interpretation of the subject enabled various actors of the Year to adjust the content of their activities to fit both the topic of the Year and the needs of their target groups.

During the evaluation interviews with citizens, those who were reached by EYC2013-related communication activities gave a positive response as to the relevance of their content. Citizens have particularly welcomed the ability to be actively engaged in the debate rather than be passive receivers of information. The debate form of events and activities, which was the primary form of activity during this Year, was perceived as bringing the EU closer to its citizens.

A wide base of multipliers, such as media and civil society organisations, were mobilised during the Year in order to reach the general public. Civil society organisations, which were involved through the EYCA network, proved to be relevant multipliers for the message of the European Year. They have access to citizens and are able to initiate debates on sensitive political issues. Communication activities of the European Year were adjusted to meet the needs of the target groups from different walks of life – such as young people, older people, workers, job seekers, etc. The evaluation also provides substantial evidence that the events were able to attract new participants—people who had not necessarily been interested in EU-related issues before the European Year.

The managers of the Year did address the relevant national multipliers. But without the financial means to enable the funding of bottom-up activities related to the objectives of the Year, it was not possible to trigger sufficient involvement and contribution of these national actors. In cases where such contributions were achieved, the actors managed to adapt their activities to their countries' needs and to create synergies with other existing national initiatives/programmes.

Conclusions on the relevance of the 2013 European Year of Citizens

- The chosen portfolio of activities of the 2013 European Year of Citizens has fully covered the objectives of the Year. There were no major gaps or overlaps as regards the types of activities implemented.
- The wide topic of the Year enabled the mobilisation of a variety of partners. **Thus a wide range of relevant actors and multipliers was involved in the dissemination of the messages of the Year.** Communication activities were adjusted to meet the needs of the target groups.
- Both the information about EU rights, policies and programmes and engagement in the debate about the EU were relevant to the needs of citizens. **Citizens perceived the participative form of events and activities as a particularly relevant form of communication.** It also appeared as relevant in the specific political context. It showed the power of this chosen form of communication to influence the relevance of the message.

- Although the managers of the Year did mobilise the relevant national actors, the lack of funding for bottom-up activities did not allow for the full involvement of all relevant national multipliers in the implementation of the European Year, so not all available opportunities were able to be used to increase the relevance of the activities of the European Year of Citizens.

Effectiveness of the 2013 European Year of Citizens

The evaluation showed a range of favourable effects of the European Year on the citizens reached by its activities. Once citizens were exposed to different groups of activities of the Year, they were involved and satisfied with their experience. As a result of the campaign, the perception of citizens on the issues addressed by the Year was changed. However the evaluation also showed that the funds dedicated to the European Year did not allow sufficient scope of these effects to be reached, in particular at national level.

The evaluation showed very limited media coverage of the European Year at national level. To deal with the limited budget of the campaign, strong emphasis was placed on on-line communication and social media. A range of complementarities with other EU campaigns and initiatives was achieved, which allowed increasing the visibility of the European Year's branding. This proved to give better results than the attempts to generate media attention with limited means. This strategy maximised the scope of awareness given the limited resources.

A lot of debate events were implemented throughout the European Year of Citizens. These events proved to be effective in involving citizens in the debate on EU issues and influencing their knowledge and perceptions about the EU. Although the funded events could not reach a significant share of the EU population, they attracted substantial media coverage (both traditional and social media). These effects are linked to the sufficient and stable resources made available for the Citizens' Dialogues (apart from the European Year's own budget), which enabled press supplements and other activities supporting the media relations to be produced. The events were able to strengthen the outcomes of the communication campaign for the European Year and to affect the general population. A significant share of the national media attention to the Year was developed as a result of these events.

The EYCA was effective in fostering debate among the EU and national level CSOs on the issues of active citizenship and the rights of EU citizens. A particular novelty was the setting up of EYCA National Alliances, which enabled better involvement of the national CSOs in the debate. This increased the political significance of the policy recommendations produced during the debate. The debate was effectively documented and disseminated to the CSOs at national level. The evaluation showed that CSOs adjusted their national activities (events, seminars, workshops) planned before the involvement in EYCA to meet the

priorities of the European Year. With the given financial circumstances, where no budget was allocated at the national level, they were important channels for publicising the messages of the European Year. However, in those countries where EYC2013 National Contact Points were not actively involved, it was difficult to attract significant attention to the messages of the Year at national level.

The complementarities found during the implementation of the Year enabled an increase in the scope of the campaign. Cooperation between different DGs and services was fostered as an opportunity to promote communication that focussed on citizens' needs rather than organisation-centric promotion of the activities of individual DGs. It also enabled new communication practices to be tested. Thus the Year had some significant effects at the EU-level in terms of increased horizontal cooperation and changing communication practices. The horizontal potential of the design of the European Year was effectively used to create effects that could not have been generated by other policy instruments.

Conclusions on the effectiveness of the 2013 European Year of Citizens

- **The late adoption of the Decision created some implementation challenges:** it made it difficult for the potential partners to get mobilised in due time and to contribute to the Year's activities. It was an additional obstacle to making the most of the limited resources of the Year.
- **Activities implemented throughout the European Year had a positive effect on the exposed citizens.** They increased citizens' awareness on their EU rights. They were also effective in shaping their perceptions of the EU and stimulating their interest in EU issues.
- The scope of the activities of the European Year was not sufficient to address all EU citizens. **Thus, the Year was not effective in reaching EU citizens at large.** The financial means dedicated to the Year's implementation were not proportional to its ambition to inform all citizens of their EU rights.
- The European Year proposed a participative setting for the citizens involved in its activities. Under the given financial circumstances, **participative activities and events proved to be more effective than information through mass media.** Debate events had positive effects on the perceptions of the EU. The events and activities also gained media attention at national level.
- The budget for the EU-wide information and communication campaign did not allow buying media placements. The media coverage accumulated through the campaign was not sufficient to inform EU citizens at large. The lack of traditional media coverage was to some extent replaced by the

presence of the messages of the Year in the social media.

- In contrast to most of the previous European Years, no specific EU funding was dedicated to the implementation of the Year at national level. As a result national level partners were not sufficiently active in implementing activities related to the Year. **Few activities were implemented at national level to promote the objectives of the European Year.** The EC Representation Offices (often with the support of the Europe Direct Information Centres) were the most active actors at national level and adapted their activities to meet the priorities of the European Year.
- **Despite the lack of budget, civil society organisations strongly contributed to the objectives of the Year.** The EYCA National Alliances implemented events to disseminate results of the debates and other activities. The affiliated CSOs adapted their activities to meet the priorities of the Year. This was all reached without any direct contribution from the budget of the European Year.
- **The EYCA network developed an inclusive debate by CSOs on the issues related to active citizenship and the policies of the EU.** The debate resulted in the preparation of policy recommendations "*It's about Us, it's about Europe! Towards Democratic European Citizenship*" reflecting the consensus of the CSOs from both EU and national levels. The EYCA achieved substantial involvement of national-level CSOs, which was a novelty compared to CSOs' involvement in the implementation of previous European Years.
- The European Year created interesting complementarities with other EU programmes and initiatives. The European Year of Citizens created opportunities for participating Commission services to learn or reinforce new communication approaches and practices.

[Efficiency of the 2013 European Year of Citizens](#)

Looking directly at the objectives set out in the Decision and at the evidence collected during the evaluation, one can conclude that the European Year of Citizens was not sufficiently effective in reaching citizens at large and thus cannot be *prima facie* evaluated as efficient. This lack of efficiency was however mainly caused by the mismatch between the ambitions of the Year as defined in the Decision and the allocated budget. Although this general statement is important and supported by the evidence of this evaluation, it does not tell a lot about the actual implementation of the Year. The lack of resources forced the managers of the Year to look for creative solutions and effective complementarities, which resulted in efficient use of the available budget. **The evaluation showed a**

considerable mobilisation of the available resources. A lot of the Year's achievements were reached with very limited means.

The evaluators found that various stakeholders of the Year judged the EU-wide information and communication campaign, a tool traditionally used for European Years, to be the least efficient group of EYC2013-related activities. It did not manage to reach a significant audience. But this activity of the Year was certainly the most vulnerable to the inadequacies of the budget. However the active use of social media had a positive effect on the efficiency of the campaign. It increased the waves of awareness among target groups, with modest financial means. The wide topic of the European Year enabled it to function as a viral initiative, benefitting from the information resources, information channels and audiences of other campaigns and initiatives.

The participative type of events and activities implemented throughout the Year proved to be an efficient means of communication. First of all, this type of communication proved to create more sophisticated effects on the participants (both increased awareness and change of perception). An important side effect of these events was that they were able to attract media attention and also created echoes for the messages of the Year in the social media. This format of communication was more relevant, given the financial scope of the Year.

The civil society organisations organised into the EYCA network initiated efficient policy debate. Compared to the involvement of civil society organisations in the implementation of previous European Years, the number and thematic scope of the participating CSOs expanded. The activities implemented by EYCA's national members directly contributed to the objectives of the European Year and were implemented without any direct support from the budget of the European Year.

Conclusions on the efficiency of the 2013 European Year of Citizens

- The European Year of Citizens was not sufficiently effective in reaching citizens at large and thus cannot be evaluated as globally efficient. However, firstly the European Year of Citizens achieved a considerable mobilisation of stakeholders, who contributed to the Year with their own human and financial means and/or on a voluntary basis, and secondly the different groups of activities implemented throughout the European Year did not present the same levels of (in)efficiency.
- Even if the **EU-wide information and communication campaign** managed to use existing tools of other campaigns as well as social media to broaden its effectiveness, due to its limited means, it **did not succeed in attracting sufficient media and citizens' attention.**
- Various participative events and activities proved to be a more relevant

format of communication, given the financial scope of the Year. **The debate events had positive effects on participants, and also generated media attention, which enabled a wider spread of the messages of the European Year.** These additional effects of the participative events and activities have positively influenced the efficiency of this initiative.

- The EYCA has shaped the perceptions and activities of civil society organisations and informed citizens at the national level. **Compared to previous European Years, EYCA has achieved wider participation of CSOs with lower financial means.** The activities of the CSOs at the national level contributed to the objectives of the European Year without support from the budget of the European Year.

Sustainability of the 2013 European Year of Citizens

Some activities of the Year will leave a more sustainable trace either on exposed citizens or on future communication practices of the stakeholders involved. The Year had some important sustainable learning effects on the EU institutions and stakeholders involved in its implementation. They gained new knowledge and experience in the use of social media as a key tool for direct communication with citizens. The communication approach centred on citizens' needs, which was promoted in the Year's activities, will also have a sustainable effect on the Commission services involved in the implementation of the Year.

Participation in the EYCA debate has created some important sustainable effects on the participating civil society organisations. The participants in the debate gained ownership of the consensus built through discussions among CSOs from both EU and national level. They have also created sustainable connections, which should result in new projects and initiatives. More importantly, they came up with the EYCA policy recommendations on the reinforcement and enhancement of active citizenship in Europe. These recommendations have been translated in all EU languages, published and are being actively disseminated at national level and used in the work of CSOs.

An important insight coming from the evaluation material is that the EU institutions are expected to give a clear follow-up to the activities of the Year. The numerous debates and Citizens' Dialogues were appreciated by the participants. They felt that EU institutions were at last coming to meet and to hear the concerns of citizens. If the contents of the exchanges were not to be taken into consideration and the direct communication approach not to be maintained, the result would be the opposite of that expected – increasing the already existing distrust instead of improving trust as the main legacy of the Year.

Conclusions on the sustainability of the 2013 European Year of Citizens

- The effects of the EU-wide information and communication campaign are not likely to be sustainable due to its low intensity. This has a negative influence on the overall sustainability of this European Year.
- The European Year of Citizens has promoted participative forms of communication and communication approaches that were centred on citizens' needs. **These communication practices have sustainable influence on the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Year.** However the new participative forms of communication raised the expectations of the citizens involved.
- As a result of the inclusive and democratic debate, civil society organisations have come up with a set of concrete policy recommendations, which are being disseminated in the Member States and are also used in the work of national CSOs. Members of the EYCA debate have increased their capacities to participate in the EU level policy debate, which could be beneficial in the future.
- The implementation of the European Year has mobilised actors at the national level. One of the effects of the Year, which will be sustained during the coming European Years, is the strengthened relationships between the national actors. However it should also be noted that participation in the European Year has created expectations for follow-up that, if not perceived to take place, may negatively influence the future involvement of some stakeholders.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

Looking at the implementation of the European Year of Citizens, and also at the practices of previous European Years, provides an important general insight. During the design phase as well as during the implementation of a European Year, a clear choice has to be made and maintained as regards the type of communication campaign to use: should it focus on using the mass media? Or should it be used to support individual events that aim at achieving greater participation by citizens, stakeholders and/or specific target groups? The latter option is often the more realistic, given the available financial resources. A mass-media information campaign that hopes to reach a large audience through effective media buying, equally targeting all Member States, would require a significant budgetary "*entrance ticket*". It would also need to convey sharp and original messages to catch attention and have potential impact.

When very limited resources are available, it is arguably more relevant to deploy a communication campaign that supports *individual events*. In that case, the events are the key pillars of information dissemination, and the campaign is a tool that mainly aims at recruiting participants to the events concerned and attracting

media attention to secure wider dissemination. Trying to implement both strategies (traditional mass-media campaign and event-based communication) with a limited budget is ineffective and incoherent.

It is important to emphasise that the choice of communication strategy should be determined in an early design phase of the European Year. Therefore the questions of the scope of the Year and the relevant budget should be clearly raised and answered during the preparation of the Decision.

Similarly, this raises questions about the underlying concept of a European Year – should it focus on being a catalyst for policy development and fostering complementarities at EU level, or should it be a purely punctual, mass-media-based awareness-raising initiative reaching out to citizens across the EU? There are examples of European Years that show that they can achieve both, and in preparing for a Decision setting up a European Year, careful consideration must be given to the appropriate balance between the two, bearing in mind any budgetary constraints that may affect the choice of communication strategy.

The following recommendations are proposed for future European Years:

- Clearly define the communication strategy of the European Year. **A choice between priorities should be made – either communication through the mass media, or communication to support the involvement of citizens, stakeholders and specific target audiences.** The choice should be relevant to the topic and messages of the Year and be realistic, given the financial resources available for its implementation.
- **The financial resources dedicated to the Year should be adequate for the scope to be reached.** Defining ambitious objectives for the Year without dedicating sufficient resources hampers the implementation and impedes effectiveness and efficiency of the initiative.
- In order to reach out to target audiences at large, the **European Year should fund activities at national level.** This would enable more numerous and effective activities, closer to the target audiences, and would reinforce the role and involvement of the Member States.
- **Earlier announcement of the topic of the Year is vital for its smooth implementation.** It would ensure timely involvement of all the parties – National Contact Points, communication campaign provider, civil society and other stakeholders at national level. A campaign conception should be developed and relevant stakeholders approached at least 6 months before the Year's implementation gets started.
- A broad, crosscutting and concrete theme allows the various actors to

address it in different and complementary ways. EU institutions should continue the cooperation with the actors involved in the Year's implementation, once the Year is over. **However it should be taken into account that a broad theme does not allow focusing the messages of an EU-wide information and communication campaign.**

The implementation of the EYC2013 took place under difficult financial circumstances and forced creative ways of communication to be looked for. There were some novelties implemented during this Year. Implementation of the activities has uncovered some advantages and limitations of the usual communication instruments of the European Years. More specific recommendations can be found in the final report of the evaluation. They should be useful for the managers of future European Years as well as managers of other EU initiatives.