Effectiveness of Structural Measures spending on waste water treatment for the 1994-99 and 2000-06 programme periods

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Who did the audit?

European Court of Auditors

⇒ Audit Group II in charge of "Structural Policies, Transport, Research and Energy"

⇒ Mr Ispir, Romanian Member
⇒ “Structural Policies - Performance Audit Unit”


NB: audit on "Water Supply" being carried out
Why do the audit?

• Sensitive theme for our « clients » (quality of the water)

• Significant financial intervention by EU; even greater in current programme period (2007-13)

• Significant late reporting on UWWTD and SSD implementation

• Huge implementing delays in MS
What were the objectives and scope?
What were the objectives and scope? (2/3)

Assessing the effectiveness of Structural Measures spending on WWT ⇒

- Do WWT plants achieve an adequate performance in the treatment of waste water?

- Is the sludge produced used appropriately?

- Is the Commission fulfilling its role (project selection, monitoring of outcomes)?
What were the objectives and scope?

- EU spending: European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund (Structural Measures)
- 4 MS (11.1 Bio €) which account for about 50% of Structural Measures spending in the area of WWT infrastructure
- Average of 6 completed projects on the spot / MS
- Further, 12 completed projects for desk checks / MS
How was the audit carried out? (1/2)

• Preliminary Study: EU background, DG Env, experts, visit of a plant...

• Audit Planning Memorandum including Evidence Collection Plan (questions, criteria, evidence sources, collection and analysis methods) tested with DG Env and an expert

• Benchmarks: EU framework [UWWTD (1991), SSD (1986), WFD (2000)] compared with others from countries of similar level of economic and social development
How was the audit carried out? (2/2)

- Combined audit of direct performance (projects) and system audit (assessment and monitoring in MS and at Commission)
- Two-week missions in each MS
  - 1st week: authorities responsible for wastewater, sewage sludge and river basin management (collecting info on systems and test results)
  - 2nd week: 6 UWWTP visits with the experts: inspection of treatment facilities including effluent discharge points and sludge disposal
- Use of data available in the MS
What were the outcomes of the audit? (1/3)

• Very significant contribution of SM (50% or more)

Performance of the UWWTP

• 18 / 26 plants operating at least at 50% of capacity
• 64 / 73 plants had a satisfactory effluent quality
• Frequency and methods for testing effluent quality in accordance with EU benchmark [in one category all plants (14) did significantly more checks than required by EU]
What were the outcomes of the audit? (2/3)

Use of the sludge

- 48 / 73 adopted EU recommended methods for disposal
- Non-recommended methods in the other cases (lack of strategy, on site, landfills)
- Safe re-use in agriculture: EU requirements do not take into account developments since 1986 (PCBs, pathogens such as E.coli etc); some MS and some non-EU countries do
- Monitoring (frequency / sampling / independent checks): generally OK; some improvements in data collection
What were the outcomes of the audit? (3/3)

Commission

- Little information about sewage sludge disposal
- Lack of information when the Commission pays the balance of the grant
- Reduction of pollution at source: phosphate-based domestic laundry detergents (major issue in the MS visited)
- Polluter pays: DG Regio’s internal procedures foresee its application but WFD plans this to be compulsory in 2010 only / lack of information about tariffs for water services
Lessons to be learnt?

• Benchmarks analysis to be carried out before audit phase
• Very clear understanding of where the experts may have an added-value [ex ante (audit questions, methodology ...), during visits, at final stage (conclusions and recommendations)]
• Sharing all information with the experts
• Do not forget to understand and collect facts explaining success / failure / difficulties ...
• Internet may provide interesting information on most recent developments
Thank you