Special Reports of the European Court of Auditors

A Rolling Check-List of recent findings

STUDY

EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service
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Ex-Post Evaluation Unit
PE 615.658 - March 2018
Special Reports of the European Court of Auditors:
A Rolling Check-List of recent findings
Introduction

This rolling check-list presents an overview of the European Court of Auditors’ (ECA) Special Reports, concentrating on those relevant for the 2016 budgetary discharge procedure. It strives to link the research topics of the Special Reports to the relevant debates and positions within the European Parliament, including the working documents of the Committee on Budgetary Control, the work of the specialised parliamentary committees, plenary resolutions and individual questions by Members.

This check-list is prepared by the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit of the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), the EP’s in-house research service and think-tank, as part of its on-going support for parliamentary committees and individual Members in scrutinising the executive with regard to the implementation of EU law, policies and programmes. The checklist is available online, so as to allow access to all the base documents via hyperlinks.

The ECA’s Special Reports present the results of its ‘performance audits’. Unlike the more traditional financial and compliance audits, which merely look into the legality and regularity of expenditure, the performance audits give an appreciation of whether the policy objectives have actually been met and/or if the efforts have provided value for money. The performance audits cover a range of subjects. These go further than just expenditure or own resources related questions as, in some cases, the Court also looks into more political ambitions set at the European level and whether these were then translated into the necessary action.

The ECA’s Special Reports form an integral part of the discharge procedure. They can also serve as a tool for policy-makers, pointing to issues of implementation and enforcement of EU policies and programmes and to good practices and lessons learned.

The check-list seeks to assist Members both in their work on scrutinising how the EU general budget is spent and in their co-legislator role. The document is updated on a regular basis to include the most recent Special Reports.

The European Parliament is strongly committed to Better Law-Making, and particularly to the effective use of ex-ante impact assessment and ex-post evaluation throughout the entire legislative cycle. It is in this spirit that the Parliament has a particular interest in following the transposition, implementation and enforcement of EU law, and, more generally, monitoring the impact, operation, effectiveness and delivery of policy and programmes in practice.

José Luis Rufas Quintana
Head of the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit
Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value
European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS).

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**EU pre-accession assistance for strengthening administrative capacity in the Western Balkans: A meta-audit**

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| Short summary of questions asked, observations, findings and recommendations | Questions asked: Did the Commission contribute towards strengthening administrative capacity in the Western Balkan region through the IPA programme? The Court addressed two main questions: 1. Did the Commission manage the IPA in the Western Balkans well? 2. Did the IPA strengthen administrative capacity in the Western Balkans?  
The Court focused on two sectors relevant to the strengthening of administrative capacity in the Western Balkans: (a) Rule of law (fundamental rights, justice and home affairs), with a particular emphasis on the fight against corruption and organised crime; and (b) Public administration reform, including public finance management.  
The Court assessed the Commission’s management of the IPA throughout the instrument’s programming cycle and on the basis of the following audit criteria: (a) Did the IPA have specific and measurable objectives? (b) Were programmes and projects based on clear needs? (c) Was assistance actually paid out (absorption)? (d) Were strict conditions for assistance applied (conditionality)? (e) Was implementation monitored and were results evaluated effectively? (f) Was donor assistance coordinated effectively?  
From 2007 onwards, IPA has been the only EU funding instrument established to strengthen administrative capacity in the western Balkans. In the sectors of the rule of law, on the one hand, and public administration reform, on the other, the Court assessed whether: (a) The Commission had effectively delivered the intended outputs; (b) IPA results beyond outputs were sustainable; (c) The political dialogue effectively addressed the strengthening of administrative capacity.  
**Findings:** |
Did the Commission manage well the IPA in the Western Balkans?

1. With regard to the Commission’s management, the Court considered that the objectives of national programmes under IPA I were often broad and not always measurable through specific targets but noted that the Commission moved towards a clearer and more measurable sector-based approach. The regional programmes’ objectives were generally specific including measurable targets and an explicit regional integration objective;

2. Programmes and projects were based on needs assessments but some beneficiaries’ assessments (Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina) in particular for the rule of law sector showed shortcomings.

3. The Court also noted that the absorption of IPA I funding was hampered by weak administrative capacity in some countries (some western Balkan countries had difficulties to make payments) but under IPA II more focus is being put on improving the countries public finance management systems. Moreover, the Court observed that, in the case of decentralised implementation, strict requirements linked to the management of EU funds were not systematically applied at programme level (Bosnia and Herzegovina and for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and at project level (Albania and Serbia).

4. Despite some shortcomings in the reporting for its results-oriented monitoring (ROM), the Court found that the Commission was effective in monitoring the implementation of IPA projects and the delivery of outputs. It was also partly effective in following up on the conclusions and recommendations of IPA evaluations notably to make greater use of conditionality. Finally, despite shortcomings in the donor coordination at the country level due to a lack of leadership and administrative capacity within the national structure (Albania Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo), the Court found that the Commission was able to support effectively the improvement of donor coordination between the Western Balkan countries.

Did the IPA strengthen the administrative capacity in the Western Balkans?

1. With regard to administrative capacity in the Western Balkans, the IPA generally delivered the outputs that were contractually planned in both national and regional programmes and the Court observed that its support for the rule of law and public administration reform was partly sustainable. Out of 29 projects reviewed by the Court, 15 were unsustainable due to insufficient budget and staffing, poor coordination and a lack of political will.

2. In the case of rule of law projects, the Commission did not apply conditionality sufficiently prior to authorising contracts. The Court found that relatively little IPA I funding was provided in key areas of the rule of law, such as media freedom and civil society, public prosecution and the fight against corruption and organised crime. Moreover, the beneficiaries’ lack of political will to reform institutions, insufficient budget and staffing, as well as poor coordination also affected project sustainability.

3. In the area of public administration reform, the Commission managed to convert many project outputs into sustainable results despite widespread corruption and political interference in civil service recruitment and career management. Out of the 23 projects reviewed by the Court, 14 were qualified by the Court as sustainable. The remaining were unsustainable due to their lack of budget and staffing and above all the beneficiary’s lack of political will to reform institutions. Whilst not an explicit IPA objective, the Commission could have encouraged beneficiaries more to use IPA as a learning tool for strengthening the rest of their public administration.

4. Enhancing regional cooperation and strengthening administrative capacity in the region as a whole is of high importance and has been encouraged by the Commission, notably through various policy dialogue structures such as the Western Balkans Investment Framework. However, during the period audited, the Court found that Regional Cooperation Council did not have a significant impact on the ground. For the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), it was too early to establish whether it improved administrative capacity in the Western Balkans.

5. The Court considered that the political dialogue in the Western Balkans, through specialized working groups on the independence of the judiciary or on weaknesses in public prosecution and corruption in the judiciary and police, had a limited impact on the rule of law while the political dialogue on public administration reform did achieve some progress.

Recommendations:
In the light of its findings, the Court makes a number of measurable concrete recommendations both to improve the setting of objectives and the design and implementation of IPA projects in the Western Balkans and encourage greater commitment by the six Western Balkans national authorities towards strengthening their administrative capacity:

1. Under IPA II, the Commission should set specific objectives based on ranked priorities and measurable targets. To simplify management requirements, when the Commission identifies a weak administrative capacity, it should apply indirect management selectively, taking into account the volume of the funds involved and the complexity and political sensitivity of projects to be decentralised;

2. The Commission should apply relevant conditions at sector, programme and project level and follow up on them. For instance, it could apply, where appropriate, a net reduction in future IPA allocations, suspend payments, cancel projects not yet contracted and systematically monitor project compliance with predefined conditions. The Commission should systematically monitor sensitive programmes and projects and carry out external evaluations of interventions in priority sectors in the Western Balkans;

3. In the context of the political dialogue and under IPA I and II, the Commission should engage the beneficiary countries in stronger political commitment so that they establish a convincing track record of effective investigation, prosecution and final convictions in cases of high-level corruption and organised crime. To this end, it should require each of the beneficiaries to build up their track records further. This should be done in the framework of the political dialogue and should be reflected into future national IPA allocations and other potential sources of EU funding. Furthermore, upon availability of political commitment, and better absorption capacity, the Commission should better target resources in key areas of the rule of law where we noted a significant need for support: the fight against corruption and organised crime (with a particular focus on the public prosecution) and media freedom;

4. Under IPA I and II, the Commission should support regional cooperation. In particular, it should ensure that its financial contributions to the RCC and ReSPA yield measurable and sustainable results on the ground.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

CONT Working Document of 10/01/2017 on ECA Special Report 21/2016 (Discharge 2015): EU pre-accession assistance for strengthening administrative capacity in the Western Balkans: A meta-audit

Rapporteur: Joachim Zeller (EPP)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur,]

1. Welcomes the special report under the form of a meta-audit presenting an overview of the European Commission’s management of pre-accession assistance in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia and sets out its observations and recommendations below;

2. Acknowledges that the European Commission has to operate in a difficult political context and encounters many weaknesses within beneficiaries’ public institutions such as excessive bureaucracy, a high staff turnover, low efficiency, lack of accountability and corruption;

3. Calls all the stakeholders both to pay particular attention to the definition of qualitative national strategies as well as national and regional programmes that would include clear, realistic and measurable objectives and to better link the design of programmes in the beneficiary country to these strategies and respective needs assessments;

4. Supports the efforts of the Western Balkans countries’ authorities to pursue efforts in key areas of good governance and towards their public administration reform, including the area of financial control in the context of public finance management (PFM); invites all actors to intensify the efforts for developing or consolidating strategies to coordinate the implementation of public finance management reform;

5. Considers as crucial to reinforce the application of the principle of conditionality, particularly by verifying in advance the beneficiary’s capacity to do what is required for a high-quality project and in specific measurable terms;

6. Regrets that about half of the EU funded projects for strengthening public administration reform and rule of law were not sustainable; stresses the
importance of developing sustainability, especially for projects dedicated to the reinforcement of administrative capacity; regrets that the sustainability was not ensured in many cases due to inherent factors such as the lack of budget, staffing and above all the beneficiary’s lack of political will to reform institutions; calls on the Commission to build on the achievements of successful projects with quantifiable added value and to secure sustainability and viability of the projects by setting it as a pre-condition of the projects when implementing IPA II;

7. Believes that there is still room for improvement to bring certain key sectors up to the EU standards such as rule of law, public administration reform and good governance; is of the opinion that the assistance provided to these areas should be increased, more effective and sustainable-driven due to the close link with the enlargement strategy and political criteria;

8. Calls on the Commission to focus on the fight against corruption, organized crime, public prosecution and the development of transparency and integrity requirements within the public administration as a matter of priority; reiterates the need for a more continuous and stringent strategy and greater political commitment by the national authorities in order to ensure sustainable results in this respect.

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<td>[The European Parliament,] 1. Welcomes the steady progress made by Albania with respect to the reforms on the key priorities required for opening accession negotiations; encourages the government, the parliament and political parties to maintain the reform momentum and to accelerate the implementation of reforms; calls on them to swiftly proceed with a substantial reform of the judiciary; insists on the importance of proper and timely implementation of these reforms; 31. Requests that the Commission include detailed information about IPA support for Albania and the implementation of measures in its future reports, in particular the IPA support allocated to the implementation of the key priorities and relevant projects, bearing in mind the Commission’s declaration on the Strategic Dialogue with the European Parliament;</td>
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On Bosnia and Herzegovina
3. Welcomes the progress made on the implementation of the 2015-2018 Reform Agenda, as well as the country’s determination to pursue further institutional and socio-economic reforms; recalls that the renewed EU approach towards BiH has been triggered by the difficult socio-economic situation and the increasing dissatisfaction among citizens; notes that the situation has somewhat improved, but stresses that harmonised and effective implementation of the Reform Agenda in line with the action plan is needed to achieve real change across the country and make tangible improvements to the lives of all BiH citizens;

5. Welcomes the agreement on setting up a coordination mechanism for EU matters aimed at improving functionality and efficiency in the accession process, including in relation to EU financial assistance, and enabling better interaction with the EU; calls for its swift implementation; calls, moreover, for effective cooperation and communication between all levels of government and with the EU in order to facilitate the alignment and implementation of the acquis, and to provide satisfactory replies to the Commission’s inquiries throughout the Opinion process; deems it unacceptable that the Government of the RS is trying to establish parallel channels of communication by adopting provisions on direct reporting to the Commission; calls for the role and capacities of the Directorate for European Integration to be further enhanced with a view to assuming its coordinating functions in full within the implementation of the SAA and, overall, in the accession process;

2015/2897(RSP), European Parliament resolution of 14/04/2016 on the 2015 Commission Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. Welcomes the first more positive Commission Report on BiH and reiterates its unequivocal commitment to BiH’s European perspective; calls on the authorities to show determination in pursuing institutional and socio-economic reforms, including their effective implementation, and making steady progress towards the EU; calls for transparency in the process of planning and implementing reforms; welcomes the Joint Action Plan by the State and Entities to implement the 2015-2018 Reform Agenda, and calls for harmonised implementation in order to achieve real, visible change across the country and to improve the lives of all BiH citizens;

2. Welcomes the submission of the application for EU membership by BiH on 15 February 2016; calls on the Council to examine this application at the earliest opportunity and to forward it without delay to the Commission in order to start the preparation of the avis;

3. Welcomes the adoption by the BiH CoM, on 26 January 2016, of a decision establishing a coordination mechanism on EU matters and, on 9 February 2016, of the negotiation position on the adaptation of the SAA following the accession of Croatia to the EU; recalls that, alongside meaningful progress in the implementation of the Reform Agenda, these elements are necessary for the EU to consider the membership application as credible; calls for the entities’ position on the adopted coordination mechanism to be harmonised without delay and encourages cooperation between all stakeholders in further improving it; calls for its swift implementation and urges constructive cooperation on EU matters; stresses that this mechanism is indispensable for efficient decision-making in the EU accession process; welcomes the initial concrete consultations – on a parliamentary level – with a view to the full implementation of the coordination mechanism, and strongly encourages the further intensification of such meetings among institutional stakeholders; insists again on the adaptation of trade concessions granted under the SAA; considers the full implementation of the SAA, including its adaptation, an important element of BiH’s commitment to the EU and one of the preconditions for endorsement of its candidacy for membership; recommends that BiH also engage with the EU Member States on its progress towards the EU;
4. Reiterates the need to continue also with constitutional, legal and political reforms that would transform BiH into a fully effective, inclusive and functional state, guaranteeing the equality and democratic representation of all its constituent peoples and all citizens, and guaranteeing that all citizens can stand as candidates and are eligible to be elected and to serve at all political levels, on equal grounds and regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds, in accordance with the principles expressed in its previous resolution, including the Copenhagen criteria, the EU acquis, recommendations made by the Venice Commission and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the relevant decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR); calls on the authorities to actively promote the principles of legitimate representation, federalism, decentralisation and subsidiarity, as well as European values and the importance of the European perspective; calls on the EU institutions to become actively involved in the efforts to find a sustainable solution to BiH’s constitutional arrangements;

On the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia


1. Welcomes the formation of a new government on 31 May 2017; urges all political parties to act in a spirit of reconciliation, in the common interest of all citizens and to work with the government on restoring confidence in the country and its institutions, including through the full implementation of the Przino Agreement and Urgent Reform Priorities;

6. Underlines the strategic importance of further progress in the EU accession process and calls again for political will and ownership to be displayed by all the parties in fully implementing the Urgent Reform Priorities and the Pržino agreement; underlines that implementation of the Pržino agreement is vital also beyond the elections to ensure political stability and sustainability in the future; calls on the Commission to assess, at its earliest convenience but before the end of 2017, the country’s progress on implementation and to report back to Parliament and to the Council; while recalling that long overdue reforms need to be launched and implemented, supports the continuation of the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) for systematically assisting the country in this endeavour; regrets that no meeting was held under HLAD and that there was little progress on meeting previous targets; draws attention to the potential negative political, security and socio-economic consequences of further delays in the country’s Euro-Atlantic integration process; further calls on the Commission and the EEAS to increase the visibility of EU-funded projects in the country in order to bring the EU closer to the citizens of the country;

7. Underlines the significant progress the country has made in the process of EU integration and emphasises the negative consequences of further delaying the process of integration, including the threat to the credibility of the EU’s enlargement policy and the risk of instability in the region;

9. Welcomes the high level of legislative alignment with the acquis communautaire and acknowledges the priority given to the effective implementation and enforcement of existing legal and policy frameworks, as in the case of countries already engaged in the accession negotiations;

10. Congratulates the country for continuing to fulfil its commitments under the SAA; calls on the Council to adopt the Commission’s 2009 proposal to move to the second stage of the SAA, in line with the relevant provisions;

12. Notes some progress in reforming public administration including the steps to implement the new legal framework on human resources management; calls for further commitment to implement the Commission recommendations; remains concerned about the politicised public administration and that civil servants
are subject to political pressure; urges the new government to demonstrate a strong political commitment to enhancing professionalism, merit, neutrality and independence at all levels by implementing the new merit-based recruitment and appraisal procedure; stresses the need to complete the 2017-2022 public administration reform strategy, including by making sufficient budget allocations for its implementation, and to strengthen relevant administrative capacity; calls for the incoming government to establish transparent and effective lines of accountability between and within institutions; recommends that all communities be fairly represented at all levels of the public administration;

14. Regrets the continuous backsliding in the reform of the judiciary, which should be encouraged to function independently; deplors recurrent political interference in its work, including in the appointment and promotion of judges and prosecutors, as well as the lack of accountability and cases of selective justice; calls once again on the competent authorities to address effectively the outstanding issues as identified in the ‘Urgent Reform Priorities’ and to demonstrate the political will to progress in judicial reform including by improving, in law and in practice, transparency in the appointment and promotion procedures and by reducing the length of court proceedings; acknowledges that some efforts have been made to improve transparency; calls, furthermore, on the authorities to ensure the professionalism of the Judicial Council and the Prosecutors Council and the functional independence of the justice system as a whole;

39. Urges the authorities to strengthen the administrative and financing capacities in order to ensure a transparent, efficient and effective public procurement regime, prevent any irregularities and implement EU funds properly and in a timely manner, and to provide, at the same time, detailed regular reports on the programming and use of Community funds; notes with concern that the Commission has yet again reduced the IPA financial assistance by approximately EUR 27 million as a consequence of the lack of political commitment to deliver on reforms in public financial management; calls on the Commission to include information about IPA support for the country and the effectiveness of implemented measures in its reports, in particular the IPA support allocated to implementation of the key priorities and relevant projects;

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[The European Parliament,]

2.Takes note of the fact that a number of obligations envisaged in the June/July 2015 Agreement have been fulfilled according to the agreed deadlines and objectives, but regrets the tendency to delay some of the commitments and some retrograde steps in relation to Urgent Reform Priorities; emphasises the aspects of the Agreement which refer to structural reforms, and the need for all parties to constructively engage in the Working Group convened by the EU mediator on a continuous basis and on the issues of implementing the agreement, even during the election period; calls on all parties to put the interests of the country before party interests and insists that an all-party agreement remains essential in order to fulfil all the elements of the June/July 2015 Agreement, which would put the country back on track towards the Euro-Atlantic perspective; welcomes the return to parliament of the main opposition party SDSM on 1 September 2015; welcomes the appointment of a Special Prosecutor on 15 September 2015 to lead independent and thorough investigations; notes that the amendments to the new electoral code, the law establishing the Inquiry Committee, the law on government and the law on the composition of the new State Election Commission were adopted with delay;

6. Considers it of strategic importance to ensure continuity of support to the Macedonian progress towards EU membership. Takes note of the fact that a number of obligations envisaged in the June/July 2015 Agreement have been fulfilled according to the agreed deadlines and objectives, but regrets the tendency to delay some of the commitments and some retrograde steps in relation to Urgent Reform Priorities; emphasises the aspects of the Agreement which refer to structural reforms, and the need for all parties to constructively engage in the Working Group convened by the EU mediator on a
continuous basis and on the issues of implementing the agreement, even during the election period; calls on all parties to put the interests of the country before party interests and insists that an all-party agreement remains essential in order to fulfil all the elements of the June/July 2015 Agreement, which would put the country back on track towards the Euro-Atlantic perspective; welcomes the return to parliament of the main opposition party SDSM on 1 September 2015; welcomes the appointment of a Special Prosecutor on 15 September 2015 to lead independent and thorough investigations; notes that the amendments to the new electoral code, the law establishing the Inquiry Committee, the law on government and the law on the composition of the new State Election Commission were adopted with delay;

8. Considers it essential for the democratic process that the Urgent Reform Priorities on systemic reforms on the rule of law and fundamental rights be implemented without delay; invites the Commission to report back to Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the political agreement and the Urgent Reform Priorities after the early parliamentary elections, and to give an assessment of the conduct of the elections;

11. Is concerned that the Macedonian public administration remains subject to political influence; urges the government to enhance professionalism, neutrality and independence at all levels and to ensure the full implementation of the principles of accountability, transparency and merit; calls on the competent authorities to implement in a sustainable manner the Law on Administrative Servants and the Law on Public Employees, in full compliance with the principles of transparency, meritocracy and equal representation, and to adopt a comprehensive public administration reform strategy for 2016-2020, including an action plan, and a public financial management reform programme;

12. Underlines the need to enhance administrative capacity and inclusive and evidence-based policy-making in order to ensure effective implementation of policies and lines of accountability; calls for the development of a designated training programme for public administration staff; urges the Commission to provide assistance and exchange possibilities in this regard;

43. Remains concerned about the insufficient capacity to programme and absorb Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA) funds; urges the government to strengthen the administrative and financing capacities in order to procure and implement EU funds properly and in a timely manner; calls on the Commission to closely monitor projects financed by the EU in order to avoid misuse of European public money for political and other inappropriate purposes;

45. Considers that EU negotiations can only positively influence efforts towards resolving bilateral disputes, while also generating momentum and leverage as regards much-needed reforms, particularly in respect of the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and the fight against corruption, strengthening multiethnic cohesion, and safeguarding the credibility of the EU’s enlargement policy;

On Kosovo


1. Welcomes the entry into force of the EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) on 1 April 2016 as the first contractual relationship and an essential step in order to continue the process of the integration of Kosovo into the EU; welcomes the launch of the European Reform Agenda on 11 November 2016 and the adoption of the national strategy for the implementation of the SAA as a platform to facilitate implementation of the SAA and calls on Kosovo to continue to show clear political will and determination to implement the agreed roadmap including the setting up of the coordination mechanism for the
implementation of the SAA, and to seize the positive momentum created by the SAA, in order to implement and institutionalise reforms and improve the socio-economic development of Kosovo, to establish cooperation with the EU in numerous areas, which would also further Kosovo’s trade and investment integration, to advance relations with neighbouring countries and to contribute to stability in the region; calls on the government of Kosovo to focus on the implementation of the comprehensive reforms that are required to meet its obligations under the SAA; welcomes the holding of the Second Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee on 23-24 November 2016, and the holding of the first meeting of the EU-Kosovo Association and Stabilisation Council on 25 November 2016; notes how free, fair and transparent early general elections and municipal elections in in the second part of 2017 are crucial for the democratic future of Kosovo as well as for the future of its EU integration process;

6. Underlines that the path towards EU integration requires a strategic long-term vision and sustained commitment in the adoption and implementation of the necessary reforms;

21. Welcomes the signing of the framework agreement for Kosovo’s participation in EU programmes and encourages the swiftest possible entry into force and proper implementation of the agreement following the European Parliament’s approval;

33. Regrets the slow pace of Kosovo’s efforts to build an adequate and efficient administrative capacity, which is preventing the country from fully implementing the laws adopted and using EU funds effectively; expresses regret at the endemic corruption, the political interference and politicisation of staff in public administration at all levels, as well as appointments to various independent institutions and agencies made on the basis of political affiliation and not of professional criteria to a sufficient extent; calls for further efforts to ensure merit-based recruitment, which is necessary to ensure effective, efficient and professionally independent public administration; calls for investigations to be made into the recent allegation of political interference in recruitment to and decision-making processes in public bodies;

34. Notes that tendering specifications for applications for all forms of contracts under IPA funding are so demanding that Kosovar or regional companies often cannot even apply for them and calls, to this end, for special attention to be given to guide and instruct interested stakeholders; urges authorities to direct the remaining assistance, which has not yet been programmed, towards projects with a more direct impact on the economy of Kosovo;


[The European Parliament,]

1. Welcomes the signing of the EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Agreement on 27 October 2015, as the first contractual relationship, and the swift ratification by the Kosovo Assembly on 2 November 2015; stresses that the SAA paves the way for the integration of Kosovo into the EU, and will provide a powerful incentive for the implementation and institutionalisation of reforms and allow the establishment of cooperation with the EU in a wide variety of areas, with a view to enhancing political dialogue and closer trade integration in addition to strengthening relations with neighbouring countries and helping to ensure regional stability; calls on the Government of Kosovo to focus on implementing the comprehensive reforms necessary to meet its obligations under the SAA;

2. Welcomes the adoption by the Commission of a package to support reforms and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans – a package which expresses the EU’s commitment to supporting the political and economic reform process of the countries on their path to EU accession;

11. Supports the continuation of discussions on a framework agreement which would allow Kosovo to participate in EU programmes;
29. Reiterates its call on Kosovo to complete the legislative framework for the civil service and to implement fully the strategic framework for public administration and the action plan; calls on the authorities to stop the politicisation of public administration, to promote merit-based professionalism in all public institutions, to ensure sound financial management of public institutions, and to ensure the transparency of the Assembly’s oversight of budget implementation;

On Montenegro


[The European Parliament,]
1. Welcomes the continued progress in Montenegro’s EU integration; welcomes the fact that Montenegro has achieved steady progress in the accession negotiations, noting that so far 26 chapters have been opened for negotiations and 2 chapters have been provisionally closed; calls on the Council to speed up negotiations with Montenegro; encourages the opening and closing of further chapters in the accession negotiations in 2017; commends the adoption by the Montenegrin Government of the 2017-2018 Programme of Accession of Montenegro to the EU; encourages Montenegro to accelerate the pace of reforms, to increase its efforts towards meeting all benchmarks and to continue focusing on the fundamentals of the accession process; recalls that it is essential to deliver concrete results with a strong and sustainable implementation record, especially in the fields of the rule of law, justice and the fight against corruption and organised crime;

8. Welcomes the new public administration reform strategy (PAR) 2016-2020, the public financial management reform programme, the entry into force of the new law on salaries and the simplification of administrative procedures; calls for measures to allocate the appropriate budgetary resources for PAR’s implementation, as well as for consistent political will to rationalise public administration, also in view of accession preparations; notes the limited progress that has been made in strengthening administrative capacity; encourages the full de-politicisation of the public administration; considers it essential that the principles of merit, professionalism, accountability, transparency and timely regulatory impact assessment are adhered to and that citizens’ rights to good, corruption-free administration and to information are safeguarded;

28. Notes with concern that some IPA-funded capacity-building outputs were not fully used or followed up by the authorities; stresses that, for positive outcomes to be achieved, authorities need to ensure adequate staff availability, adopt the necessary legislation to allow the outputs to be used and grant the necessary independence to newly created institutions

2015/2894(RSP), European Parliament resolution of 10/03/2016 on the 2015 Commission report on Montenegro

[The European Parliament,]
1. Welcomes the steady progress in the accession negotiations with Montenegro, noting that 22 negotiation chapters, including chapters 23 and 24, have been opened so far, two of which have been provisionally closed; encourages tangible progress in meeting the benchmarks for the closing of chapters already under negotiation and for the opening of new chapters; stresses that progress in the negotiations must be accompanied by the strict implementation of relevant action plans and strategies; reiterates that overall progress in the negotiations depends on the progress in the implementation of the rule of law and the visible track...
2. Urges more parliamentary scrutiny over the accession process; welcomes the adoption of the 2015 action plan for strengthening parliamentary oversight, but emphasises the need to reinforce the capacities of the Montenegrin parliament and to improve its access to accession-related information; welcomes the newly adopted Code of Ethics, and calls for further measures to improve public trust in the Montenegrin parliament;

5. Notes some progress in the government’s 2011-2016 public administration reform, and calls for the timely adoption of a strategy covering the period 2016-2020; encourages further depoliticisation of the public administration; considers it essential to adhere to the principles of merit, depoliticisation, accountability and transparency in public administration and to ensure the citizens’ right to good administration free of corruption; welcomes the amendments to the Law on the Ombudsman; is concerned that the capacity of the Ombudsman’s Office to effectively handle complaints remains limited; stresses the need for a greater number of specialised independent state agencies;

6. Welcomes the good progress on strengthening the legislative framework to enhance the independence, accountability and professionalism of the judiciary, and looks forward to the full implementation of the relevant rules in practice; notes with satisfaction that the backlog of certain types of cases has further decreased; calls for ensuring the independence of the judiciary and welcomes its increased efficiency; remains concerned about undue influence on judicial independence, especially with regard to the appointment of judges; stresses the need to reinforce the capacity of the Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils, to further improve the efficiency of the Constitutional Court, to strengthen the enforcement of civil and administrative decisions and to implement fully the new recruitment and professional appraisal and promotion systems;

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On Serbia

2016/2311(INI), European Parliament resolution of 14/06/2017 on the 2016 Commission Report on Serbia

[The European Parliament,]

1. Welcomes the opening of negotiations on Chapters 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security) as the key chapters in the EU approach to enlargement based on the rule of law, as progress on these chapters remains essential for the overall pace of the negotiation process; welcomes the opening of Chapters 32 (Financial Control) and 35 (Other Issues), the opening of negotiations on Chapter 5 (Public Procurement) and the opening and provisional closure of Chapter 25 (Science and Research), the opening of negotiations on Chapter 20 (Enterprise and Industrial Policy) and the opening and provisional closure of Chapter 26 (Education and Culture); looks forward to the opening of additional chapters that have been technically prepared;

2. Welcomes the continued engagement of Serbia on the path of integration into the EU and its constructive and well-prepared approach to the negotiations, which is a clear sign of determination and political will; calls on Serbia to continue to actively promote and communicate this strategic decision among the Serbian population, including by promoting enhanced awareness of Serbian citizens about funding from the EU budget directed to Serbia; invites the Serbian authorities to refrain from anti-EU rhetoric and messages directed at the public; underlines the need for informed, transparent and constructive debates on the EU, its institutions and the implications of membership; takes note of improvements in dialogue and public consultations with relevant stakeholders and civil society as well as their engagement in the EU integration process;

3. Underlines that the thorough implementation of reforms and policies remains a key indicator of a successful integration process; commends the adoption of
the revised National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA); calls on Serbia to improve the planning, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of new legislation and policies, setting up an adequate and efficient administrative capacity, and to undertake further efforts to ensure the systematic inclusion of civil society in policy dialogues, including in the accession process, as a tool to improve the standards of democratic governance; welcomes the continued initiatives by the Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society aimed at improving cooperation between the state and the civil sector;

4. Notes delays in the absorption of pre-accession aid, also due to the inadequate institutional framework; urges the authorities to seek positive examples and best practices among the Member States; underlines the need to establish a more effective and comprehensive institutional system at national, regional and local level, for the absorption of IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) and other available funds;

13. Is concerned by the lack of progress in the fight against corruption and urges Serbia to show clear political will and commitment in tackling this issue, also by enhancing and fully enforcing the legal framework; calls on Serbia to step up the implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy and action plan, and calls for the establishment of an initial track record on investigations, prosecutions and convictions for high-level corruption; welcomes the progress on the finalisation of the draft law on the Anti-Corruption Agency and the implementation of the activities on the prevention of and fight against corruption envisaged through the newly established EU twinning project; urges Serbia to amend and implement the economic and corruption crimes section of the criminal code with a view to providing a credible and predictable criminal law framework; is concerned about repeated leaks to the media regarding ongoing investigations; calls on the Serbian authorities to investigate seriously several high-profile cases where evidence of alleged wrongdoings has been presented by journalists; reiterates its call for proper reform of the offence of abuse of office and abuse of responsible position so as to prevent possible misuse or arbitrary interpretation; stresses that the excessive recourse to the provision on abuse of office in the private sector is harmful to the business climate and hampers legal certainty; calls on Serbia to guarantee the neutrality and continuity of the public administration;

18. Welcomes the adoption of the public financial management reform programme, e-government strategy, a strategy on regulatory reform and policy-making, new laws on general administrative procedures, public salaries and civil servants at provincial and local government level; notes that the implementation of the public administration reform action plan has been slow in some areas, and that no progress has been made in amending the legal framework for central government civil servants; underlines that more effort is needed to further professionalise and depoliticise the administration and make recruitment and dismissal procedures more transparent;

**2015/2892(RSP)**, European Parliament resolution of 4/02/2016 on the 2015 Commission report on Serbia

1. Welcomes the opening of the negotiations and the opening of Chapters 32 (Financial control) and 35 (Other issues – Item 1: Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo) at the Intergovernmental Conference in Brussels on 14 December 2015; welcomes the continued commitment by Serbia to the European integration process; calls on Serbia to actively promote this strategic decision among the Serbian public; notes with satisfaction that Serbia has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda; calls on Serbia to tackle decisively and head-on the systemic and socio-economic reforms; urges Serbia to devote particular attention to its young people when implementing its reforms;

2. Welcomes the preparations by Serbia to effectively start the accession negotiations with the conclusion of the screening process, and the preparation and submission of comprehensive action plans for Chapters 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (Justice, freedom and security); expresses the hope that these chapters can be opened early in 2016; stresses that thorough negotiations of Chapters 23 and 24 are essential to address the reforms that have to be carried out and implemented in the areas of judiciary and fundamental rights and of justice, freedom and security; recalls that progress in these areas will need to be made in parallel with progress in the negotiations overall; stresses that the negotiation of Chapter 35 is of crucial importance for Serbia’s progress on its
path towards EU integration; takes the view, in this regard, that the full normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo is an important condition for Serbia’s accession to the EU;

3. Underlines that the thorough implementation of legislation and policies remain a key indicator of a successful integration process; encourages Serbia’s political leaders to continue with the reforms needed for alignment with EU standards; calls on Serbia to improve the planning, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of new legislation and policies;

Observations of the European Court of Auditors regarding failings in pre-accession assistance to Balkan countries, E-007058-16, Rule 130, WQ to the Commission, Kostas Chrysogonos (GUE/NGL), 23/09/2016
A report by the European Court of Auditors has raised questions about the use and value for money of the pre-accession assistance provided by the European Union to enhance administrative capability in the western Balkans. The observations concern mismanagement of resources because of existing structural weaknesses. At the same time, questions arise with regard to the prospect of reducing or cancelling these resources.

In view of this:
1. Is the Commission aware of the observed weaknesses and failings? Does it agree with the observations of the European Court of Auditors?
2. Does it believe that a possible reduction in the assistance provided would benefit the countries with the prospect of membership?

Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA & IPA II), E-003556-16, Rule 130, WQ to the Commission, Mairead McGuinness (EPP), 29/04/2016
The use of the IPA funds has proven to be an effective tool in aiding reforms, both politically and economically, in countries that are in the process of joining the EU.

1. If a country is not fulfilling the necessary reforms, what are the instances in which the Commission can impose restrictions on the access to IPA funds and/or suspend the access to such funds entirely?

EU funding for reform and cooperation in the Western Balkans and Turkey, E-016025/2015, Rule 130, WQ to the Commission, Jasenko Selimovic (ALDE), 21/12/2015
The Commission recently decided to grant EUR 1 billion for further democratic reforms and regional cooperation to the countries of the western Balkans and Turkey, all of which have in common that they want to join the EU. At the same time we know that in many of these countries corruption is widespread and constitutes a threat to an effective and properly functioning state administration. Corruption is in many cases hard to tackle, and the resources to combat it are often limited. Corruption also involves a major risk that EU financial aid will end in the wrong hands, will not lead to the desired outcome and will not be used for the intended purpose.

1. How will the Commission monitor that the promised money ends in the right hands?
2. How will the Commission follow up whether the money has been used correctly, i.e. whether it has really led to a reform of the administrative machinery and increased regional cooperation?
3. What has the Commission done so far in practice to support work aimed at combating corruption in countries wishing to join the EU?
EU enlargement to the Western Balkans and Turkey, E-015735/2015, Rule 130, WQ to the Commission, Karol Karski (ECR), 14/12/2015

The enlargement of the European Union to include the western Balkans and Turkey could be an important step towards improving economic and political stability. However, it is vital that reforms are carried out in the area of fundamental rights and in order to strengthen democratic institutions, including reforms in public administration, economic growth and competitiveness. One shared challenge is the issue of refugees. The Western Balkans and Turkey have been very accepting and supportive of refugees in their territory. The influx of migrants is also an essential reason to cooperate more closely with the countries involved in the enlargement process. Action also needs to be taken to combat organised crime and corruption and to ensure closer cooperation with civil society groups at local level in order to consolidate reforms within society.

With that in mind:

1. What political, economic and social changes does the Commission think that EU enlargement to the western Balkans and Turkey will bring about?
2. Does the EU enlargement process require the establishment of a new strategy for action?
3. What objectives and challenges lie ahead for the EU, the western Balkans and Turkey?

Coordinated reform of the judiciary in the countries of the Western Balkans, E-014941-15, Rule 130, WQ to the Commission, Jozo Radoš (ALDE), 20/11/2015

The extent to which reform of the judiciary is important for EU candidate countries is demonstrated by the fact that it is the first chapter to be opened and the last to be closed during accession negotiations. Given that the judiciaries of the countries of the Western Balkan share the same origins, they suffer from the same problems. It is therefore logical that the Commission is seeking the coordinated reform of the judiciary in the countries of the western Balkans.

1. What specific forms of coordination and cooperation are being used in the judicial reform process in the countries of the western Balkans?
2. Does the coordination of reform of the judiciary also include the harmonised informatisation of the judiciary in the countries of the western Balkans?

Cooperation programme in the Balkan-Mediterranean region, E-013282-15, Rule 130, WQ to the Commission, Georgios Epitideios (NI), 30/09/2015

The European Commission approved the first EU transnational cooperation programme in the Balkan-Mediterranean region, covering the Balkan Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The programme — in which three EU Member States (Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus) and two candidate countries (Albania, FYROM) are participating — is aimed at enhancing competitiveness, through entrepreneurship, innovation and environmental protection.

The programme will receive more than EUR 28 million from the ERDF and more than EUR 5 million from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). In total, including national co-funding, the programme will receive nearly EUR 40 million. Taking into consideration that incidents of corruption have undeniably occurred in the two countries under accession and in the Member States participating in the programme, as noted in the annual progress reports regarding the countries under accession and in the results of relevant EU controls in Member States, will the Commission say:

1. Why have Albania and FYROM been included in the programme, even though they do not fulfil the Copenhagen criteria, since they have been violating the good neighbourliness obligation and displaying expansionist aspirations against Greece (Great Albania, use of the name Macedonia by FYROM)?
2. Are there provisions to establish control mechanisms, in order to ensure that the money will only be used for the actions planned?
### Member States' responsibility to combat policies that promote conflict in the context of accession negotiations

**P-010288-14, Rule 130, WQ to the Commission, Tonino Picula (S&D), 5/12/2014**

We have all been witness to a number of initiatives undertaken by individual Member States, and indeed by the international community, aimed at fostering cooperation and internal reforms in the western Balkans. The initiative put forward by the foreign ministers of Germany and the UK, which would offer Bosnia and Herzegovina additional assistance to help it reverse its increasingly marked failure to keep pace on the path to Europe, should certainly be welcomed.

However, the commitment of the authorities in each of the Western Balkan countries is of still greater importance. In the context of the still sensitive relations between the countries in this region, the Serbian authorities are raising concerns due to their failure to take on their responsibilities as a candidate country in their dealings with Russia, and due to their complete passivity in the face of the warmongering speeches made by indicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj. On 1 December 2014, the prosecutor’s office requested Šešelj’s return to The Hague.

1. Given that your responsibilities as Commissioner include on-going accession negotiations with candidate countries, do you plan to make continuation of the enlargement process more clearly contingent upon Serbia assuming its responsibility to prevent policies that encourage, or could encourage, the outbreak of new conflicts in the western Balkans?

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### Clarification regarding IPA II

**E-009715/2014, Rule 130, WQ to the Commission, Mario Borghezio (NI), 16/11/2014**

According to the Commission Communication 'Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2014-2015', Chapter IV ‘Conclusions and Recommendations’, Part I, paragraph 17, the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, IPA II, entered into force in 2014. With this instrument the EU will provide EUR 11.7 billion for the period 2014-2020 to support the enlargement countries in their preparation for accession.

Can the Commission specify:

1. Which countries and to what extent this aid has been granted;
2. For what purpose this funding has been granted;
3. How the proper use of this funding is being monitored?
**Special report 24/2016 of 4 October 2016**

**More efforts needed to raise awareness of and enforce compliance with State aid rules in cohesion policy**

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**Questions asked:**

Has the Commission taken sufficient measures to understand why the number of errors concerning compliance with state aid rules in cohesion policy is so significant?

Have actions taken by the Commission to strengthen its, and the Member States’, capacity to prevent, detect and correct infringements of State aid rules resulted effect.

Through this audit, the Court assessed the level of non-compliance with State aid rules in cohesion policy in the 2007-2013 programme period and the extent to which the Commission was aware of the causes of non-compliance. The Court’s specific analyses focused mainly on the 2010-2014 period. It also examined whether the actions undertaken by the Commission for the 2014-2020 programme period are likely to address non-compliance with State aid rules.

In particular, the Court examined:

1. Whether the Commission had a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the causes of non-compliance with State aid rules in cohesion policy, and whether Commission DGs and Member States detected infringements of State aid rules.

2. The court also examined whether the Commission’s actions in response to State aid errors had led to an appropriate number of corrective actions; and whether the Commission had taken appropriate actions to prevent infringements of state aid rules in cohesion policy in future.

**Findings:**

Over the 2010-2014 period, the Commission and the Court of Auditors detected infringements of State aid rules in a significant number of their audits; State aid errors in ERDF and CF were an important factor contributing to our estimated level of error in cohesion policy. The Court found that the Commission’s own audits and monitoring in the cohesion area resulted in a detection rate that was similar to its own findings. The audit authorities in the Member States, on the other hand, detected infringements of State aid rules at a far lower rate than either the Commission or the Court. This indicates that, so far, audit authorities have not focused sufficiently on State aid in the course of their audits.

During the 2007-2013 programme period the Commission did not record the State aid errors it detected or those reported by Member States in a way that allowed it to perform a proper analysis. Such an analysis could have helped the Commission to develop more focused and tailor-made preventive measures for Member States and programmes.
Member States indicate in the application for major projects whether they consider that the investment involves State aid and the Commission can verify this information. Particularly in the beginning of the 2007-2013 programme period, the Commission did not systematically verify major projects for State aid compliance.

Member States rarely notified investments in infrastructure to the Commission. In order to mitigate this risk for the future, the Commission stepped up its internal preventive measures and introduced an alternative approval procedure including an Independent Quality Review for the 2014-2020 programme period. This alternative procedure is not designed always to provide legal certainty for Member States with regard to State aid compliance at the time the major project decision is taken. That certainty can only be obtained on the basis of a Member State notification followed by a Commission State aid decision.

The Commission has taken actions to simplify the applicable State aid legislation for the 2014-2020 programme period, which have resulted in a reduction of administrative burden and more transparency, but have also increased Member States’ responsibilities for designing and implementing aid measures. Member States getting more responsibility risks increasing the number of State aid errors: the Commission’s monitoring has shown that Member States made many mistakes in the design and implementation of aid schemes in the 2007-2013 programme period. To mitigate this risk, the Commission has taken actions to promote Member States’ administrative capacity in the area of State aid, including the introduction of pre-conditions for State aid systems to promote the efficient and effective implementation of European Structural and Investment Funds ("ex ante conditionalities"). However, the Member States that were considered not to be fulfilling these conditions are not necessarily those where the Commission found most problems in the past. Moreover, these actions require continuous attention.

Recommendations:

[The Commission, ]

1. Should impose corrective actions where aid measures do not comply with State aid rules;
2. Should also:
   a) use MAPAR to record irregularities in a way that allows easy analysis of, for example, their type, frequency, seriousness, geographical origin and cause; the database should equally contain information on the follow-up of these irregularities (such as financial corrections imposed);
   b) adapt the database’s structure of the IMS so that information on irregularities such as State aid can be extracted and analysed across Member States and type;
   c) give DG COMP access to all relevant information on State aid irregularities contained in MAPAR and IMS on a regular basis;
3. Should approve major projects only after internal State aid clearance and consistently request Member States to notify aid where needed with a view to ensuring legal certainty, independent of the application procedure used by the Member State;
4. Should:
   a) ensure that the scope and quality of audit authorities’ checks of compliance with State aid rules are sufficient;
   b) ask audit authorities to check the State aid compliance of those major projects that have been approved before the end of 2012 during the closure of the 2007-2013 period;
   c) develop further guidance material, including in particular case studies illustrating good practices and the most common types and causes of infringements of State aid rules;
   d) encourage Member States to set up a central register for monitoring “de minimis” aid;
   e) set up a central EU-wide database in which relevant Member State authorities can consult the identity of undertakings subject to State aid recovery orders as well as the status of recovery proceedings;
5. Should:
   a) use its powers to suspend payments to the Member States concerned until they have rectified all significant shortcomings, if the ex-ante conditionality concerning State aid is not fulfilled by the end of 2016;
   b) follow up, every two years, on Member States’ capacity to comply with State aid rules by carrying out analyses of, for example, the type, frequency, seriousness, geographical origin and cause of State aid errors detected by the Commission itself or by Member State authorities.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

Rapporteur: Nedzhmi Ali (ALDE)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Welcomes the Court’s special report and endorses its recommendations;
2. Notes with satisfaction that the Commission will implement the vast majority of the recommendations;
3. Underlines that all directorates general concerned, and in particular DG COMP and DG REGIO, must have access to all data bases held by Commission services, which enables them to effectively assume their responsibilities;
4. Calls on the Commission to review its refusal to implement recommendation 4(b), as this may endanger the protection of the Union’s financial interests; 5. Can accept the Commission’s reticence to put in practice recommendation 4(d), for as long as alternative methods chosen by Member States are equally effective as a central register for monitoring “de minimis” aid and calls on the Commission to ensure that this is the case;
5. Is convinced that it is of prime importance for Member States to have legal certainty of applicable State aid rules before undertaking major projects as clear and coherent rules can contribute to bring down the error rate in this area;
6. Calls on the Commission to ensure that national audit authorities are familiar with and verify applicable State-aid rules before filing their annual control report;
7. Supports the Court in its call for a central EU-wide database in which relevant Member State authorities can consult the identity of undertakings subject to State aid recovery orders as well as the status of recovery proceedings. Such a database could be important for future risk analyses.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

2016/2100(INI), European Parliament resolution of 14 February 2017 on the annual report on EU competition policy

[The European Parliament, ]

50. Notes that the European Court of Auditors has detected State aid errors in approximately one-fifth of the projects that it audited which were co-financed by cohesion programmes and deemed to have State aid relevance over the period 2010-2014; notes that one-third of these errors were assessed as having a financial impact and that they are considered to have contributed to the level of error in cohesion policy; considers, therefore, that there is scope for progress in addressing non-compliance with State aid rules in cohesion policy; considers that it is particularly necessary to improve the knowledge of State aid rules in the recipient countries in order to avoid errors made in good faith, as well as to improve the recording of irregularities in order to have a better overview of the issue;

51. Is of the opinion that a better understanding is needed at local and national level as regards classification of illegal State aid; welcomes the Commission’s recent decisions clarifying which Member State public support measures can be carried out without a State aid assessment by the Commission; regards those decisions as providing helpful guidance for local and municipal projects, reducing administrative burden and at the same time increasing legal certainty;

176. Refers to the European Court of Auditors’ most recent report on non-compliance with State aid rules in cohesion policy, which notes a significant level
calls for a number of recommendations to be implemented; expresses concerns about these findings, as it is to the detriment of a well-functioning internal market, and, therefore, asks the Commission to take the recommendations made by the Court into consideration and to increase its efforts to avoid further defects.

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2015/2282(INI), European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2016 on implementation of the thematic objective ‘enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs’ – Article 9(3) of the Common Provisions Regulation

[The European Parliament, ]

21. Calls on the Commission to establish conditions for State aid at national and regional level which will not discriminate against SMEs and which should be in line with Cohesion Policy support for enterprises, and to make full use of aid schemes based on the general block exemption regulation, so as to reduce the administrative burden for administrations and beneficiaries and increase the take-up of ESI Funds, while clarifying the link between the rules on ESI Funds for SMEs and the rules on State aid;

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European Parliament decision of 28/04/2016 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014, Section III – Commission, 2015/2154(DEC)

[The European Parliament, ]

253. Notes that respecting state aid rules seems to be an important subject to minimise errors in cohesion;

522. Notes that the annual report of the Court of 10 November 2015 on the implementation of the 2014 budget of the European Union found the most likely error rate in cohesion policy to be estimated at 5.7 %, which represents an increase as compared to 2013 of 5.3 %; expresses its concern at this increase, which is especially significant as far as errors with financial implications and serious negative effects on the budget are concerned; highlights that half of the estimated error rate in cohesion policy is due to the complexity of public procurement and state aid rules, as well as violations in those procedures, such as the unjustified direct award of contracts, conflict of interest and discriminatory selection criteria;

523. Acknowledges the Commission’s replies to Court’s report that the average decrease in the error rate compared with 2000-2006 programming period is due to an improvement of the management and control systems; calls on the Commission to provide timely information and training to authorities with a view on public procurement and state aid rules; in that context, welcomes the establishment of the Action Plan on Public Procurement; notes the application of the Integrity Pacts initiative and urges the Commission to carry out an appropriate ex-ante evaluation as to their potential to really improve transparency and efficiency in public procurement as regards ESI Funds; calls on the Member States to fulfil the ex-ante conditionality concerning public procurement by the end of 2016 and to transpose the 2014 Public Procurement Directives into their legal systems by April 2016, in order to avoid irregularities and ensure effective and efficient projects implementation and achievement of the envisaged results and hence the cohesion policy’s goals; calls on the Commission to strictly supervise this process providing the respective guidance and technical assistance to the Member States in the context of the correct transposition of these Directives into national law;
### Oral / Written Questions

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| **Enforcing State aid rules in the EU**, E-008737/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Adam Szejnfeld (PPE), 22/11/2016 | State aid in the EU is, in principle, forbidden, as it disrupts the functioning of the single market. There are a number of exceptions to that rule, but they must all be announced by the Member States to the European Commission. According to the report presented in October 2016 by the European Court of Auditors (ECA), irregularities were found in 50 of the 220 cases scrutinised in which EU funding was linked to state aid. What is more, the report makes it clear that the Commission was aware of those irregularities. Auditing bodies in the Member States also found far fewer violations of state aid rules than the Commission and the ECA did, which shows that they have not been paying enough attention to this issue in their audits. The ECA auditors recommended that the Commission take corrective action if funds are provided in a way that is not compatible with EC law. They also suggested that the Commission should approve major projects only after internal state aid clearance, and ask Member States to notify aid where needed.  
1. Given that more than one-fifth of projects were found to be in breach of EU rules governing support for companies within the framework of cohesion policy, what corrective measures will the Commission take to tackle the numerous violations of the rules that apply in this area? | **EFSI and agriculture**, E-008599/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&D) 16/11/2016 | The mid-term review of the Juncker Plan, published in June, hints at a possible danger that the EFSI is being focused solely on integration with the ERDF and the ESF, and the EAFRD is consequently being relegated into the background. EFSI-related procedures need to be simplified, and the EAFRD should be dovetailed more fully into financial engineering, starting with the percentage of EAFRD funding to be linked to revolving mechanisms in collaboration with the EIB.  
1. Does the Commission not think, therefore, that special financial instruments should be devised for the agricultural sector, first and foremost for young farmers setting up new business ventures without collateral?  
2. Does it not consider that the rules on state aid in the agricultural sector should be made more flexible when structural funds and financial instruments
are to be used, one way to do that being to raise the de minimis thresholds for interest subsidies?

3. Does it not believe that it should tackle bureaucratic and regulatory obstacles in order to enable CAP first- and second-pillar payments to be combined with the EFSI?

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ECA report: recommendations on state aid, E-008411/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Rosa D'Amato (EFDD), Marco Valli (EFDD), 7/11/2016
The European Court of Auditors (ECA) recently published its Special Report No 24/2016 concerning state aid rules in cohesion policy. The document reveals that during the 2007-2013 programming period, ‘the Commission’s databases did not allow the analysis of state aid errors’ and that ‘DG COMP’s monitoring exercises in the 2009-2014 period did not result in significant recoveries of state aid’. Moreover, until the end of 2012, the Commission ‘did not systematically verify whether the investments in public infrastructure might involve state aid’ and, for the future, a new set of rules has been introduced, but one which ‘is not always designed to provide legal certainty to Member States’.

1. In view of the above remarks, and taking account of the answers provided by the Commission, how does the latter intend specifically to follow up the recommendations received?
2. In particular, how will it adapt the typology of errors so that it can analyse the situation in each Member State effectively?

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Breaches and poor knowledge of state aid rules, E-007960/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ramón Jáuregui Atondo (S&D), 24/10/2016
Compliance with state aid rules is vital when it comes to preventing competition from being distorted and to guaranteeing that the single market functions properly. However, the European Court of Auditors recently reported that Member States know little and often breach state aid rules. The Commission has taken measures to simplify the legislation in force on state aid for the 2014-2020 programming period, but problems remain.

1. What is the Commission’s view on how to reverse this trend of breaches and poor knowledge of state aid rules?
2. What type of measures is the Commission considering taking to prevent, identify and effectively correct infringements?

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State aid in cohesion policy, E-007569/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Raffaele Fitto (ECR), 4/10/2016
Special report No 24/2016 by the European Court of Auditors on state aid in cohesion policy for 2010-2014 pointed out that there are still a large number of problematic areas in the EU. The report highlights the fact that these problems have been increasing from year to year and states that one of the main causes is the difficulty the Commission has in its monitoring work, which is undermined by the lack of a comprehensive analysis and by insufficient coordination between the various DGs, in addition to the difficulties the national audit authorities have in applying the EU regulatory framework on state aid. Despite the fact — as recognised by the Court of Auditors itself — that something has already been done in terms of regulatory and administrative simplification as far as state aid is concerned, can the Commission say:

1. What measures it intends to take to promote greater coordination between the various DGs with regard to cohesion policy (2014-2020);
2. Whether it does not consider it useful to adopt new measures to simplify the state aid rules and increase the support it gives to the audit authorities of the Member States?

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On 4 October 2016, the European Court of Auditors published a report entitled ‘More efforts needed to raise awareness of and enforce compliance with state aid rules in cohesion policy’. In this report, the authors draw attention to the fact that although the Commission has simplified the provisions concerning state aid in order to reduce administrative burdens and provide more transparency, it has also imposed additional obligations on the Member States as regards the development of concepts and the implementation of aid measures.

1. How does the Commission intend to support the Member States so that those additional obligations and responsibilities do not lead to an increase in the number of errors?
2. Does it plan to take remedial measures in the event that irregularities are uncovered?
3. Does it plan to make changes to the monitoring system?

Simplifying European instruments, E-004101/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Dan Nica (S&D), 20/05/2016

The Commission has been making efforts to simplify and streamline existing instruments at EU level, but a number of barriers still exist, such as differences in the rules and procedures and the bottlenecks created by the state-aid framework, and these barriers have a substantial impact on the synergy between the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), EU programmes and national funds. What is more, the instruments implemented ‘outside’ Horizon 2020 require additional national funding, which is limited in the case of several Member States and limits their participation in these measures. There is a clear need to further simplify and harmonise these rules and procedures.

1. How can the Commission address this issue?
2. Does the Commission envisage aligning the rules for implementing European policies that finance research and innovation?

Regional promotion of rural areas, E-015393/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ska Keller (Verts/ALE), 3/12/2015

In the wake of the scandal over the awarding of public subsidies and the use made of them by the registered association ‘pro agro’ (Association for the Promotion of Rural Areas in the Federal State of Brandenburg), it is clear that state-aid rules are very likely to have been breached elsewhere in the regional promotion of rural areas.

1. What structures exist for the regional promotion of rural areas in the EU Member States?
   The Commission is asked to list the various types of structure and to provide examples of each, indicating the Member State and region where each example is located, the name of the programme in question and its main organisational characteristics.
2. Which of these types of regional rural marketing body are likely to be affected by state-aid rules and how often, in the last funding period (2007-2013) and to date in the current period (2014 to 2010), has approval for state aid been sought; on how many occasions have proceedings been taken under the state-aid rules and how many breaches of the rules have been recorded?
3. How, and using what tools, does the Commission ensure that monies from the structural funds are not misused for the provision of institutional subsidies, and can it list specific measures it is taking to ensure that any abuses are identified independently at an early stage and investigated?

Direct aid for businesses from the ERDF, E-004471/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Mark Demesmaeker (ECR), 19/03/2015

I have been contacted by a citizen who is concerned about the possibility of unfair competition caused by providing direct aid to commercial companies from the
ERDF (European Regional Development Fund). The citizen owns a business in the digital printing sector and is faced with competition from other EU Member States, where he claims that business owners receive a considerable level (80%) of direct aid for their investments from European funds. In this context, I would like to put the following questions to the Commission:

1. Can the Commission indicate which Member States provide direct aid to companies from the ERDF?
2. Which sectors are given priority?
3. How much money does this involve (per Member State over the period 2007-2013)?
4. How does this aid relate to the rules governing state aid?
5. How does this aid relate to the creation of a level playing field in the European internal market?
Special report 29/2016 of 18 November 2016

Supervisory Mechanism - Good start but further improvements needed

Economic and Monetary Affairs | Other Institutions

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<td>Summary</td>
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<td>The Court focused on the way the ECB set up the SSM and has organised its work. In particular, the auditors looked at the new mechanism’s governance structure (including the work of internal audit), arrangements for accountability (including external audit), the organisation and resourcing of banking supervision teams (both ‘off-site’ and ‘on-site’ at bank premises), and the on-site inspection procedure.</td>
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**Findings:**

1. The Court did obtain sufficient information to conclude that the SSM was set up on schedule. Owing to the involvement of national supervisory authorities, the supervisory structure is rather complex and relies on a high degree of coordination and communication between ECB staff and NCA appointees from the participating Member States. This complexity is a challenge in the area of governance, where the efficiency and effectiveness of management decision-making may be hampered by complex procedures for exchanging information.
2. The ECB is bound by legislation to observe a clear separation between its monetary policy and supervision functions. The latter is overseen by a Supervisory Board, which proposes decisions to the ECB’s Governing Council. However, within the ECB the SSM Supervisory Board does not exercise control over the supervisory budget or human resources. This raises concerns about the independence of the two areas of the ECB’s work, as does the fact that some ECB departments provide services to both functions without clear rules and reporting lines that would minimise possible conflicts of objectives.
3. Internal audit is one such shared service. The Court found that it was under-resourced for its work on the SSM, which is given less attention than other audit tasks. Although a satisfactory risk assessment has been made to determine necessary audit topics, the resources currently available to internal audit are inadequate to ensure that the most risky aspects of the SSM’s operations will be addressed within a reasonable timeframe.
4. The ECB’s efforts to ensure transparency and accountability for the SSM towards the European Parliament and the general public are potentially weakened by the lack of a proper mechanism for assessing and then reporting on supervisory effectiveness.
5. The level of supervisory staff was originally set by a very simple approach that relied on estimates of staffing for similar functions in National competent authorities before the SSM was established. No detailed analysis of staffing needs for the new and much more demanding SSM framework was conducted, and therefore no direct link has been established between the supervisory examination programme and the allocation of resources, as required by legislation. There are indications that current staffing levels are insufficient.
6. The SSM’s work of supervising the euro area’s more important banks, both on-site and off-site, is heavily dependent on staff appointed by national authorities. Thus, despite its overall responsibility, the ECB has insufficient control over the composition and skills of supervision and inspection teams or over the resources it can bring to bear.
7. The allocation of resources to joint off-site supervisory teams, particularly from national authorities, has not matched the initial needs estimates, and...
the resulting constraints in terms of staff numbers could in many cases affect the teams’ ability to adequately supervise the banks for which they are responsible.

8. The work of on-site supervision is likewise the ECB’s responsibility, but here the problem is that inspection teams typically include very few ECB staff. Moreover, in most cases inspections are headed up by the bank’s home or host supervisor.

9. Other issues the Court found to affect the conduct of on-site supervision included missing guidance on prioritisation for inspection requests, IT shortcomings and the need to improve the qualifications of National competent authority on-site inspectors. In addition, owing to the length of the timeframe for issuing final recommendations, findings may be outdated by the time they are formally delivered to the inspected bank.

**Recommendations:**

1. In the area of governance, the ECB should:
   a) seek to improve efficiency by further streamlining the decision-making process;
   b) examine the risk posed by the system of shared services to the separation of functions, establish separate reporting lines for cases where specific supervisory resources are concerned and look into giving the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Supervisory Board stronger involvement in the budgetary process; and
   c) assign internal audit skills and resources in such a way that higher-level risks are covered as and when appropriate.

2. In the area of accountability, the ECB should:
   a) make available all documents requested for the Court to exercise its audit mandate; and
   b) develop and make public a formal performance framework to demonstrate the effectiveness of its supervisory activities.

3. In the area of off-site supervision (joint supervisory teams), the ECB should:
   a) take steps to ensure that national authorities participate fully and proportionately in JST work;
   b) develop with NCAs methods to assess the suitability of prospective JST appointees and their subsequent performance;
   c) establish and maintain a comprehensive database of the skills, experience and qualifications of all JST staff;
   d) implement a formal, relevant training curriculum for all supervisory staff and consider setting up an off-site supervision certification programme;
   e) develop a risk-based methodology to determine the target size and composition of each JST; and
   f) periodically review the clustering model used in supervisory planning and update it as necessary. The clustering itself should be based on the most recent bank-specific information.

4. In the area of on-site supervision, the ECB should:
   a) substantially strengthen the presence of its own staff in on-site inspections, and ensure that a greater proportion of inspections are led by non-native supervisors; and
   b) remedy weaknesses in the IT system and improve the overall skills and qualifications of on-site inspectors.

**CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur**

**CONT Working Document of 14 February 2017** on the European Court of Auditors’ Special Report 29/2016 (Discharge 2016) : Single supervisory Mechanism - Good start but further improvements needed

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Takes note of the following legal bases:
   • Article 287 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (FUE): “The Court of Auditors shall examine the accounts of all revenue and
expenditure of the Union. It shall also examine the accounts of all revenue and expenditure of all bodies, offices or agencies set up by the Union in so far as the relevant constituent instrument does not preclude such examination. The Court of Auditors shall provide the European Parliament and the Council with a statement of assurance as to the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions which shall be published in the Official Journal of the European Union. This statement may be supplemented by specific assessments for each major area of Union activity."

- Article 27 of the Statute of the European System of Central Banks (ESCB) and of the European Central Bank (Protocol n° 4 of the TFEU): “27.1. The accounts of the ECB and national central banks shall be audited by independent external auditors recommended by the Governing Council and approved by the Council. The auditors shall have full power to examine all books and accounts of the ECB and national central banks and obtain full information about their transactions. Article 27.2. The provisions of Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union shall only apply to an examination of the operational efficiency of the management of the ECB.”

- Articles 20(1) and (7) of the Council Regulation 1 conferring specific tasks on the ECB concerning policies relating to the prudential supervision of credit institutions: “1. The ECB shall be accountable to the European Parliament and to the Council for the implementation of this Regulation, in accordance with this Chapter. 7. When the European Court of Auditors examines the operational efficiency of the management of the ECB under Article 27.2 of the Statute of the ESCB and of the ECB, it shall also take into account the supervisory tasks conferred on the ECB by this Regulation.”

2. Supports the Court’s conclusions and welcomes that the ECB has accepted the Court’s recommendations 2;

3. Is, however, concerned about a report by the Contact Committee of the EU Supreme Audit Institutions comparing the audit rights of 27 of the 28 national SAIs across the EU over banking supervisors; regrets that the resulting statement pointed out that an audit gap has emerged in those countries where previous audit mandates of national SAIs over banking supervisors are not being replaced by a similar level of audit by the ECA over the ECB’s supervisory activities;

4. Underlines that it already expressed this concern in its resolution on the Banking Union Annual Report 2015 2;

5. Regrets a certain limited transparency of information for the supervised entities as the result of the approach adopted by the ECB with regard to the disclosure, that involved that the supervised entities could be not able to fully understand the outcome of the SREP (review process and prudential assessment); stresses that the Court has expressed concern about the lack of transparency, which in its opinion could increase “the risk of arbitrariness in supervision”;

6. Points out that the lack of any supervisory scrutiny on bank’s exposure to illiquid “level 3 activities”, including toxic assets and derivatives, resulted in an asymmetric exercise of the supervisory function; considers that the strong bias against credit risks relative to market and operational risks stemming from speculative financial activities, resulted in penalising commercial banks in favour of big investment banks, putting into question the validity and reliability of the comprehensive assessments conducted so far; is concerned about the recent statements by the Chair of the Supervisory Board Danièle Nouy concerning the difficulties and inability of the ECB to proceed with a proper valuation of positions related to these complex and risky products;

7. Highlights the findings of the Court about the lack of an effective organisational separation between the monetary policy and supervisory functions as well as of clear and stringent governance rules to prevent conflict of interests, which reinforces the concerns over the inherent conflict of interest between the ECB’s role in preserving the stability of the euro and the prudential supervision of big European credit institutions;

8. Supports the finding of the Courts on the necessity to provide a risk analysis concerning the use of shared services on the tasks related to the monetary policy and the supervisory function;

9. Is worried, in this context, that the Court pointed out that the level of information provided by the ECB was only partly sufficient to assess the efficiency of operations linked to the SSM’s governance structure, the work of its joint supervisory teams and its on-site inspections; stresses that important areas were therefore left unaudited;

10. Finds it unacceptable, from a point of view of accountability, that the auditee, i.e. the ECB, wants to decide single-handedly to which documents the external auditors may have access 1; calls therefore on the ECB to fully cooperate with the Court as external auditor and to provide full access to the information to the Court in order to comply with the abovementioned rules;
11. Calls on the Court to inform its competent committee whether a solution to the problem of access to information was found before November 2018;
12. Acknowledges the existing reporting arrangements between the ECB and the European Parliament; these arrangements cannot, however, replace the Court’s audit;
13. Recalls that the Commission should have published, by 31 December 2015, a report on review of the application of the regulation conferring specific tasks on the ECB concerning policies relating to the prudential supervision of credit institutions; regrets that this did not happen;
14. Calls therefore on the Commission to finalize this report as swiftly as possible and in any case before November 2017.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees


[The European Parliament, ]

17. Calls for greater transparency in the EU’s economic and financial decision-making process, in particular in the area of the banking supervision performed by the European Central Bank; supports, furthermore, the Ombudsman’s recommendations to increase the transparency of the EIB and the Eurogroup and to strengthen their internal ethics rules, while recognising her recent efforts in this regard and the fact that Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 does not apply to the Eurogroup as it is not an institution or body within the meaning of the Treaties; calls for compliance with the Ombudsman’s recommendations on the EIB Complaints Mechanism Review (EIB-CM) and underlines the importance of an independent complaints mechanism; invites the Ombudsman to play a more active role in ensuring that the new EIB-CM remains credible and efficient while respecting the principles of operational independence, transparency, accessibility, timeliness and adequate resources;

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[The European Parliament, ]

10. Underlines the need for a comprehensive view of the cumulative impact of the different changes in the regulatory environment, whether they concern supervision, loss absorption, resolution or accounting standards;
19. Welcomes the progress made to prepare for allowing some delegation in the area of fit and proper decisions; points out, nevertheless, that a change in the regulations is needed to allow more and easier delegation of decision-making on certain routine issues, from the Supervisory Board to relevant officials; would welcome such a change, which would contribute to making the ECB’s banking supervision more efficient and effective; calls on the ECB to specify tasks and legal framework for the delegation of decision-making;
20. Takes note of the report of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on the functioning of the SSM; takes note of the findings concerning the insufficient level of staffing; calls on NCAs and Member States to fully provide the ECB with the necessary human resources and economic data enabling it to do its job, in particular as regards on-site inspections; calls on the ECB to amend the SSM Framework Regulation in order to formalise commitments by participating NCAs and to implement a risk-based methodology to determine the target number of staff and the composition of skills for Joint Supervisory Teams; takes the view that more involvement of ECB personnel and less reliance on staff from NCAs would improve the independence of supervision, together with the use of staff from the competent authority of one Member State to supervise an institution from another Member State, which also contributes to effectively addressing the risk of supervisory forbearance; welcomes the ECB’s cooperation with the European Parliament on staff working conditions; calls on the ECB to promote a good working environment that fosters professional cohesion within it; recalls the potential conflict of interest between supervisory tasks and responsibility for monetary
policy, and the need for a clear separation between both sets of functions; calls on the ECB to perform a risk analysis on possible conflicts of interest and to envisage separate reporting lines where specific supervisory resources are concerned; believes that, while the separation of monetary policy and supervision is a central principle, it should not preclude cost savings enabled by the sharing of services, provided such services are non-critical in terms of policymaking and proper guarantees are established; calls on the ECB to hold public consultations when drafting quasi-legislative measures in order to enhance its accountability;

36. Notes that the SSM has been assigned the task of European banking supervision for the purpose of ensuring compliance with EU prudential rules and of ensuring financial stability, while other supervisory tasks having clear European spillovers have remained in the hand of domestic supervisors; stresses, in this regard, that the SSM should have monitoring powers concerning Anti-Money Laundering (AML) activities of national banking supervisors; emphasises that the EBA should also be assigned additional powers in the field of AML, including the powers to carry out on-site assessments of Member States’ competent authorities, to require the production of any information that is relevant to assessing compliance, to issue recommendations for remedial action, to make those recommendations public, and to take measures that are necessary to ensure that the recommendations are effectively implemented;

37. Reiterates its call on the EBA to enforce and enhance the consumer protection framework for banking services in line with its mandate, complementing the SSM’s prudential supervision;

49. Points out that swift and effective exchange of information between supervision and resolution authorities is paramount in order to ensure smooth crisis management; welcomes the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the ECB and the SRM in respect of cooperation and information exchange; calls on the ECB to specify in the MoU the communication procedures between joint supervisory teams and internal resolution teams; recommends that the attendance of the ECB as a permanent observer at the SRB Plenary and Executive Sessions be made fully reciprocal by allowing a representative of the SRB to attend the Supervisory Board of the ECB, also as a permanent observer;

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[The European Parliament,

21. Welcomes the step forward taken by the ECB in publishing the summary minutes of its meetings, and looks forward to the announcement of further steps to improve the transparency of its communication channels; considers that further progress could still be made, especially with regard to the SSM;

25. Stresses that the ECB’s supervisory role and its monetary policy function must be clearly distinguished, and that the combination of both functions should not generate any conflict of interest for the ECB; recalls in this respect the guiding principle that the instrument used for policymaking, whether monetary or supervisory, should be chosen depending on the objective pursued and the issue in question;

26. Underlines the need for democratic accountability in view of the new responsibilities conferred on the ECB regarding supervisory tasks, as well as its advisory role in Troika and Quadriga programmes;

27. Stresses the importance of the organisational independence of the European Systemic Risk Board, and calls on the ECB to consider ways of enhancing this board’s independence;

1. Welcomes the establishment of the SSM, which has been successful since its creation both from an operational point of view and in terms of supervisory quality, and considers it a remarkable achievement, taking into account the complexity of the project and the very short timeframe available;

2. Encourages broad representation in the BU through the future involvement and participation of NCAs of non-participating Member States in accordance with established legal rules and procedures, as well as through enhanced cooperation with third countries outside the EU; reaffirms that closer coordination between NCAs across the EU and internationally is essential for ensuring effective regulation and supervision of systemically important banks;

3. Welcomes in particular, in relation to the operational set-up:
   (a) the recruitment process, which resulted in a good blend of competences, cultures and gender, thus contributing to the supranational nature of the SSM, and the thorough training activity programme for national competent authorities (NCAs) and ECB staff; points out, however, that ECB contracting practices leave room for improvement, especially in regard to the number of short-term contracts, checks on staff working hours, transparency of the recruitment process and willingness to negotiate with unions; notes the ECB’s announcement that it has appointed its first Chief Services Officer to manage all administrative services, IT services and human resources;
   (b) the drafting, building on national best practices, of the Supervisory Manual laying down common processes, procedures and methods for conducting a euro-wide supervisory review process;
   (c) the set-up of the IT infrastructure and of the supporting analytical tools; stresses the importance of strong and well-functioning IT systems corresponding to the needs of the supervisory functions of the SSM; encourages coordination between the SSM and national supervisory authorities in order to meet the needs of data through a single application;
   (d) the setting up of Joint Supervisory Teams (JSTs) and the dialogue they have established with the supervised credit institutions;
   (e) the processes devised to work off the common procedures (authorisation of qualifying holdings, licensing, passporting, fit and proper assessments);

4. Notes that a very significant share of work is routinely devoted to administrative procedures, required by the SSM Regulation, which may not always be proportionate, and stands ready to consider proposals aimed at reducing the operational burden on structures at all levels and improving the effectiveness of the SSM supervision, namely by exploiting the potential of streamlining administrative procedures, or by delegating certain decisions on specific administrative issues within clear limits and guidelines;

5. Notes with satisfaction that the ethics rules of the ECB have been reviewed, and stresses the importance of effective rules on conflict of interests and safeguards against undue influence of the financial industry, on staff as well as on members of the governing bodies;

6. Believes that while the degree of effectiveness achieved by JSTs in less than a year is remarkable, further improvements can be pursued, including by involving NCAs in a more effective way in the decision-making process;

7. Takes note of the remarks made by supervised entities about the need for early planning of supervisory actions, in order to enhance their quality and
avoid the unintended consequence of affecting banks' business activities, and considers that there is a great deal of room for improvement in this respect;

8. Emphasises the need to avoid double reporting requirements and multiple reporting channels, and more generally an unnecessary administrative burden on credit institutions, in particular smaller banks, as well as to ensure that the proportionality principle is upheld; calls for increased effectiveness of data collection, which should abide by the 'once only' principle and should be examined for its usefulness, applicability and proportionality;

9. Calls on the ECB to ensure that the creation of a comprehensive credit risk database (Analytical Credit Dataset, AnaCredit) pays particular attention to the proportionality principle and to the need to avoid disproportionately high administrative costs, especially for smaller institutions; calls, in this context, for the relevant reporting thresholds to be set at an adequate level;

10. Stresses the importance of close interaction between the ECB’s Directorates-General (DGs) in charge of direct and indirect micro-prudential supervision and the DG in charge of horizontal supervision and expertise services, and emphasises the role of the latter in improving the comprehension, among supervised entities, of a common supervisory approach underlying the concrete individual micro-prudential measures; stresses the importance of a full organisational separation between SSM staff and the staff providing services needed for independent monetary policy purposes;

11. Calls for a systematic review of comprehensive assessments of ECB-supervised institutions, as well as for appropriate improvements of the methodology in the light of lessons learned, in all cases where an institution is deemed sound under the assessment and subsequently runs into trouble, as well as where an institution is deemed undercapitalised on the basis of a stress test scenario which turns out to be significantly unrealistic; emphasises the limitations of the current stress test methodology which evaluates third-country exposure on the basis of banks' internal assessment;

25. Welcomes the development of a common methodology for the 2015 round of the SREP; notes that, partly as a consequence of the swift start of the SSM, many aspects of this methodology were finalised only when the SREP cycle was already under way, and considers that in order to improve the robustness of results and consistency between banks’ risk profiles and capital levels, the process leading to the approval of the common supervisory standards for risk assessment can benefit from further refinement; welcomes the SSM’s willingness to work on bank governance, and in particular on risk management, risk appetite and cyber-risk;

30. Stresses the importance of the work that has been undertaken on the homogenisation of the calculation of risk-weighted assets, which is pivotal for comparability purposes, and on the review of internal models for the calculation of banks’ capital requirements; considers progress in this area, for all portfolios, to be crucial for preserving the effectiveness and credibility of banking supervision in the euro area in order to promote best practice in market and credit risk models;

31. Welcomes the adoption by the SSM of five high-level priorities to guide its supervision throughout 2016; underlines that the SSM should look beyond credit risk to all forms of bank risk, including non-financial risk; underlines that further steps are necessary to reinforce the supervisory scrutiny of banks’ financial portfolios, especially level 3 financial assets, including derivatives; stresses the need for a reduction of the interlinkages between the regulated and the shadow banking sector, not least via limiting the respective credit risk exposure;

36. Believes that the ECB’s supervisory strategy, while avoiding any differentiation along national lines, should reflect and safeguard pluralism and diversity of banking models across the EU, including authentic and healthy mutual, savings and cooperative banks, and should comply with the principle of proportionality;

37. Considers transparency vis-à-vis market players and the public, including on sensitive topics such as capital targets as a result of the SREP cycle,
supervisory practices and other requirements, to be essential for a level playing field between supervised entities, for fair competition in the banking market and for avoiding situations where regulatory uncertainty negatively influences banks’ business strategy; underlines that transparency of both supervisors and supervised entities is also a prerequisite for accountability, as it allows Parliament and the public to be informed about key policy issues and to assess consistency with rules and supervisory practices; calls for more transparency with regard to pillar 2 decisions and justifications;

39. Welcomes the efficient and open way in which the ECB has so far fulfilled its accountability obligations towards Parliament, and calls on the ECB to continue to fully engage in this regard and to further contribute to improving Parliament’s capacity to assess SSM policies and activities; views favourably the willingness of the ECB President to further cooperate with Parliament regarding the ECB’s role in banking matters, in particular in the framework of global standards-setting bodies such as the FSB;

40. Recalls that public audit is an integral part of the mechanisms for ensuring the accountability of institutions to citizens; notes, therefore, with some concern the statement published in June 2015 by the Contact Committee of the Heads of the Supreme Audit Institutions of the European Union and the European Court of Auditors (ECA), which warns against the emergence of audit gaps due to the transfer of supervisory tasks from national authorities to the SSM in a context where the audit mandate of the ECA over the ECB acting as a supervisor is less comprehensive than those of national audit institutions over national supervisors; recommends accordingly that consideration be given to strengthening the audit mandate of the ECA;

42. Welcomes the credibility of the SSM on the international stage; considers it fundamental that the SSM is properly involved in the design of global regulatory standards, in particular the orientations negotiated within the FSB and the BCBS;

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European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2016 Stocktaking and challenges of the EU Financial Services Regulation: impact and the way forward towards a more efficient and effective EU framework for financial regulation and a capital markets union, 2015/2106(INI)

[The European parliament, ]

23. Calls for an appropriate and clear-cut division of competences between EU and national level, bearing in mind that national supervisors have more knowledge of local market characteristics; highlights that the effectiveness of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM), a level-playing field and transparency are to be ensured and that conflicts of interest between supervisory authorities and supervised entities are to be avoided; is concerned about the effect of a one-size-fits-all supervisory approach on entities that are smaller and primarily active at national level within the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM);

26. Reiterates the need for a level playing field within the EU, including with regard to SSM-supervised banks and the banks of non-participating Member States, and encourages the full inclusion of non-euro Member States into the Banking Union, while recognising that certain elements currently provide for voluntary participation; calls on the Commission to ensure that the single market continues to be developed, while recognising national specificities; calls on the Commission to further pursue a strong approach, in terms of regulation and supervision, to 'parallel' or 'shadow banking' with the aim of mitigating systemic risks and improving transparency; welcomes the major steps achieved in European insurance regulation by the application of Solvency II, as of 1 January 2016, which has to be assessed and possibly developed further, while considering the international framework for global systemically important insurers;

47. Believes that the ESAs and SSM have a crucial role to play in achieving the objectives of better regulation and supervision; highlights the role of the ESAs and the SSM in ensuring coherence and consistency between different pieces of legislation, in reducing uncertainty and regulatory arbitrage and in fostering mutually beneficial cooperation among market participants; stresses that the ESAs and SSM have to be adequately funded and staffed if they are to fulfil the
tasks given to them by the co-legislators;

48. Highlights that the revision of the ESA regulations must reflect the accountability and transparency provisions for enhanced scrutiny by Parliament, as laid down in the SSM and SRM regulations, and must reinforce the independence of the ESAs from the Commission; considers it necessary to explore possibilities for facilitating greater ESA participation at an advisory level during the level 1 phase while respecting the prerogatives of the co-legislators;

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<th>Oral / Written Questions</th>
<th>Lacuna in supervision of the ECB by the Court of Auditors, E-006055/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Paul Tang (S&amp;D), 25-07-2016</th>
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<td>When the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) was introduced, certain supervisory powers were transferred from national courts of audit to the Court of Auditors of the EU (Article 20(7) of the SSM Regulation). However, the effectiveness with which public responsibilities are discharged is not subject to supervision under these provisions. This gives rise to a lacuna in supervision.</td>
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<td>1. Does the Commission agree that, since powers were transferred from national courts of audit to the Court of Auditors, a lacuna has arisen with regard to monitoring the effectiveness of the ECB’s discharge of its public responsibilities?</td>
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<td>2. In connection with the evaluation of the ESM, does the Commission aim to reinforce the mandate of the Court of Auditors in relation to the ECB, preferably to increase its powers to put them on a par with those vested in the Netherlands Court of Audit at national level?</td>
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<th>National audit authorities’ audit powers in connection with bank supervision, E-011490/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Barbara Kappel (ENF), 17-07-2015</th>
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<td>According to a letter from the President of the Austrian Court of Auditors, Dr Josef Moser, there are differences in the way checks are carried out on the bank supervision arrangements established at European level. With regard to bank supervision, the Single Supervisory Mechanism Regulation did not clearly apportion audit powers between the European Court of Auditors (ECA) and the European Central Bank (ECB). According to Dr Moser, there is a risk that audit powers will be restricted.</td>
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<td>1. Does the Commission regard the current ECA-ECB share out of audit powers in connection with bank supervision as sufficient?</td>
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<td>2. On what grounds have banking union audit powers not been conferred on the ECA in their entirety?</td>
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<td>3. What conditions must be met for a ‘significant’ bank to be inspected by supervisors, and how is ‘significant’ defined in this context?</td>
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<th>Supervisory Review and Evaluation Process (SREP), E-003892/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&amp;D), 11-03-2015</th>
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<td>As is well-known the ‘Supervisory Review and Evaluation Process’ (SREP) is the process of review and prudential assessment carried out annually in order to ensure that banks and banking groups have equipped themselves with capital and organisational safeguards appropriate to the risks taken on, ensuring overall operational equilibrium. For the major banks, this process was first conducted by the Banca d’Italia and is now conducted by the ECB under the ‘Single Supervisory Mechanism’ (SSM). It was announced that, as part of its new powers, the ECB has started and is currently in a European race to obtain support from consulting firms on the SREP, relating to on-site monitoring activity. This recourse to outside companies, if implemented in the future on an ongoing basis, seems to presuppose the birth of a different structure to that originally imagined.</td>
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<td>1. I therefore ask the Commission, subject to the well-known independent responsibilities of the ECB, how can it promote, with reference to the SREP, and in consultation with the Council, a dialogue with the ECB on the following aspects:</td>
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<td>a) the opportunity to establish swift and structured organisational processes</td>
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<td>b) the adoption of caution regarding the reduction of costs and conflicts of interest?</td>
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European Central Bank and the Single Supervisory Mechanism: oversight, transparency, and democracy, E-008998/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&D), 10-11-2014

The European Central Bank (ECB) has taken charge of the new banking supervision system, the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM), which entered into operation on 4 November 2014. Replying to my earlier question about the SSM accountability arrangements, the President of the ECB, Mario Draghi, stated the ECB view that accountability is central to the transparency, legitimacy, and independence of supervision decisions and helps to make banking supervision effective and efficient.

Commenting on 4 November 2014 on the advent of the SSM, the President of Parliament, Martin Schulz, said that ‘The establishment of the Single Supervisory Mechanism, within the European Central Bank (ECB), is a crucial step towards building the Banking Union. As financial markets are cross-border, it is fundamental to unify the supervision of European banks. I welcome this major development which the European Parliament has been advocating for years’.

1. In the light of the foregoing, and without encroaching on the powers of Member States or detracting from the exclusive monetary policy competence which, as is common knowledge, lies with the ECB, what will the Commission do in order to:
   a) make the real economy more resilient in the face of economic crises;
   b) coordinate its actions more closely with those of Parliament, the Council, and the ECB where oversight, transparency, and democracy are concerned?

Conflict of interest affecting the ECB, E-007879/2014, Question for written answer to the Council, Rule 130, Marco Zanni ++ (EFDD), 13-10-2014

From November 2014, the European Central Bank will take on new responsibilities for banking supervision as a party to the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM). Under the SSM Regulation adopted pursuant to Article 127(6) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the ECB is to be assigned specific tasks pertaining to the prudential supervision of credit institutions, and the main aims will be to safeguard the safety and soundness of the European banking system and to increase financial integration and stability in Europe. Some of the banks which are defined as significant institutions requiring supervision, such as Intesa SanPaolo Spa and Unicredit Spa, hold shares in the Bank of Italy and therefore indirectly have holdings in the ECB.

1. In the light of this fact, does the Council consider there to be a conflict of interest?
2. What precautions have been taken to prevent this and to guarantee the independence of the supervising bodies?
**Special Report 30/2016 of 12 January 2017**

**The effectiveness of EU support to priority sectors in Honduras**

**EU Development Aid | Foreign Affairs**

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<td>Special report 30/2016: The effectiveness of EU support to priority sectors in Honduras</td>
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<td>Short summary of questions asked, observations, findings and recommendations</td>
<td>Questions asked: The Court assessed the effectiveness of EU development support to priority sectors in Honduras. Therefore, it examined the Commission’s management and the degree to which the EU’s development support objectives have been achieved. The audit focused on the 2007-2015 period and was carried out between November 2015 and April 2016. The priority sectors examined were poverty reduction, natural resources, and security and justice. These sectors received 89% of expenditure under bilateral support over the 2007-2015 period.</td>
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<td>Findings: 1. The EU approach was generally relevant and well-coordinated but insufficiently focused</td>
<td>When programming its bilateral support for Honduras, the Commission targeted many priority areas, such as education, health, water and sanitation, forestry, renewable energy, and security and justice. The Commission’s documents usually provided convincing arguments for engaging in new fields as they responded to high needs that were covered by pertinent and credible national strategies. However, the large number of the addressed issues limited the focus of the financial assistance and jeopardised its potential impact. Some areas (basic education, health, quality systems, water and sanitation) received support only for a relatively short time, because the Commission decided to adapt to the changes in the national plans. Activities under the actions used to implement the Commission’s strategies were complementary and well-coordinated with other EU support in the form of bilateral, regional and thematic programmes. Furthermore, in most cases the objectives and activities were in line with the needs of the sector supported. The exceptions concerned the forestry sector, where unsatisfactory attention was paid to land tenure uncertainty, and the education sector, where more emphasis should have been laid on the third cycle of the primary phase (grades 7th to 9th). Technical assistance provided as part of the principal actions or by dedicated actions (poverty reduction) was prioritised by the national authorities, which allowed to concentrate on essential fields while avoiding duplications. Nevertheless, despite the specific requests by the responsible line ministries, the available funding did not enable to address all significant needs in priority sectors as the Commission’s aid was spread on many broad areas. The Court qualified the donor coordination structure (organised at three levels and including information sharing as well as exchange of views) as satisfactory,</td>
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but stated that there has not been yet an effective division of labour. The Commission has closely collaborated with EU Member States, especially with respect to the forestry and justice sectors. Cooperation with other donors has been less intensive. There was no real distribution of tasks which meant that several donors were active in the same areas whereas others remained neglected. In some cases this even led to either an overlap in funding or an entire absence of support. Another obstacle was the absence of a good overview of the support provided by donors.

2. **Budget support was generally provided in support of relevant and credible national strategies**

The Commission provided a substantial part of its financial assistance in the form of budget support, which was committed to national development strategies as well as to generally relevant and credible sector strategies (education, health, water and sanitation, forestry, food security). The Court pointed out, though, that the EU Delegation in Honduras lacked the necessary macroeconomic and public financial management expertise, namely the in-country expertise, to manage budget support operations. These involved substantial risks due to the unstable macroeconomic framework and weak public financial management, such as fraud and corruption. In line with its risk assessment framework, the Commission described these risks and sought to mitigate them.

In order to combat macroeconomic instability, a strong dialogue with the Ministry of Finance was conducted and a technical assistance was provided to help analyse the situation and make economic projections. However, the Commission did not assess budget support eligibility in a sufficiently structured manner to demonstrate that the progress achieved was in line with clearly defined benchmarks and targets. Furthermore, it did not always react consistently when the partner country did not respect the budget support eligibility conditions. This sent contradictory messages that could be detrimental to aid effectiveness.

In the field of public financial management, the Commission identified a number of persistent problems, such as excessive government spending, an unknown level of payment arrears, a lack of treasury single account to manage budget, a limited effectiveness of the Honduran Court of Audit, and a high level of corruption. The efforts to mitigate these risks were made. The Commission contributed to Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability assessments and it became more active in policy dialogue, which focused especially on improvements to budgetary management via increased fiscal revenue, transparency and controls on public sector deficit and expenditure. Although the requirement for a program of reforms was considered as a good practice by the Court, it was not clear to what extent or by when they were expected due to the lack of precise indicators and deadlines.

3. **EU actions generally delivered the expected outputs but weaknesses in the monitoring tools hindered the assessment of the results achieved**

With regard to the expected outputs, they were mostly realised, with some delays - noticeable particularly in the forestry sector - owing mainly to the difficult context after the 2009 coup d’état and an insufficient cooperation from the national authorities.

The Commission made use of diverse tools to monitor EU performance, but they displayed some weaknesses which hindered the assessment of the achieved results. Certain indicators were inadequate, other did not refer to any baselines or were not credible (e.g. zero illegal logging). Although the field visits were documented, they were not planned on the basis of a risk analysis. There was also a lack of consistent follow-up of the external consultants’ recommendations who had carried out results-oriented monitoring during or after the implementation of actions.

4. **The Commission made good efforts to have a constructive policy dialogue contributing to positive changes**

The Court noted the Commission’s efforts to have a constructive policy dialogue contributing to positive changes. The overall framework, established in the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement, was deemed as appropriate. The strategies covering eight areas (macroeconomic policy, public financial management, development policy, decent work, food security, forestry, water and sanitation, quality systems for improving competitiveness), which have been developed since 2012, represent good practice, although they lack clarity and do not provide an exhaustive coverage as specific strategies for poverty reduction or security and justice were missing. Moreover, the implementation of policy dialogue strategies is not sufficiently documented.
When dialogue was coordinated with other donors, the Commission was involved in most initiatives. It also conducted dialogue bilaterally or in steering committees overseeing the actions it finances (e.g. in the areas of forestry or security and justice). Despite a relatively low level of financial aid from the EU in comparison with the Honduras’ GDP (an average of 0.2 %), the Commission managed to exercise a leverage that went beyond expectations - policy dialogue contributed to significant improvements in the country’s timber trade standards and the field of human rights. On the contrary, the Commission could make a better use of its dialogue with regard to the educational objectives. Another disadvantage was the absence of government’s will to adopt a national security and justice sector policy.

5. In difficult country circumstances, EU actions have contributed to positive developments but the overall situation in Honduras remains worrying

Notwithstanding the positive advancements facilitated by the EU assistance, the Court expressed its concern about the overall situation in Honduras. Despite increased social spending, the level of poverty increased during 2007-2015 period, with a sharp rise in extreme poverty in urban areas.

The actions in the domains of education, health, water and sanitation, and quality systems exhibited mixed results. The number of schooldays per year progressed to comply with the required minimum and new educational centres were opened in disadvantaged areas. However, the majority of targets set by various plans were not reached (e.g. the number of children completing primary school).

As for the health sector, important improvements regarding the number of institutional births and medical consultations in rural centres, as well as the rates of prenatal/postpartum care and child/maternal mortality, could be observed. On the other hand, in spite of the political will to increase the health expenditure and make it more efficient, the objectives defined in the 2010-2014 national health plan and the Millennium Development Goals were not achieved.

The EU contribution in terms of water and sanitation was relatively limited. The levels of total investment were unsatisfactory to enhance access to tap water and sanitation rates. The additional funds received by the national water provider were mainly absorbed by expenses such as salaries and debt payments. At the same time, administrative bodies like municipal water boards and local supervision and control units benefited from the EU aid.

Equivocal outcomes were also obtained while attempting to improve the quality and, consequently, competitiveness of agri-food sector. Although the output targets set in 2012 sector support programme were accomplished, Honduras’ overall exports by value declined and the volume of exports to the EU failed to repeat the peak of 2011.

The role of the EU in prompting reforms in the forestry sector was acknowledged by the Court, yet it was too early to notice a broader impact. In fact, the percentage of forest land in Honduras decreased between 2011 and 2014 (from 59 % to 48 %), which affected biodiversity, whereas the number of fires has increased steadily since 2012. Legislative delays on the road to empower the Forest Conservation Institute were the biggest obstacles to a more efficient management and the situation was further aggravated by a natural plague.

Finally, EU support has helped justice and public security institutions to work more closely together as the exchange of information was improved and some interinstitutional agreements emerged (e.g. on shared training). It has to be underlined, though, that the situation in the country remains critical. Widespread violence continues to be a problem and it is unclear whether the EU funding, focused on prevention activities, contributed to a decline observed since 2012.

Recommendations:
1. For the next change in its strategy for supporting priority sectors in Honduras, the Commission should strengthen its approach by:
   a) ensuring that support to priority sectors is provided sufficiently long to be able to reach the targets set;
   b) narrowing the focus of its actions to fewer well-defined areas that involve assisting a limited number of institutions;
c) pursuing its efforts towards joint programming with EU Member States and better coordinating its approach with other donors.

2. The Commission should further strengthen the management of its budget support operations by:
   a) ensuring the consistency of the messages given when taking decisions on new budget support contracts (in particular, avoid making budget support commitments while at the same time withholding disbursements because eligibility conditions relating to the macroeconomic framework and/or public financial management have not been met);
   b) better structuring its future assessments of budget support eligibility to demonstrate whether the expected progress is being achieved in line with targeted and clearly defined benchmarks;
   c) ensuring, at the next rotation of delegation staff, that the EU Delegation in Honduras obtains further macroeconomic and public financial management expertise.

3. The Commission should further strengthen the performance measurement of future EU actions by timely selecting sufficient, relevant and quantifiable performance indicators and setting baselines for them. In this connection, it should consider strengthening national systems for obtaining reliable data on demographic and other trends, in particular the National Institute of Statistics. It should improve the timing of its results-oriented monitoring and systematically follow up the resulting recommendations.

4. The Commission should further strengthen its policy dialogue in the priority sectors before 2018 by generalising the use of dialogue strategies in all relevant areas. This should include a clear definition of the expected results/outcomes of dialogue. The Commission should subsequently make written assessments of the extent to which the objectives of its dialogue strategies have been achieved.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

[Recommendations by the rapporteur,]

1. Welcomes the special report assessing the effectiveness of EU support to priority sectors in Honduras, endorses its recommendations and sets out its observations and recommendations below; also takes note of the Commission’s replies;
2. Notes with satisfaction that the ECA’s report has been very well received, both by the government of Honduras and by the Commission, and that the challenges identified by the ECA, as well as its conclusions, have been very useful in strengthening political dialogue between Honduras and the EU;
3. Points out that, currently, relations between Honduras – as part of Central America – and the EU are principally based on the Association Agreement signed in 2012, which is a strong, long-term link forged on the basis of mutual trust and the protection of shared values and principles; points out that the agreement lays down three central pillars for action: political dialogue, cooperation and trade; points out, in particular, that, in the agreement, both parties undertook to implement measures to foster economic development, taking into account mutual interests such as poverty eradication, job creation, and fair and sustainable development;
4. Emphasises that, to date, 21 Member States have ratified the agreement; hopes that those countries that have not yet signed it will do so as soon as possible, as the full implementation of the three pillars will strengthen the development of political dialogue, allow for the efficient allocation of funding, and ensure, once and for all, that EU assistance will be effective in rebuilding and transforming Honduras;
5. Points out that Honduras is the Central American country that receives the most development assistance from the EU, and that the EU’s contribution is the fourth largest among the 12 main donors to Honduras, representing 11% of the total amount of official development assistance that the country receives; emphasises that the total figure has increased from EUR 223 million in the period from 2007-2013, to EUR 235 million in the period from
2014-2020;

6. Notes with concern, however, that the EU’s financial contribution over the period under consideration represented just 0.2% of the country’s GDP, a proportion far lower than that of other donors, particularly the USA;

7. Notes, in a similar vein, that according to data from the World Bank, in the wake of the global economic crisis, Honduras has experienced a moderate recovery, economically speaking, driven by public investment, exports and high levels of income from remittances, paving the way for growth figures of 3.7% in 2016 and 3.5% in 2017;

8. Emphasises, nevertheless, that although the economic prospects are encouraging, and despite efforts on the part of the government and donors, Honduras still has the highest levels of poverty and economic inequality in Latin America, with around 66% of the population living in poverty in 2016, according to official data, and with persistent, widespread violence, corruption and impunity, and although the murder rate has fallen in recent years, it is still among the highest in the world, and is the highest in Latin America; emphasises, furthermore, that there are still major problems and challenges as regards access to basic needs, job opportunities, natural resources such as land and means of survival, and that women, indigenous people and people of African descent are the sections of the population that are most vulnerable to human rights violations as a result of inequality;

9. Emphasises, with particular concern, that Honduras is still one of the most dangerous countries in the world for human rights defenders and environmental rights activists, two areas that are often closely linked; points out that, according to data from Global Witness, at least 123 land and environmental defenders have been murdered in Honduras since 2009, many of whom were members of indigenous and rural communities opposing megaprojects on their land, as was Berta Cáceres, whose murder remains unsolved; calls on the Commission to ensure that EU cooperation in Honduras cannot in any way undermine the human rights of the Honduran people, and to conduct rigorous monitoring on a regular basis to ensure that remains the case; with that in mind, reiterates the importance of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in providing urgent direct financial and material support for human rights defenders who are at risk, and the emergency fund that enables EU delegations to award them direct ad-hoc grants; calls on the Commission, furthermore, to promote the effective implementation of the EU guidelines on human rights defenders via the adoption of local strategies to ensure the guidelines are fully put into practice, in cooperation with civil society organisations which already have experience in this area;

10. Points out how important it is that the private sector in EU countries also undertakes to uphold human rights and the very highest social and environmental standards, with European standards in those areas being met as a minimum; calls on the EU and its Member States to continue playing an active role in the UN’s ongoing efforts to draw up an international treaty on holding corporations to account for any involvement in human rights violations;

11. Recalls that the 2009 coup had disastrous consequences for the country: there was a marked slowdown in social and economic growth, international assistance no longer got through, and Honduras was suspended from the Organization of American States; notes that EU activities in Honduras could nevertheless be continued during that period, although implementation delays did occur in all priority sectors, and some, such as harmonisation of the legal framework, could not be completed; emphasises that if the EU had not provided and maintained support for priority sectors for cooperation, conditions in those areas would have been even more difficult;

12. Welcomes the fact that the government of Honduras is open to international scrutiny and is willing to cooperate with international organisations (establishment of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the recent opening of the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras, auditing of State accounts by Transparency International, etc.); points out, nevertheless, how important it is to take on board and apply lessons and best practices that have been learned, and not to depend indefinitely on those organisations in order to exercise key responsibilities of the State;

13. Notes that the audits carried out by the Court of Auditors focused on the period between 2007 and 2015, when EU payments amounted to EUR 119 million, and that the priority sectors under consideration were poverty reduction, forestry, security and justice, which received 89% of the bilateral support paid out; takes the view, nevertheless, that the period covered by the Court in its report is too long, in that it is longer than the Commission’s term of office and also includes extremely difficult and disparate political and economic situations; takes the view that in order to make them more
effective, the audit periods ought to be shortened, or that interim assessments should be carried out, given the fact that there are too many instances in which the report identifies issues or shortcomings which have been rectified in the meantime, meaning that some of the report’s conclusions and/or recommendations are no longer relevant; emphasises, furthermore, that in its report, the Court does not give an account of the interviews it conducted in Honduras, in particular those with beneficiaries, other donors and civil society organisations;

14. Notes that in its report the Court concludes that, although some progress was made, EU assistance to the priority sectors had only been partially effective, mainly owing to the country’s circumstances, as well as a series of management problems that reduced the impact of the assistance, and notes that although the Commission’s strategy was relevant and coordinated, it was not specific enough, and funding was spread over too many areas, meaning that despite the Honduran Government’s requests, it had not been possible to meet the significant needs of the priority sectors, which had not received support from other donors either;

15. Although it shares the concern expressed by the Court, it also agrees with the Commission that, in many cases, a certain degree of flexibility was necessary in order to adapt in the face of the crisis caused by the coup, and that there was a need to respond to extremely urgent situations and meet the basic needs of the people; calls on the Commission to press ahead with its efforts to achieve an effective balance between the flexibility required to adapt to the country’s changing circumstances, needs and requirements, the need to address the most pressing challenges, including human rights, the right to life and the right to a decent life, and the need to respond and enhance the potential impact of EU assistance;

16. Notes that in the past, EU cooperation was focused on social cohesion and economic growth, while the new programming exercise responds to needs arising from the principal development challenges the country is facing: reducing poverty and inequality, food security, education and health, security and human rights, tax reform, combating impunity and corruption, creating jobs with social protection, competitiveness, managing natural resources, and vulnerability owing to climate change;

17. Emphasises that, given the specific situation the country is in, it is vital to strengthen and/or launch comprehensive anti-poverty programmes (specifically targeting the most vulnerable groups such as women, children and indigenous peoples, as the government of Honduras has requested) and comprehensive education, training and vocational programmes aimed at children and young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, to ensure they are offered opportunities to develop their skills and abilities, and protect them against the risks of getting caught up in violence and organised crime;

18. Highlights, in addition, the critical role played by women and women’s rights organisations in social progress, including youth-led movements; calls for the EU to insist on the need to support women’s empowerment and the creation of a safe and enabling environment for women’s civil society organisations and women’s rights defenders, and to address specific gender-based forms of repression, particularly in conflict-affected regions; highlights the importance of actively helping to support policies and actions relating to women’s rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights;

19. Takes the view that the EU must continue to make a special effort with regard to cooperation, in order to enhance the transparency, credibility and accountability of State institutions, and with regard to dismantling the edifice of corruption and impunity that undermines citizens’ trust and represents one of the chief obstacles to the country’s development;

20. Expresses its concern at the lack of policy dialogue identified by the Court in certain critical areas receiving assistance under the Support to the National Plan (objectives in the areas of education, national statistics and civil service reform); given that the Commission’s policy dialogue facilitates the implementation of EU action and is leading to tangible improvements, calls on the Commission to step up policy dialogue, particularly in strategic and priority sectors, and to remain firm in those areas in which the government does not show much interest or responsiveness, as was the case with the national security and justice policy and the Judiciary Observatory;

21. Calls on the Commission to continue improving joint programming with the government of Honduras, and with the EU Member States, and, alongside the other donors, to make a special effort with regard to internal coordination in order to ensure that the division of labour is as efficient as possible, to achieve complementarity where possible, and especially to prevent the problems identified by the Court: the proliferation of identical or similar projects (same sectors, same beneficiaries), contradictory or overlapping action and/or lack of action, particularly in the priority sectors; points out that
and improve efficiency and results;
22. Notes that approximately half of the EU’s bilateral assistance in Honduras is channelled through budget, general and sector-specific support; emphasises with concern the substantial risks relating to providing budget support, which are principally the result of the significant macroeconomic instability in the country, technical shortcomings and problems with fraud and corruption in the management of public finances;
23. Notes with concern that although the Court’s report points out that budget support was allocated to relevant and credible national strategies, in some priority sectors the government’s strategies were unclear or fragmented and were not given specific budgets, and the institutions concerned were unable to develop policies and reforms;
24. Acknowledges that the Commission identified these risks and tried to mitigate them, but points out to the Commission once again that budget support is not a blank cheque and that government promises that reforms will be forthcoming are not necessarily a sufficient guarantee; with that in mind, calls on the Commission, in order to mitigate any risks, to continue to make every effort to ensure that the budget support guidelines are followed and complied with at all stages of the procedure; calls on the Commission, furthermore, to avoid budget support in sectors in which a credible and relevant response from the government cannot be assured;
25. Agrees with the Commission that suspending various budget support payments over a certain period – as was the case in 2012 owing to the general macroeconomic situation and the fact that no agreement had been reached between Honduras and the IMF – need not be a contradictory message to send that might be detrimental to aid effectiveness, as the Court suggests, but might, on the contrary, be a way of making it crystal clear that the government needs to resolve the problems encountered swiftly and effectively;
26. Notes with great interest that Honduras is the first country in which results-oriented budget support has been used; expresses concern, however, at the fact that the ECA concluded that weaknesses in the monitoring tools hindered the assessment of the results achieved, that there were many shortcomings in the monitoring of those results, and that the recommendations made had not been consistently followed; calls on the Commission to draw up a detailed report, including the objectives, indicators and benchmarks that were used, the calculation and verification methods, etc., and to assess their effectiveness and impact for the purposes of measuring the results achieved and, at the same time, improving communication, visibility and the impact of EU action; calls on the Commission, furthermore, to place more emphasis on the results as regards the objectives set in its policy dialogue strategies with the Honduran Government and in dialogue with civil society and other donors;
27. Given that the sound management of public finances is an essential prerequisite for disbursements of budget support to be made, and that it is one of the most significant shortcomings in Honduras, despite the successive plans drawn up by the government and the support from the Commission, takes the view that the Commission should place particular emphasis on continued improvement in that area; with that in mind and taking into account the role that the Honduran Court of Auditors ought to play in managing State resources, calls on the Commission to come up with specific programmes for cooperation with the Court with a view to providing technical assistance and training in the area concerned;
28. Calls on the Honduran Government to provide all the necessary means and funding to ensure that the Honduran Court of Auditors can carry out its duties independently, effectively and in accordance with international auditing, transparency and accountability standards;
29. Notes with concern the ECA’s observation that the EU office in Honduras has a shortage of staff specialised in managing public finances and macroeconomic issues surrounding budget support transactions, and points out that this is particularly risky given the chronic economic instability of a country which, despite those serious circumstances, is still being granted budget support; in the light of the risks pointed out by the Court, calls on the Commission to take urgent action to shore up staffing at the EU office in Honduras;
30. Notes that EU cooperation in Honduras is providing support to civil society organisations in order to promote food security, human rights and gender equality, and that some 35 thematic projects are ongoing, involving funds of over EUR 9 million; notes, furthermore, that as regards engagement with civil society in Honduras, the EU delegation drew up a roadmap, which was approved in 2014 and includes political dialogue and support activities specifically designed for Honduras; considers it paramount that civil society organisations be involved not only in the consultation process leading to the drafting of roadmaps, but also in their implementation, monitoring and review;
31. Is gravely concerned by the fact that there is less and less room for civil society in developing countries; notes with grave concern that, in the first three months of 2014 alone, the department responsible for the registration and monitoring of civil society associations revoked the licences of more than 10,000 NGOs for failing to submit reports on their finances and programmes to the government, and that despite some positive developments in recent years, some of the legislation and administrative measures that have recently been adopted in Honduras are impeding associations’ activities, and restricting the space within which they are able to operate, meaning that many are being forced to close down;

32. Welcomes the support and commitment that the EU has been providing to civil society in developing countries for some time now; takes the view that, in the context of policy dialogue and the development of cooperation programmes, the Commission must focus on the development of strategies to establish the legal, administrative and political environment required to enable civil society organisations to carry out their roles and operate effectively, advise the associations, provide them with regular information about funds and financing opportunities, and encourage them to sign up to international civil society organisations and networks;

33. Takes the view that the Court of Auditors ought to have devoted a chapter of its report to EU cooperation with civil society organisations in Honduras, given the key role they play in society in general and in local development in particular, and especially since the EU is the largest donor to those organisations in the developing countries and has taken a leading role in protecting civil society representatives and human rights defenders through the use and implementation of a raft of instruments and policies; hopes that the Court will bear that in mind for future reports.

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<td>[The European Parliament, ]</td>
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<td>10. Calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service to ensure that European assistance does not promote or permit development projects unless they meet the requirement for prior, free and informed consultation with indigenous communities, ensure meaningful consultation of all affected communities and have strong human rights, labour rights and environmental safeguards in place;</td>
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<td>11. Calls on those Member States that have not done so to ratify the EU-Central America Association Agreement; urges the Council to develop a unified policy towards Honduras that commits the 28 Member States and the EU institutions to a strong common message concerning the role of human rights in the EU-Honduras relationship and in the region as a whole;</td>
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| 2016/2139(INI) - Increasing the effectiveness of development cooperation, 22/11/2016 |
| [The European Parliament, ] |
| 2. Calls for the utilisation of all development policy tools for poverty eradication and the promotion of the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs); is of the opinion that the effectiveness of development funding should be assessed on the basis of concrete results and its contribution to development policy as a whole; |
| 3. Stresses the key role of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in fulfilling the development effectiveness agenda, for poverty eradication, reduction of inequality, delivering essential public services and supporting good governance; underlines that ODA is more flexible, predictable and accountable than other flows potentially contributing to development; |
22. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to engage with national parliaments of partner countries with a view to constructively supporting the development of such policies, complementing them with mutual accountability arrangements; welcomes the Commission’s efforts to improve domestic accountability in the context of budget support by reinforcing the institutional capacities of national parliaments and Supreme Audit Institutions.

30. Stresses that development assistance can play an important role in fighting poverty, tackling inequalities and promoting development, in particular of least developed countries, as well as in boosting access to quality public services for the most deprived and vulnerable groups and catalysing other critical systemic factors that are conducive to development, such as promoting gender equality (as articulated in the Busan Partnership), education, and the strengthening of health systems, including the fight against poverty-related diseases, if employed in a context of legitimate, inclusive governance based on the rule of law and respect for human rights.

11. Believes that more emphasis must be put on institutional coordination, whether between EU institutions or with Member States; calls on the governments of the Member States to embed PCD in a legally binding act and to define a Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) action plan to operationalise it; considers that national parliaments should be more fully involved in the PCD agenda, in the context of their capacity to hold their governments accountable and scrutinise progress in this field.

14. Notes that joint programming is a successful tool for the coherent planning of EU development cooperation activities; welcomes the fact that it includes Member States’ bilateral activities in partner countries, but laments past failures to link EU action to Member States’ activities, which have led to opportunities for exploiting synergies being missed.

43. Recognises that there can be no sustainable development or poverty eradication without security; recognises, moreover, that the security-development nexus is an important element in ensuring the effectiveness of EU external action.

Oral / Written Questions

**Assassination of human rights’ defenders in Honduras**, E-007921/2016, WQ to the Commission (Vice-President/High Commissioner), Rule 130, Sofia Sakorafa ++ (GUE/NGL), 20-10-2016

After a succession of murders of human rights’ defenders, Honduras’s prominent rural leader and head of the Unified Campesinos Movement of the Aguan Valley (MUCA), Jose Angel Flores, was assassinated in public and in cold blood. Well known for his actions in defence of poor farmers against bigger landowners’ efforts to grab their land, he received repeated death threats from the para-state and was recently illegally arrested by the government.

1. What specific action will the VP/HR undertake to ensure an independent investigation of this crime by the authorities of Honduras and the protection of people threatened because of their action in defence of human rights?
2. When you say you are engaged in promoting the protection of human rights and the application of the guidelines on human rights’ defenders in the political dialogue between the EU and the authorities of Honduras, what are the concrete commitments and results you have achieved so far?
3. What are the concrete outcomes so far of the implementation of the EU cooperation programmes PADH, EuroJusticia or any others?

The Facility for International Cooperation and Partnership: Honduras, E-011120/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Pablo Iglesias (GUE/NGL), Javier Couso Permuy (GUE/NGL), 09-07-2015
On 11 June 2015, the Commission announced a EUR 230 million to support the efforts towards the sustainable development of Latin America and the Caribbean. The announcement was made at the EU-CELAC Summit that was held in Brussels on 10 and 11 of June 2015. According to the press release by the Commission, ‘In order to adapt to this new reality, the EU has set up a Facility for International Cooperation and Partnership. The facility will support the consolidation of peer learning among countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and to promote joint cooperation with emerging donors in the region.’(1) Part of the project seeks to address particular countries’ challenges such as those of Honduras. For Honduras there are three programmes in place: 1) a programme on food security to improve the living conditions of 15,000 rural households; 2) a programme to promote decent working conditions and employment opportunities for young people in Honduras; 3) an EU grant contribution that will focus on rehabilitation, upgrading and road safety improvements.

1. What measures has the EU demanded in exchange for the financial assistance?
2. How does the EU intend to measure the impact of the financial assistance given?

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Situation with regard to human rights defenders in Honduras, E-007418/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Lola Sánchez Caldentey (GUE/NGL), 07-05-2015
Civil society is seen as a vital partner in the EU’s external relations. The EU is constantly pressing for more dialogue with social stakeholders in order to enhance the impact, predictability and visibility of EU action, as pointed out in the 2014-2017 EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Partner Countries. This will is similarly expressed in agreements signed with third parties, such as the EU-Central America Association Agreement, which, in Article 11 and Articles 25(c) and 30(i), refers to the need for the EU and the Government of Honduras to promote the provision of information to, and the gathering of suggestions from, civil society.

1. How does the EU intend to respond to the repeated condemnations expressed by civil society in Honduras, and by human rights defenders in the country, in relation to human rights violations committed by the Government of Honduras, the failure to uphold the rule of law, the lack of an independent judicial system and the serious threat to minorities in the country?

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Human rights situation in Honduras, E-007417/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Lola Sánchez Caldentey (GUE/NGL), 07-05-2015
Honduras is a strategic partner in trade relations and cooperation with the EU, it is the second-largest recipient of EU ODA in Latin America, it is a party to the EU-Central America Association Agreement (the provisions of which centre around upholding the rule of law, promoting human rights, democracy and public freedoms), and is currently in the third round of talks on a bilateral voluntary partnership agreement with the EU. Over the coming weeks Honduras will undergo its second universal periodic review (UPR). Reports brought forward by civil society in Honduras and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in September 2014 and February 2015 show that the recommendations set out in the previous UPR on human rights, democracy, justice and freedoms have not been acted upon, and indeed the situations concerned have actually deteriorated.

1. If the new UPR does confirm that the human rights situation has stagnated and/or worsened, what implications will that have as regards the maintenance and scope of relations between the EU and Honduras?

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VP/HR - The EU and CELAC, E-006299/201, WQ to the Commission (Vice-President/High Commissioner), Rule 130, Pablo Iglesias (GUE/NGL), 21-04-2015
In a recent speech to the EU-CELAC Civil Society Forum in Honduras, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy stated that ‘creating synergies between public authorities and civil society organisations makes a real and tangible contribution to tackling poverty and inequality more effectively and building genuinely sustainable development. Those synergies are vital elements for reinforcing democratic governance’.
2. How does she think that the EU could promote and reinforce such democratic governance, and in particular, how could it contribute to the areas of civil society involvement in CELAC countries?

3. What experience has the EU gained in this kind of regional integration, and what kinds of policies could improve and enhance that experience?
**Special report 31/2016 of 22 November 2016**

**Spending at least one euro in every five from the EU budget on climate action: ambitious work underway, but at serious risk of falling short**

Environment  |  Climate Action

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<td>Report No / Date / Title</td>
<td>Special report No 31/2016 of 22 November 2016: Spending at least one euro in every five from the EU budget on climate action: ambitious work underway, but at serious risk of falling short</td>
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<td>Short summary of questions asked, observations, findings and recommendations</td>
<td>Questions asked: The Court sought to determine whether the target to spend at least 20% of the EU budget on climate-related action is likely to be met and whether the approach employed is likely to add value. More specifically, the Court sought to answer the following questions: 1. Is the action underway on track to meet the overall target? 2. Is the target likely to add value by leading to more and better focused funding on climate action? The Court analysed whether: 1. there was a plan on how the overall target will be achieved; 2. an appropriate tracking method built on internationally established methodologies has been set up; 3. progress had been reported based on reliable and relevant information.</td>
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<td><strong>Findings:</strong></td>
<td><strong>I—Overall progress has been made but there is a serious risk that the 20% target will not be met</strong></td>
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The Court observed that ambitious work was underway and that, overall, progress had been made towards reaching the target of 20%. However, there is a serious risk of falling short of meeting the 20% target without more effort to tackle climate change. If the objective to spend ‘at least 20%’ of the EU Budget on climate action is part of the EU’s leadership in climate action and represents a clear commitment to tackling climate change, the Court could not find clear evidence quantifying the investment needs. According to Commission figures, the share of funding dedicated to climate action has averaged 17.6% between 2014 and 2016. Overall, the Commission estimated that 18.9% would be spent on climate action, thereby falling short of the 20% objective.

The main areas examined in this audit are expected to account for 84.5% of expected contributions to the climate action target. The Court noted that some of these areas have climate-related targets, especially the Horizon 2020 programme, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the LIFE programme...
and the European Regional Development Fund, supporting the delivery of their contribution. The Court however found that no overall plan was ever devised, outlining which funding instruments could contribute and to what extent; this being qualified by the Court as a sub-optimal way of determining the climate action contribution to be made by spending programmes which differ in nature.

According to Commission forecasts, the main contributors to the target of 20% since 2014 are the agriculture and rural development (i.e. 47 billion EUR) and the cohesion policy (with 57.2 billion EUR). Weaknesses were identified by the Court on the tracking method used by the Commission and Member States concerning notably reporting and comprehensiveness. The Commission’s approach to planning and measuring progress towards the 20% target across the EU budget was based on an internationally established methodology, namely the OECD’s Rio markers, which assign categories to expenditure and EU climate coefficients (0%, 40% and 100%) to be applied to EU expenditure.

Even though the Commission and visited Member States found it to be a pragmatic approach to tracking climate expenditure, several shortcomings were identified however by the Court:

(i) The EU climate coefficients applied in certain areas failed to respect systematically the conservativeness principle developed by the World Bank in order to avoid overestimating climate funding,

(ii) The tracking system did not differentiate between mitigation and adaptation measures, thereby making it difficult to assess the level of financing for these different approaches to addressing climate change, and

(iii) The tracking method did not reflect the full financial effects of EU spending on climate action through financial instruments and off-balance-sheet items, despite their increasing use.

With regard to system used for monitoring progress towards the 20% target, the Commission acknowledged that it was not able in 2015 to evaluate the progression towards this objective for the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework period. Moreover, no tool has been available to date to provide a multiannual, consolidated update on the progress across the EU budget in achieving this aim.

The Commission has recently updated climate-relevant spending data for the whole 2014-2020 period in the context of the multiannual financial framework mid-term review. The Commission’s approach to assessing levels of climate action funding focused on identifying planned expenditure, which carried an inherent risk, since planned expenditure will not necessarily translate into actual spending. The audit also showed that the monitoring of the actual financial implementation of the 20% target would not provide any information on results achieved by the climate action spending.

The Court found information on what funds plan to achieve, or have achieved in terms of results such as greenhouse gas reductions, was only available for parts of the budget and lacked comparability. For the Court, there was a significant risk that the target will not be met and estimated that the rate of climate funding must be increased to an average of 22% across the remaining years of the current multiannual financial framework, i.e. for 2017 to 2020, to reach the overall target of 20% by the end of 2020.

It was also noted that apart from the risks affecting the delivery of the climate contribution in the main areas, other, less significant, contributing areas would need to double their current efforts to achieve the 20% target but the Court could find no evidence, of such as an action plan, showing that the Commission was increasing efforts in these areas and how such a doubling would be feasible.

Serious risks that could affect the expected contribution in agriculture, rural development and research were identified too: if calculated in accordance with internationally established methodologies for assessing levels of climate finance, the assessed contribution from agriculture and rural development would be adjusted and reduced by up to approximately 33 billion euro. As regards research, the Horizon 2020 programme has fallen behind its target to allocate 35% to
climate action, with its contribution currently standing at 24% and needed to catch up.

While it is encouraging that the Commission has put in place an action plan, the plan did not set out in sufficient detail how the required catch-up towards the 35% target was expected to be ensured.

The Court reviewed assumptions concerning the contribution from agricultural direct payments to the climate action target and estimated they were insufficiently justified and that an application of the principle of conservativeness would result in a decrease of 9 billion in climate contributions from 47.1 to 38 billion euro. The Court observed that the application of a different set of EU-climate tracking coefficients, based on internationally established methodologies to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, led to an overestimation of the contribution to climate action of rural development as the approach followed for the EAFRD did not distinguish sufficiently between the climate contributions made by different activities. The Court’s estimates suggested that the EAFRD climate amounts should be reduced by 40%.

II - More and better-focused climate action funding in some European Structural and Investment Funds, but largely business as usual in others

The Court stated that the implementation of the target has led to more, and better-focused, climate action funding in some of the European Structural and Investment Funds, namely the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund with an increase by around 63% from 32.4 billion euro to 54.7 billion euro. This trend was also found in the three Member States visited by the Court.

Likewise, qualitative improvements in investment activities showing a better focus on climate action were identified such as the inclusion in the grant applications of requirements describing the climate change impacts of projects.

In other areas, however, such as in the European Social Fund, agriculture, and rural development and fisheries, the Court considered that more could be achieved and that the situation was largely business as usual. In these areas, there has been no significant shift of these funds towards climate action and not all potential opportunities for financing climate-related action have been fully explored. The Court noted that the ESF programmes allocated a very low share to climate action (i.e. 1.4% of 83 billion euro) or that the Member States were not required to provide the Commission any justification of the ESF allocation to climate action objectives. Equally, for the common agricultural policy spending, the introduction of a Green Payment did not guarantee a significant change of the contribution of direct payments to climate, this new scheme, while having a certain climate action impact, rests in practice largely on already existing agricultural practices.

Across the three rural development programmes audited, the Court saw no real upward or downward shift in investments. Regarding the better targeting of climate action, it was found no significant change in the key features of the management process, such as the requirements or eligibility and selection criteria. The design of some less material measures had, however, been modified to make them more climate-related.

The Court also found several examples of emerging good practice contributing directly to tackling climate change (for instance, forestry measures were improved in Poland, Spain and France or agri-environment climate measures).

Finally, the Court observed only very limited increased focus on climate action in the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund as direct and clear references to climate change objectives, both mitigation and adaptation, were still rare. As a result, the maritime and fisheries fund has not widened the scope of its contribution to climate action.
**Recommendations:**
The Commission should carry out annually, a robust, multi-annual consolidation exercise to identify whether climate expenditure is on track to achieve the 20% target.

**A comprehensive reporting framework**
(a) The Commission should report, annually, consolidated information on the progress towards the overall 20% target in its annual management and performance report and report, with comprehensive information thereon, in each relevant annual activity report. This should include reporting on progress on action plans where they exist. In addition, information on the climate contribution of financial instruments should be reported.
(b) Member States should report, in their annual implementation reports to the Commission, on the areas under shared management where there are potential opportunities for climate action, outlining how they plan to increase climate action in these areas.
(c) The Commission and the Member States should ensure that data collection differentiates between mitigation and adaptation

When planning the potential contribution to climate action from individual budget lines or funding instruments, the Commission should ensure that such plans are based on a realistic and robust assessment of the climate change needs and on each area’s potential to contribute to the overall target.

The Commission and the Member States should apply the principle of conservativeness and correct the overestimations in the EAFRD by reviewing the EU climate coefficients set.

Whenever the annual consolidation exercise reveals a risk that the expected contributions from a particular area may not be achieved, the Commission should draw up an action plan for that area, setting out in detail how it expects to ensure the catch-up needed.

In order to develop indicators monitoring actual spending on climate action and related results, the Commission should:
(a) in cooperation with the Member States, in the area of shared management, develop a harmonised and proportionate system for monitoring the actual implementation of climate action;
(b) in line with its ‘budget for results’ initiative, establish climate-related results indicators in all areas that contribute towards the achievement of the target, in particular to assess greenhouse gas emissions and reductions brought about through EU-funded measures;
(c) facilitate the exchange of good practice on climate-related result indicators between Member States.

In order to explore all potential opportunities and ensure a real shift towards climate action, the Commission should:
(a) identify those areas with underutilised potential for climate action, such as the European Social Fund, and develop action plans for increasing the climate action contribution of these areas;
(b) The Commission and Member States should increase the mainstreaming of climate action in agriculture, rural development and fisheries, for example, by developing new, or retargeting existing, measures tackling climate change.

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<td><strong>CONT Working Document of 08/02/2017</strong> on the European Court of Auditors Special report No 31/2016 (2016Discharge): Spending at least one euro in every five from the EU budget on climate action: ambitious work underway, but at serious risk of failing short</td>
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post evaluation and recalculation of projected climate funding contributions;

14. Regrets that there is no specific reporting framework conducted by the Commission on detecting and measuring the counter-implications of the EU policies that negatively contribute to climate change and on measuring how big a share of the EU budget is spent in this opposite direction; is concerned that without this data it is not fully portrayed into what extent the EU contributes to mitigation of the climate change; calls on the Commission to systematically identify potentially counter-productive actions and project them into the final calculations on climate action mitigation.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

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Extract from the summary, related to climate action:
Members called on the EIB to step up its involvement in the fight against climate change, which was linked to 27 % of the projects approved in 2015 and accounted for a total investment of EUR 20.6 billion; the largest ever annual amount invested in climate change by the EIB.

The EIB is encouraged to:
- support sustainable and innovative transport solutions;
- continue to promote accessibility for passengers with reduced mobility;
- bring about a modal shift from road to rail and waterborne and inland waterway transport;
- invest in clean energy and in modern transport services through specialised funding tools, such as the European clean transport facility;
- support investment in sustainable urban mobility, ideally based on sustainable urban mobility plans.

Relevant articles:

[The European Parliament, ]

43. Notes that in 2015 the EIB, after public consultation, published a formal Climate Action Strategy geared towards helping to implement the Paris Agreement both at Member State and international level; recalls the need to implement the EIB Climate Strategy of 2015 and asks for concrete reporting on the implementation of the action included in the strategy;

44. Calls on the EIB to step up its involvement in the fight against climate change, which was linked to 27 % of the projects approved in 2015 and accounted for a total investment of EUR 20.6 billion – the largest ever annual amount invested in climate change by the EIB, while climate and environment were the focus of almost 50 % of EIB-approved projects in 2015 reiterates the importance of moving away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy sources and the improvement of energy efficiency in accordance with the commitment made by the European Union in March 2015 to reduce its carbon emissions by at least 40 % by 2030; highlights the importance of financial support to indigenous energy sources in overcoming Europe’s heavy dependence on external energy and ensuring security of supply;

45. Encourages the EIB to continue to support sustainable, safe, climate-friendly and innovative transport solutions, and to continue to promote accessibility for passengers with reduced mobility; underlines that it is the Union’s priority to ensure sufficient funding for projects with European added value, including cross-border transport links and, in particular, abandoned or dismantled cross-border regional rail connections; underlines the need for European investment policy to pay more attention to horizontal issues, particularly as regards future means of transport and services, which will require the simultaneous and coherent development of alternative energy and telecommunications networks;
46. Stresses the importance in combating climate change of the goals set by COP 21 with regard to transport; underlines that the financial means should be available to bring about a modal shift from road to rail and waterborne and inland waterway transport; insists also that attention should be paid to investment in clean power and modern services for transport; proposes, to this end, that the capacities of financing tools that are specialised for this purpose, such as the European Clean Transport Facility (ECTF), be increased;

47. Emphasises that investments should be based on minimising external costs, including those caused by climate change, thereby reducing the challenges for public budgets of the future;

48. Calls on the Commission and the EIB to support investment in sustainable urban mobility, ideally based on sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMPs) with proper criteria for reducing congestion, climate change, air pollution, noise and road accidents;

49. Notes that in order to reduce the burden of infrastructure construction and maintenance on taxpayers, and on public finances in general, transport infrastructure projects of the PPP type should generally be based on the ‘user pays’ principle;

50. Recommends focusing lending operations on smaller-scale, off-grid decentralised renewable energy projects involving citizens and communities, and integrating the Energy Efficiency First principle into all EIB policies and operations;

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European Parliament resolution of 27 April 2017 on the annual report on the control of the financial activities of the EIB for 2015 (2016/2098(INI)

[The European Parliament, ]

42. Encourages the EIB to focus its climate action on the sustainability of cross-sector projects in the context of the COP21 targets and to support the expansion of renewable energies and resource efficiency; notes that financing for renewables reached EUR 3.4 billion;

43. Calls on the EIB to re-assess the attention that it specifically devotes to gas infrastructure projects, especially as gas demand in Europe is declining while new large-scale plans to build new pipelines and LNG terminals are emerging; expresses concern that the EIB investments in gas infrastructure could lead to investments in stranded assets;

44. Believes it necessary to continue the development of a market for sustainable green projects, promoting above all the creation of a circular economy, in particular via a green bond market;

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European Parliament decision of 27 April 2017 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2015, Section III, Commission
Rapporteur: Joachim Zeller (EPP)

Extract from the summary, related to climate action
Climate-related spending: Parliament expressed concern that in 2015 the share of the climate-related spending of the Union budget was only 17.3% in 2015 and was only 17.6% on average for the period 2014-2016, while the objective was to reach, at least, 20% over the financial period. It pointed out that the 20% climate-related spending was decided before the Paris agreement. It is convinced that further efforts should be made in order to make the Union budget even more climate-friendly. To this effect, the revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework shall create an excellent opportunity to ensure that the 20% target of spending on climate-related actions is reached and to provide for a possible increase of this threshold in line with the EU’s international commitments taken during the COP 21.

Relevant articles:

[The European Parliament, ]

6. Is worried that in 2015 the share of the climate-related spending of the Union budget was only 17.3% in 2015 and was only 17.6% on average for the period 2014-2016 according to the Court of Auditors (the “Court”), while the objective was to reach, at least, 20% over the financial period; stresses therefore that according to the Court there is a serious risk that the 20% target will not be met without more effort to tackle climate change;

7. Points out furthermore that the 20% climate-related spending was decided before the Paris agreement; is convinced that further efforts should be made in order to make the Union budget even more climate-friendly; underlines, moreover, that the revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework creates an excellent opportunity to ensure that the 20% target of spending on climate-related actions is reached and to provide for a possible increase of this threshold in line with the EU’s international commitments taken during the COP 21;

11. Endorses all recommendations made by the Court in its Special Report No 31/2016 and especially that the Commission should explore all potential opportunities, including the midterm Multiannual Financial Framework revision and the revision of some legal bases, to ensure a further real shift towards climate action; calls on the Court to issue a follow-up report on the climate-related spending of the Union budget by the end of 2018;

16. Calls on the Commission to take into account the Paris agreement and to increase immediately the climate-related spending target in the Union budget from 20% to 30%;

17. Calls on the Commission to draft the forthcoming Union budgets in order to make it more efficient and more effective and to better align them with the Europe 2020 targets, Union climate targets, and Union international commitments;

European Parliament decision of 28 April 2016 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014, Section III – Commission, (2015/2154(DEC))

Rapporteur: Martina Dlabajová

[The European Parliament, ]

485. Takes note of the presentation of the environment and health policy areas within the Court’s annual report concerning the financial year 2014; is concerned that the environment and climate policy area appear again in the chapter also devoted to rural development and fisheries; reiterates its criticism towards the illogical composition of policy areas in this specific chapter; is not of the opinion that the Court should take the political decision of grouping policy areas; urges
the Court to revise its approach in the next annual report;

488. Notices that the Court did not make any comment on the management of the "Public Health", "Food safety", "Environment and Climate action" policies;

489. With respect to the overall implementation of the budgetary headings for environment, climate action, public health and food safety in 2014, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety is satisfied; recalls again that only less than 0,5 % of the Union budget is dedicated to these policy instruments, while bearing in mind the clear Union added value in these fields, and the support of European citizens for Union environmental and climate policies, as well as for public health and food safety;

491. Underlines that EUR 352 041 708 have been available to DG ENV in commitment appropriations, of which 99,7 % has been implemented; notes that, with respect to payment appropriations, it is satisfactory that 95,03 % of the EUR 290 769 321 available has been used; notes, moreover, that the LIFE+ administrative expenditure is executed over two budgetary exercises (through automatic carryovers), and that if this administrative expenditure is not taken into account, the rate of payment implementation reaches 99,89 %;

492. Takes note that DG CLIMA has raised its implementation to 99,7 % of EUR 102 694 032 in commitment appropriations and 93,1 % of 32 837 296 in payment appropriations, and that if the administrative expenditure is not taken into account, the rate of payment implementation reaches 98,5 %;

493. Is satisfied with the overall implementation of the LIFE+ operational budget, which was 99,9 % in commitment appropriations and 97,4 % in payment appropriations in 2014; notes that in 2014, EUR 283 121 194 were dedicated to calls for proposals for projects in Member States, EUR 40 000 000 were used for financing operations in the framework of the financial instruments Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCF) and Private Financing for Energy Efficiency (PF4EE), EUR 8 952 827 supported operational activities of non-governmental organisations that are active in protecting and enhancing the environment at Union level and which are involved in the development and implementation of Union policy and legislation, and EUR 49 502 621 were used for measures intended to support the Commission’s role of initiating and monitoring the development of policies and legislation; notes that an amount of EUR 20 914 622 was used for administrative support to LIFE and for operating support to the Agency EASME;

494. Is aware that the payment rate of LIFE+ actions is always slightly lower compared to commitment appropriations, but with a high rate of implementation;

495. Acknowledges that an amount of EUR 4 350 000 has been allocated as contributions to international conventions, protocols and agreements to which the Union is a party, or in relation to which the Union is involved in preparatory work;

496. Considers the progress in the implementation of twelve pilot projects (PPs) and six preparatory actions (PAs) amounting all together to EUR 2 950 000 as satisfactory; is aware that the execution of those actions can be burdensome for the Commission due to the small amounts available in relation to the necessary procedures for execution (e.g. action plans, calls for proposals); encourages the budgetary authority to focus on PPs and PAs with true added value for the Union in the future;

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Rapporteur: Georgi Pirinski
29. Notes that out of the 84 environment projects signed in 2014 inside the EU, amounting to a total of EUR 12.6 billion, sustainable transport projects accounted for EUR 5.1 billion, renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for EUR 3.7 billion, and protection of the environment projects for EUR 3.8 billion; notes further that signed operations for the ‘climate action’ cross-cutting objective amounted to EUR 16.8 billion, or 24 % of total EIB financing inside the EU;

30. Takes note that EIB support for renewable energy capacity development in 2014 was concentrated for the most part in the EU’s five largest economies, with only EUR 42 million out of EUR 4.5 billion for renewable energy projects in the EU-28 being spent in the 13 new Member States; adds that a similar concentration is observed in the energy efficiency sector, where out of EUR 2 billion only EUR 148 million was allocated to the 13 new Member States; encourages the share of future investments in renewable energy capacity developments and the energy efficiency sector in new Member States to be increased progressively until they reach 30 % of the total investments in these fields by 2020; calls for greater effort to be made in providing further technical assistance to national and regional authorities in order to improve their capacity to prepare viable projects that will allow for more investments in the energy sector;

31. Welcomes the launch in 2014 of new innovative instruments to support climate action, such as the Private Finance for Energy Efficiency instrument and the Natural Capital Financing Facility, and expects the EIB to report on their implementation in its future activity reports;

32. Encourages the EIB’s commitment to supporting initiatives helping the EU both to stay a front-runner and to fulfil its own long-standing carbon market ambitions within the context of the Climate and Energy Policy Framework 2030, the Low Carbon Strategy 2050, and the UN climate talks for defining a new global agreement; calls for a review of the share of EIB investments in climate action, as the 25 % share has already been reached;

33. Notes the momentum towards the development of the green bonds market and the leading role of the EIB with its own green bonds and climate-awareness bonds, bearing witness to investor interest in financial products dedicated to sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient growth; calls on the EIB to review its emissions performance standard in 2016 in the light of the EU 2050 Low Carbon Strategy;

34. Welcomes the publication in September 2015 of the EIB Climate Strategy – Mobilising finance for the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, and of the Synthesis Report on Operations Evaluation of EIB Financing of Climate Action (mitigation) within the EU 2010-2014; calls for the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) approach to be applied in the specific action plans following the EIB Climate Strategy by 2017;

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European Parliament resolution of 15 March 2012 on a Roadmap for moving to a competitive low carbon economy in 2050 (2011/2095(INI))
Rapporteur: Chris Davies (ALDE)

Abstract from the summary of the resolution:

Members recall that at least 50 % of auctioning revenues must be reinvested in climate action, and they urge the Commission to monitor the spending of such revenues by Member States, and report on this on an annual basis to Parliament. Member States must make effective use of the auction revenues in order to promote R&D and innovation with a view to achieving long-term reductions in greenhouse gas emissions

Relevant articles
113. Notes that owing to low carbon prices the auction of ETS allowances will not mobilise resources for climate investment as expected; recalls that at least 50% of auctioning revenues must be reinvested in climate action both in the EU and in developing countries, and urges the Commission to actively monitor the spending of such revenues by Member States, and report on this on an annual basis to Parliament; calls on the Member States to make effective use of the auction revenues in order to promote R&D and innovation with a view to achieving long-term reductions in greenhouse gas emissions;

114. Calls on the Commission, from 2013, to collate information relating to the use of funds derived from the auction of ETS allowances, and to publish an annual report comparing the extent to which each Member State makes use of such funds to promote the development of low-carbon technologies and other means of curbing greenhouse gas emissions;

115. Calls on the Commission to propose that Member States provide a proportion of auctioning funds in order to provide additional EU funding to support innovation, through the SET plan or equivalent initiatives;

116. Calls on the Commission to explore and consider complementary and innovative funding sources, including the potential use of regional development funds, in order to further promote the development and application of low-carbon technologies;

Oral / Written Questions

Use of LIFE programme funds for further environmental action, E-003867/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Roberta Metsola (PPE), 09-06-2017

The LIFE programme is the EU’s financial instrument for environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects throughout the EU. In the 2014-2020 funding period, LIFE is set to contribute approximately EUR 3.4 billion to the protection of the environment and climate. All this is very encouraging, since the LIFE programme has not only produced great results, but has the potential to do far more.

1. Is the Commission considering increasing the resources allocated to the LIFE programme in the 2021-2027 EU budget so as to take a step forward and tackle the major challenges that lie ahead for the environment?

Climate-related spending of the EU budget in relation to the special report by the European Court of Auditors, E-009415/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Jean Lambert (Verts/ALE), 14-12-2016

The special report by the European Court of Auditors on the climate-related spending of the EU budget confirms our fears, as there is a ‘serious risk that [the] 20% spending target will not be met’. According to Commission figures, the share of funding dedicated to climate action has averaged 17.6% between 2014 and 2016. Overall, the Commission estimates that 18.9% will be spent on climate action, thereby falling short of the 20% objective. It has been calculated that the rate of climate funding would need to be increased to an average of 22% across the remaining years of the current programming period, i.e. for 2017 to 2020, in order to reach the overall target of 20% by the end of 2020.

1. Does the Commission have a detailed action plan setting out how it intends to catch up?
2. What will now be done under the Semester process and country-specific recommendations to ensure that Member States are fully factoring climate change into their domestic strategies?

Climate action funding review, E-009087/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), 30-11-2016

In an attempt to respond to climate change, the EU has agreed that at least 20% of its budget for the period from 2014 to 2020 should be spent on climate-related action. This aim is to be achieved by mainstreaming climate action into the policy areas and funds covered by the EU budget. However, the Court of
Auditors has ascertained that there is a serious risk that the EU’s 2014-2020 target, namely to spend every fifth euro on climate action, will not be met. Although progress has been made, nothing has essentially changed in the key expenditure areas. According to Commission figures, the proportion of funding allocated to climate action between 2014 and 2016 averaged 17.6%. The auditors estimate that if the overall 20% target is to be reached by the end of 2020, the rate of climate funding in the years 2017 to 2020 would need to be increased to an average of 22%.

1. Does the Commission intend to take steps and look again at the existing climate action funding arrangements and capacities when it carries out the mid-term review of the multi-annual financial framework?

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**Climate mainstreaming in Cohesion Policy**, E-005420/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Bronis Ropé ++ (Verts/ALE), 01-07-2016

In response to Written Question E-002119/2016, the Commission explains that EUR 114 billion, or 25%, of European Structural and Investment Funds are spent on climate action. This 25% climate change rate for these funds hides considerable differences between the funds and between the Member States, with some below the 20% spending target, as in the cases of Poland and Greece. Data from the end of 2015 suggest that the accumulated climate change rate of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Structural Fund (ESF) is only as high as 16.5%, bearing in mind that this figure derives from ex-ante assessment and may be lower after ex-post assessment of real implementation. The potential of the ESF (climate change rate 1.3%), especially for green jobs, remains particularly untapped.

1. How can the Commission justify the fact that the principle of equal treatment of Member States for the 20% spending target has not been applied?
2. What action is the Commission going to take in order to better monitor and evaluate the integration and mainstreaming of horizontal principles during implementation, and in particular to improve the methodology for tracking climate-related expenditure and to overcome the challenges related to the ex-ante assessment?
3. At project level, what is the Commission doing to ensure climate-proofing of EU-financed action under the ERDF, CF and ESF and to incentivise climate-resilient projects?

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**Use of European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds towards the EU’s climate and energy targets**, E-002119/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Benedek Jávor ++ (Verts/ALE), 10-03-2016

An assessment by Friends of the Earth Europe and the CEE Bankwatch Network on how resources from the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) are to contribute to the Union’s climate and energy objectives in central and eastern Europe(1) concluded that these funds do not break the vicious circle of fossil fuels, and go against the EU’s climate objectives. Following the Paris Agreement, adopted at the COP21, the need to pursue mid- and long-term objectives and to replace ageing carbon-intensive infrastructure has become even more important.

1. What action will the Commission take to prevent Member States from locking themselves, through the use of EU funds, into fossil fuel dependency, including by means of the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) review?
2. What action will the Commission take to ensure that at least 20% of the EU budget is spent on climate action, and how will it translate the Paris Agreement in budgetary terms, given that it urgently requires increasing the 20% spending target?
3. How will the Commission ensure that Parliament’s resolution on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2017 budget and the Council conclusions of 17 November 2015 on a low-carbon economy are implemented, particularly with regard to the commitment by Member States to use EU funds for high-quality low-carbon projects?

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Climate finance: towards the Copenhagen Accord 2020 target, E-005687/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Alain Cadec (EPP), 09-07-2014

In a recent report entitled ‘EU climate finance in the context of external aid’, the Court of Auditors made the following recommendation: ‘The Commission and the EEAS should report on the extent to which the EU target of spending 20% of the EU budget and EDF between 2014 and 2020 on climate-related action is implemented in development aid, specifying what has been committed and disbursed.’

1. Does the Commission intend to respond to this recommendation and issue a communication on the matter at some stage this year?

Climate measures, P-002202/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Malin Björk (GUE/NGL), 15-03-2016

The EU has decided that at least 20% of expenditure from the budget for 2014-2020 should be allocated to climate-related measures.

1. How does the EU define ‘climate measures’ in this context, and what is the distribution of, and follow-up to, climate expenditure in 2014, 2015 and 2016?

The EU budget includes appropriations which will increase emissions and damage the environment, for example large subsidies for environmentally damaging activities.

2. How is work proceeding on phasing out all environmentally damaging subsidies? Does the EU have any action plan for phasing out environmentally damaging subsidies, on the basis of which progress can be monitored?

COP21: EU commitment to combat climate change, E-015095/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Jérôme Lavrilleux (EPP), 26-11-2015

The disturbing effects of climate change, which are becoming more visible year by year, are the reason behind the COP21 negotiations in Paris aimed at implementing a global and binding agreement that will, in particular, limit climate change to an increase of two degrees. The EU must face a major challenge and make a long-overdue and long-term commitment that calls for tangible decisions to be taken in the interests of the people of Europe and of the world.

1. What measures will the Commission take to ensure that the EU is able, with COP21 approaching, to lead from the front in combating climate change and to generate more initiatives like the LIFE programme, the budget for which stands at almost EUR 3.5 billion for the period 2014-2020, in order to help support climate change mitigation projects?

2. What guidelines and global responses does the Commission intend to give, in parallel with the decisions taken in Paris, to ensure that EU’s environment policy allows new results to be achieved as part of its commitment to climate change?
### Questions asked:
For the 2007-2015 period, the Court examined whether Commission and EEAS assistance, referred to hereafter as EU assistance, was effective in supporting the transformation of Ukraine into a well-governed state. The Court focused on the area of public finance management (PFM) and the fight against corruption (FAC), and on the gas sector and energy efficiency. These areas are particularly important to Ukraine’s reform process and have received significant EU assistance. The aim was to enhance governance by promoting the use of international standards and best practices.

The audit scope included all ENPI and ENI EU budget support and macro-financial assistance programmes initiated since 2007, as well as the instruments from the Commission’s financial package launched in 2014 in response to the crisis in Ukraine.

The audit work was carried out between June 2014 and December 2015 and concentrated on:
1. the effectiveness of EU assistance to Ukraine in improving public finance management and the fight against corruption; and
2. the effectiveness of EU assistance to Ukraine in improving governance in the gas sector and the security of gas supplies to the EU.

The audit was based on interviews and exchanges of correspondence with the Commission, the EEAS and the EU Delegation to Ukraine, Ukrainian authorities and agencies, civil society organisations (CSOs), EU Member States, international financial institutions, and the International Energy Agency, as well as documentary review, including policy and strategy documents and other relevant reports from think tanks and CSOs. In addition, the audit included a one-week visit to Kyiv in March 2015.

### Findings:
The Court arrived at the conclusion that:
1. Overall, EU assistance to Ukraine has been partially effective in supporting the transformation of Ukraine into a well governed state in the area of public finance management and the fight against corruption, as well as in the gas sector during the 2007-2015 period;
2. EU assistance to Ukraine was partially effective in producing tangible and sustainable results in public finance management and fight against corruption. Public finance management occupied a modest place in EU–Ukraine dialogue for most of the 2007-2013 period. Until 2014, the Ukrainian government’s limited commitment to the reform process was reflected in incomplete and delayed outcomes;
3. Despite the new impetus for reform since 2014, the results achieved so far remain fragile. In the case of fight against corruption policy, the results of
effective implementation remain to be seen. Certain shortcomings in the way conditions were stipulated or in the method their fulfilment was assessed affected the design of the budget support programmes and macro-financial assistance;

4. EU assistance to Ukraine was partially effective in improving governance in the gas sector and in securing gas supplies via Ukraine.

Recommendations:

1. In light of its findings, the ECA recommended that the Commission should:

2. Place greater emphasis on public finance management in the dialogue process with Ukraine. In order to maintain the PFM reform momentum created by the adoption of the 2013 PFM strategy, the Commission and EEAS should consolidate policy dialogue on PFM issues. The Commission should also explore the possibility of launching a specific programme to ensure PFM reform is implemented effectively as soon as possible;

3. Improve the design of conditions for and disbursements of financial assistance. The Commission should build on the experience acquired in Ukraine to improve the way future assistance is designed:
   (a) For budget support and MFA loan conditions, all selected indicators should be clearly defined to avoid any disputes during the assessment process;
   (b) Future loan and grant conditions should complement and reinforce each other;
   (c) When negotiating and setting conditions, the Commission should work closely with other donors, in particular international financial institutions, so as to increase incentives for reform.
   (d) The programmes should seek a reasonable balance between policy leverage aspects and the need to disburse assistance rapidly. Furthermore, in the case of budget support, the amounts attached to PFM and FAC conditions in variable instalments should be significant enough to ensure conditions are fulfilled;

4. Strengthen monitoring of the way EU assistance is implemented; to deepen and speed up PFM and FAC reforms, the Commission should reinforce its monitoring in some areas and place greater emphasis on beneficiary accountability:
   (a) The Commission’s approach to evaluating the budget support programmes implemented in Ukraine should be streamlined;
   (b) Given the results obtained by suspending payments, the Commission should, where duly justified by lack of satisfactory progress in reforms, make use of budget support payment suspensions;

5. Place greater emphasis on the effective implementation and sustainability of reforms. As well as advocating legislative changes, the Commission, in cooperation with civil society organisations, should make further EU assistance conditional on effective implementation of key PFM and FAC reforms. This relates in particular to the PFM reform strategy and action plan and the financial sustainability of operational impartial bodies fighting corruption. Disbursement conditions should be strictly assessed.

6. Take steps to make EU assistance to Ukraine in the area of gas more effective. The Commission should take without delay steps to improve monitoring of EU strategic gas cooperation with Ukraine and make it more effective. In particular, greater emphasis should be placed on data collection, verification and analysis. The Commission should systematically collect more accurate and verifiable information, even in adverse conditions. This is of vital importance for well founded, evidence-based decision-making.
1. Notes that the EU financial and expert assistance to reforming Ukraine was necessary; emphasizes nevertheless, that the implementation of the reforms lacks far behind of what was expected;
2. Regrets that old structures, which are reluctant to reforms, modernisation and democratisation persist, while forces willing to reform face severe difficulties to prevail;
3. Welcomes the EU assistance to Ukraine; is however of the opinion, that it should be tied with tangible efforts of the Ukrainian government aiming to improve the situation in its own country; namely to improve the own resources system through an efficient and transparent tax scheme, which does not only account for the income of the citizens but also the assets of the oligarchs;
4. Calls for an efficient fight against the still widespread corruption and an effective support of the organisations committed to that objective;
5. Calls for a reconstruction of the judiciary power in the country towards an independent instrument committed to the rule of law;
6. Demands a stricter control of the banking sector, in order to avoid capital drain to third countries causing insolvencies of the banking institutes; points out the necessity in this regard to grant budget support only under the condition that the use of financial assistance is being disbursed in a transparent and comprehensive way;
7. Is of the opinion, that any financial aid should generally be preceded by a prior assessment of the prospects of success;
8. Is convinced, that more attention needs to be paid to the forming and education of competent, decentralised administrative structures.

**Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees**

2016/2036(INI) - Resolution on the implementation of the common foreign and security policy, 14/12/2016

38. Urges the EU to step up its cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries in order to strengthen their democratic institutions, resilience and independence, including by launching ambitious fully-fledged CSDP missions tasked with enhancing security and stability; calls on the EU to play a more active and effective role as regards conflict resolution and peace-building; calls on the Member States to increase aid to Ukraine, including adequate defensive systems, in order to deter military escalation in eastern Ukraine, to turn EU East StratCom into a permanent EU structure and to allocate adequate human and financial resources to its better functioning; further supports the EU aspirations of those countries and the reform agenda in areas such as the rule of law, the economy, public administration, the fight against corruption and protection of minorities;

2015/3032(RSP) - Resolution on Association Agreements / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, 21/01/2016

3. Supports, in this connection, the committed and multi-faceted financial and technical assistance provided by the EU and other financial institutions to Ukraine and Georgia, but stresses that the EU’s financial support to all its partners is conditioned by concrete reform steps; stresses the crucial role the Commission should play in facilitating the implementation of the AAs/DCFTAs and in monitoring and assisting the relevant authorities, both technically and financially;

5. Believes that parliamentary scrutiny is a fundamental condition for democratic support for EU policies; calls on the Commission, therefore, to facilitate regular and detailed monitoring of the implementation of the AAs/DCFTAs by the European Parliament in a timely manner; calls for fresh impetus to be given to the
Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, and for its activity to be boosted, so that it can face new challenges effectively; calls for the exchange of best practices and the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding modelled on the one signed with the Verkhovna Rada, which could serve as an example for parliamentary cooperation;

11. Underlines the need to pursue the reform agenda vigorously, especially in the areas of the judiciary, the rule of law and the fight against corruption and organised crime, as an important prerequisite for the socio-economic development of the three association countries;

13. Highlights the importance of the AA/DCFTA provisions on energy cooperation for security of supply and the development of competitive, transparent and non-discriminatory energy markets in line with EU rules and standards, as well as for renewable energy and energy efficiency; supports the EU’s intention to enhance full energy market integration with Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia through the Energy Community;

38. Stresses that the biggest single challenge of the reform effort is endemic corruption; welcomes the decisions taken to date, such as the establishment of anti-corruption legislation, institutions (the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, the National Agency for Prevention of Corruption, and a special anti-corruption prosecutor) and mechanisms, and of the National Agency for the Recovery of the Proceeds of Corruption; welcomes, in addition, the recent adoption of the law on state financing of political parties, which will enter into force on 1 July 2016, and of the law on public procurement;

41. Welcomes the EU’s active support and solidarity in the energy sphere, which allowed Russian gas deliveries to Ukraine to resume for the winter of 2015-2016; calls on the Member States to exploit fully the transit potential of Ukraine and to strengthen cooperation in order to secure the energy supply to both the EU and Ukraine, and to avoid the building of new pipelines bypassing Ukraine, in particular the development of the Nord Stream II project for the delivery of Russian gas to Europe, which could prove detrimental to the EU’s strategy for the diversification of energy sources and to EU law; supports the EU’s intention to enhance full energy market integration with Ukraine through the Energy Community and to reduce energy dependency without overburdening private households; calls for the EU and the Ukrainian Government to work out measures in order to cushion against social hardships;

2014/2965(RSP) - Resolution on the situation in Ukraine, 15/01/2015

[Abstract from the summary, ]

Reform and support for Ukraine: Parliament is of the opinion that an ambitious anti-corruption programme, including zero tolerance for corruption, is urgently needed in Ukraine. It considered that the EU should explore ways to support the Ukrainian Government in enhancing its defence capabilities and the protection of Ukraine’s external borders. It also called on the Commission and the Member States to develop a major assistance plan for Ukraine based on ‘more for more’ and conditionality. It welcomed the EUR 11 billion support package for Ukraine to be disbursed over the next few years, as well as the proposal by the Commission to extend an additional EUR 1.8 billion in medium-term loans.

Energy security: Parliament stressed the importance of energy security in Ukraine and underlines the need for reforms of Ukraine’s energy sector, in line with its Energy Community Commitments. It underlined the need to radically enhance the EU’s energy security and independence and its resilience to external pressure, as well as to reduce its energy dependence on Russia. In this regard, the EU should pursue a genuine Common External Energy Policy as well as to work for the creation...
of a European Energy Union.

2014/2717(RSP) - Resolution on Ukraine, 17/07/2014

[The European Parliament, ]

4. Supports the peace plan as a major chance for de-escalation and peace; supports President Poroshenko’s decisive actions to guarantee the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine; welcomes his commitment to addressing the problem of systemic corruption and misuse of public funds; reiterates that Russia is involved in military action and supply; urges Russia to fulfil its international obligations, to genuinely commit to peaceful settlement negotiations and to use its real influence to stop any violence;

14. Urges the European Council to adopt a more coherent and firmer strategy – and to speak with one voice – vis-à-vis the Ukrainian crisis and the behaviour of the Russian Government, including on matters related to EU energy security; deplores the fact that some Member States are showing disunity in this regard and a lack of EU solidarity;

22. Welcomes the adoption of the public procurement law and calls for its diligent implementation; expects the prompt establishment of a politically independent anti-corruption agency with powers to investigate corrupt conduct;

28. Underlines the necessity of finding a clear, fair and stable solution to ensure the security of gas supply from Russia to Ukraine, as this is a necessary prerequisite for the economic development and stability of Ukraine; believes that the EU should continue to play its role in facilitating an agreement allowing Ukraine to pay a competitive price, which is not politically motivated, for its gas purchases; stresses that the use of energy resources as a foreign policy tool undermines the long-term credibility of Russia as a reliable trading partner for the EU and that further measures to lower the EU’s dependency on Russian gas must be a priority;

29. Calls on the Member States to ensure sufficient gas supply through reverse gas flow from neighbouring states in the EU; welcomes, to this end, the memorandum of understanding on reverse flows between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine, which should encourage Ukraine to establish a transparent and reliable gas transportation system; recalls the strategic role of the Energy Community, of which Ukraine holds the presidency in 2014; welcomes the fact that cooperation with Ukraine forms an integral part of the Commission’s European Energy Security Strategy presented in June 2014;

31. Welcomes the Commission’s creation of the Support Group for Ukraine, which will provide the Ukrainian authorities with all necessary assistance in undertaking political and economic reforms and will work on the implementation of the ‘European Agenda for Reform’;

(2013/2149(INI)), European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2014 on assessing and setting priorities for EU relations with the Eastern Partnership countries

[The European Parliament, ]
4. Recognises that now more than ever the EaP societies in favour of integration with the European Union need strong, proactive and immediate support from the EU, which should be provided via different channels and policy sectors ranging from financial assistance to visa facilitation schemes;

5. Considers that the Eastern Partnership project requires a thorough assessment of its effectiveness, including an accurate evaluation of its successes and failures, and that it needs further reflection, a new impetus and a clear vision of the way forward, focusing equally on political cooperation and partnership with the societies of the EaP countries and on aiming to provide a European choice for those societies; urges the EU, therefore, to focus particularly on investing in immediate progress for citizens, and in this context to establish visa-free regimes, to support youth and future leaders, and to devote greater attention to the empowerment of civil society; highlights the importance of the energy, transport and research sectors for the scope of the European integration of the EaP countries;

6. Believes that the outcome of the Vilnius Summit highlights the need to enhance the strategic character of the Eastern Partnership; recommends, therefore, making flexible use of the tools at the EU's disposal, such as macroeconomic assistance, easing of trade regimes, projects to enhance energy security and economic modernisation, and swift implementation of visa liberalisation, in line with European values and interests;

13. Highlights the importance of investing in projects for youth and future leaders, by making full use of the scholarship opportunities under the ‘Erasmus +' programme to foster student and teacher exchanges between EaP countries and the EU Member States, by continuing financial support for the European Humanities University in exile, and establishing an Eastern Partnership University and the Black Sea European College, which would provide opportunities for the development of educational programmes on different levels, aiming at the formation of future leaders from EaP countries and the EU Member States, as well as further promoting academic and educational projects which have already proven their value in this field, such as the College of Europe;

23. Expresses its concern at the lack of shared understanding of the essence of cooperation between the EU and the EaP countries; notes with concern that the EU is frequently seen as a donor and partner countries as beneficiaries, while all should perform a double role; warns that this kind of public perception might create unrealistic expectations among the societies of the Eastern Partners;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral / Written Questions</th>
<th>EU aid for Ukraine, E-009779/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marie-Christine Arnautu (ENF), 22-12-2016</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In 2014, the EU decided to prop up the Ukrainian Government and economy with a huge aid package worth more than EUR 11 billion in order to tackle the political, diplomatic, economic and budgetary crises caused by the uprising that was organised to block the legitimate government's decision to align itself with Russia.</td>
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<td>On 7 December 2016, the European Court of Auditors published a report that makes it very clear that the results of the aid programme are unsatisfactory — especially considering the large amount of money involved — mainly due to funds having been appropriated by the oligarchy. The Court stresses that the funding was issued hastily, with no strategy nor any means of monitoring how it is used, to a country where corruption is rife and the hidden economy is thriving.</td>
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<td>1. Given the above, will the Commission put a definitive end to financial aid that appears to bear no fruit whatsoever? After all, behind those financial arguments lies the fact that the money was paid by EU citizens, many of whom are themselves in precarious economic situations.</td>
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<td>2. Failing that, will it, for purely geopolitical and ideological reasons, only grant aid on the condition that public money is properly managed and ensure that it benefits disadvantaged Ukrainians and the community rather than the insatiable oligarchy?</td>
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Court of Auditors concerns over EU aid to Ukraine, E-009553/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, David Casa (PPE), 19-12-2016

On 7 December 2016, the European Court of Auditors published a special report (No 32/2016) on EU assistance to Ukraine. The report is critical of the lack of
effectiveness of such monetary aid, which has amounted to billions spent, and states that serious issues have arisen with regard to verifying that the money has reached its intended sources and achieves the EU’s objectives.

1. What measures has the Commission taken to increase the effectiveness of EU aid to Ukraine?
2. What is the Commission’s reaction to the criticism made by the Court of Auditors?
3. How does the Commission plan to prevent such problems in the future if the EU provides further aid to Ukraine?

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**EU financing, assistance and support for Ukraine**, E-009440/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Dario Tamburrano ++ (EFDD), 14-12-2016

In 2015, the Commission concluded an agreement with Ukraine and Russia for the supply of Russian gas to Europe: Ukraine agreed to direct 2 bcm of gas into underground storage by October 2015, for which it received international financing, guaranteed by the EIB to a value of USD 250. According to AGSI data, the volume of gas in Ukrainian storage only increased by 1.53 bcm during the period in question.

1. Given that the Commission intends to enter into further gas agreements with Ukraine this year, what measures will it take to ensure that agreement deadlines are upheld?
2. According to the latest report by the European Court of Auditors, the Ukrainian authorities are merging the substantial EU budget support funds in an extra-budgetary fund. Szabolcs Fazakas, who led the audit, said that it was impossible to say how Ukraine had spent the money. Would the Commission not say that this represents sufficient grounds to suspend any allocation of funds to Ukraine?

******

**Ukraine - EU financial assistance**, E-003407/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ivan Štefanec (PPE), 27-04-2016

Stabilisation of the situation in Ukraine and assistance from the EU is an important condition for this country’s European path and for improving the living standards of its people.

1. What is the EU’s financial assistance for Ukraine this year and what will it be in the following years?

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**Assistance to Ukraine and amount of funding for this year and subsequent years**, E-002422/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ivan Štefanec (EPP), 22-03-2016

1. How does the Commission plan to assist Ukraine?
2. What amount of funding will be made available for 2016 and for subsequent years?

******

**Macro-financial assistance for Ukraine**, E-013627/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Elisabetta Gardini (PPE), 07-10-2015

During its plenary session of 25 March 2015, the European Parliament approved financial support measures for Ukraine totalling EUR 1.8 billion. The above funding was conditional, however, on the implementation of a series of structural reforms by the Ukrainian Government — reforms affecting sectors of vital importance such as the energy industry and the judiciary system, in addition to others concerning lawfulness and rights.

1. In light of the above, can the Commission please provide a progress report on how the support programme in question has been implemented, indicating any results that can be highlighted as delivering on the requirements referred to above?
2. How have the funds allocated by the European Union actually been used?

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DCFTA EU-Ukraine and the socio-economic situation in Ukraine, P-012080/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Joachim Schuster (S&D), 12-08-2015

By accepting the association agreement (DCFTA) with the EU, Ukraine undertook to carry out far-reaching reforms of its economy, administration and society. This will lead to deep socioeconomic rifts and tremendous pressure to reform. In addition, the economic and social situation is being exacerbated by the armed conflict with Russia, that country’s economic sanctions against Ukraine, and the rise in the price of basic foodstuffs and the currency depreciation. Ukraine is also facing increasing problems with the influx of migrants from areas in the east.

1. What is the Commission’s strategy to prevent this situation causing a humanitarian disaster and an even bigger gulf in Ukraine’s society?
2. How is the Commission ensuring that loans and aid payments made by the EU are put to proper use and that lasting reforms — including the fight against corruption — are carried out?
3. How is the agreement being adapted to the situation as it changes because of the war in Ukraine?

**

Ukrainian default and macrofinancial assistance payments, E-008870/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Beatrix von Storch (ECR), 02-06-2015

1. Is the Commission aware of the Ukrainian Parliament’s decision to suspend macro financial assistance repayments, and what is its opinion on the matter?
2. What payments have already been made to Ukraine using monies provided by the EU and its institutions and bodies and from other sources? In the Commission’s view, how likely is it that Ukraine will be able to repay the assistance granted in the form of loans?
3. In the Commission’s view, what implications does Ukraine’s current financial situation have for the macro financial assistance programme?

**

Anti-corruption legislation in Ukraine in the light of the recommendations by the Group of States against Corruption, E-006984/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marine Le Pen (NI), 30-04-2015

Macro-financial assistance to Ukraine is theoretically subject to the fulfilment of a number of conditions, an assessment of which is set out in a Commission note (ECFIN/D2 Ares (2015)1228209). The first micro-financial aid package, therefore, requires the introduction of a legislative framework to combat corruption in line with the recommendations of the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption, and with other international standards (3). It is stated in the Commission document that the legislative framework is scheduled to be in place by March 2015 and that the implementation projects seem appropriate. The assessment of whether this requirement has been fulfilled is not sufficiently detailed, however, and it would seem appropriate to allocate the macro-financial assistance only after an assessment has been carried out of the effectiveness and outcomes of the legislative framework.

1. Could the Commission provide detailed information on the anti-corruption requirements in view of exchanges with the Ukrainian administration on this matter, for all the areas of administration in which the Ukrainian Government is active?
2. Is the Commission intending to make the other parts of the disbursement of the macro-financial assistance subject to an ex-post evaluation of the measures and practices emanating from the legislative framework?

****
Ukraine and its government are in a quagmire. There is a real need for the European Union to provide the country with financial assistance because economic collapse would spell disaster. Yet, beyond such aid, we must see tangible results in areas such as the fight against corruption, public sector reform, and a change in the way the national economy is structured and engineered.

1. What specific action is the Commission planning to take to monitor progress in individual target areas and sectors in Ukraine?

*******

Monitoring financial assistance, E-005166/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Monika Smolková (S&D), 31-03-2015

1. How does the Commission monitor the use of financial assistance granted to those countries with which it enters into association agreements?
2. Specifically, what overview does the Commission have of how macro lending to Ukraine in the past five years has been used?

*******

EU financial assistance to crisis areas outside the Union, E-004790/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Dubravka Šuica (EPP), 26-03-2015

The security environment in the neighbourhood of the European Union has dramatically worsened since the conflict in Ukraine, which represents the biggest challenge since the beginning of the process of European integration. The role of the EU foreign and security policy should be not only to preserve the fundamental European values and interests and strengthen the political and legal order which contributes to the preservation of peace and stability, but also to improve the security of EU citizens, especially with regard to the fight against terrorism and traffic in weapons, drugs and people.

The financial assistance of the EU to third countries should be visible, coordinated and effective in order to adequately and quickly respond to crisis situations outside the EU, and it must be given in accordance with the agreed strategic priorities.

1. As the external security policy of the EU is being redefined at the time of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, I would like to know what concrete steps the Commission and EEAS have taken to ensure that financial aid reaches citizens in crisis areas around the world in a palpable and timely manner.

*******

Macro-financial assistance for Ukraine, E-004744/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Doru-Claudian Frunzulică (S&D), 25-03-2015

1. Taking into consideration the aid instalments that will be provided to Ukraine in 2015-2016, amounting to three loan instalments with a total maximum value of EUR 1.8 billion, can the Commission specify what specific provisions it will impose in order to prevent fraud and irregularities in the light of the unstable situation in Ukraine?

*******

Financial support to Ukraine, E-004208/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Neena Gill (S&D), 13-03-2015

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in February announced Ukraine would receive a USD 40 billion bailout, of which USD 17.5 billion would be covered by the IMF itself.

1. Does the Commission intend to include a contribution to the USD 40 billion bailout funds announced by the IMF in future proposals for macro-financial assistance to Ukraine?
2. If so, what would be the conditions governing the release of these funds?
3. Will the Commission consider a further increase in financial support if inflation in the Ukrainian market continues?
****

Negotiations concerning financial assistance for Ukraine, E-001242/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Sander Loones (ECR), Mark Demesmaeker (ECR), 29-01-2015

On 8 January 2015, the Commission granted Ukraine an extra EUR 1.8 billion by way of macro-financial assistance. Commission President Juncker observed in this connection that solidarity always goes hand in hand with willingness to carry out the urgently needed reforms in Ukraine under the current IMF programme and the memorandum of understanding between the EU and Ukraine.

1. How, where, when and between whom will negotiations be held between the EU and Ukraine regarding the reforms to be achieved under the Memorandum?
2. To what extent is EU financial assistance dependent on implementation of the reforms in question — which must, after all, be negotiated — and who will assess whether or not this condition has been met?
3. Does the Commission consider it appropriate to specify the amount of assistance before the negotiations have taken place or before they have been concluded?

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VP/HR - Violation of macro-financial assistance rules with regard to Ukraine, E-000245/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 09-01-2015

The Commission has supported Ukraine with strong macro-financial assistance (MFA). Having disbursed a total of EUR 1.62 billion in 2014-2015, it is now preparing to lend the country another EUR 1.8 billion.

In accordance with the treaties, macro-financial assistance is only given under exceptional circumstances and exists to help countries experiencing serious difficulties with their balance of payments. An emergency assistance measure of this kind should not be used as regular financial support for economic and social development.

In accordance with the terms of the Council’s decision and in the framework of the memorandum of understanding, what is at issue is much more than funding to correct the external imbalances of the Ukrainian economy. Possible areas affected by conditionality include the management of public finances, anticorruption measures, tax authorities, reforms to the energy and finance sectors and measures intended to improve the business environment.

1. What is the High Representative’s opinion of this latest loan arrangement, which clearly goes against the rules laid down for MFA, particularly those regarding human rights?

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Information on macro-financial assistance to Ukraine, E-000242/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 09-01-2015

A first package of macro-financial assistance (MFA) for Ukraine was approved in February 2013, supposedly to support economic reforms in the country and tackle the external deficit and ongoing funding problems. The first tranche of EUR 100 million was paid in mid-May 2014, and the second tranche of EUR 260 million in mid-November 2014, with the final tranche of EUR 250 million to be paid in 2015, subject to the usual verification of various pre-conditions.

On 19 March 2014, the Commission proposed a new loan to the value of a billion euros to aid Ukraine. Two tranches of EUR 500 million were paid in June and December 2014. In accordance with the decision of the European Council, these loans should have a maximum maturity of 15 years. Also, and in accordance with the same decision, the Commission is required to inform the European Parliament regularly of any developments concerning macro-financial assistance provided by the European Union.
1. Can the Commission provide all the relevant information concerning these two loans, namely the amounts paid, maturities and interest, guarantees, and any repayments made by the Ukrainian Government?

**VP/HR - New financial resources for Ukraine: newspaper article dated 15.12.2014, E-011083/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Franz Obermayr (NI), 18-12-2014**

According to reports in Die Welt newspaper on Monday, 15 December 2014, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, wants to indicate to the Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk that the EU is willing to make even more money available to Ukraine than before. However, this payment will be tied to certain conditions. The following question arise about this:

- The EU has already invested in Ukraine on a considerable scale. One aim has been partial redemption of the country’s debts for gas.
- In case the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs really has offered further financial aid to the Ukrainian Prime Minister, on what conditions will it be paid?

**VP/HR - Assessment of the intervention in Ukraine, E-010654/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 12-12-2014**

The European Union, in defiance of international law, decided to support the coup d'état in Ukraine, in a copy-cat move following the lead of the United States and NATO. Following this intervention, the EU had to grant financial support to the illegal government of Ukraine, despite the innumerable crimes committed against civilians by both the government and the forces supporting it. The EU signed a trade agreement with Ukraine (recently extended for a further year), which opens our borders to products produced there, namely those that were previously exported to Russia, with no reciprocal arrangements for European production. It has had to endure a Russian embargo on European exports of various foodstuffs, causing enormous losses for producers. Finally, it is paying the debts accumulated by Ukraine for purchases of natural gas from Russian companies, for fear of jeopardising the supply of gas to Central European countries.

- In view of this situation, I ask the High Representative whether this venture has yet been assessed to find out the size of the total bill that European taxpayers will of course once again have to foot?

**Gas supply security in Ukraine and the EU, E-009425/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Tibor Szanyi (S&D), 18-11-2014**

According to the S&P Capital IQ calculation model, the current Ukrainian CDS price indicates that the market is pricing a 63% probability that Ukraine will default on its sovereign debt within the next five years. The Ukrainian sovereign CDS price crossed the 1.500 basis point psychological barrier last week, while no other country in Europe has a national debt with default insurance costs over 1.000 basis points. The credit rating agencies consider Ukraine’s ability to service its debt very bad. Moody’s Investors Service, Standard & Poor’s and Fitch Ratings have assigned Ukraine a Caa/CCC sovereign credit rating, cautioning investors of exceptional risk of default. As is well known, Ukraine (with which the European Union has signed an association agreement) is planning to pay in advance for 1.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Gazprom by the end of 2014. Meanwhile, the country’s leadership is hoping the relatively warm weather will last a long time and the gas stocks will hold out until the end of winter. This, though, is a risky strategy since climate experts are forecasting the coldest winter in the past 30 years.

- What can the European Commission do so that, if necessary, Ukraine will be able to get the resources to prevent a humanitarian crisis caused by a gas shortage?
2. Does the European Commission have any means to make it possible, if necessary, to guarantee both the gas supply security of all of its Member States and the ability to help out Ukraine with energy sources?

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**Restrictions on gas supplies**, E-009329/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Krzysztof Hetman (EPP), 14-11-2014

In recent weeks Gazprom has restricted its supplies of gas to customers in a number of EU countries, including Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It is thought this may be linked to exports of gas from the European Union to Ukraine, which Russia opposes. In view of the on-going conflict in Ukraine and the assistance provided to the country by the EU, such restrictions are likely to be repeated. With winter approaching, this could be particularly dangerous in terms of gas security.

1. Are gas supplies to EU countries back to normal?
2. Does the Commission intend to take, or has it already taken, any action to normalise the situation?
3. In the long term, does the Commission intend to take action to strengthen the security of supply in the European Union?

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**EU financial assistance to Ukraine**, E-008269/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Boris Zala (S&D), 23-10-2014

On 12 September 2014, President Jose Manuel Barroso stated that the Commission would disburse EUR 760 million of assistance to Ukraine within the following month, in the form of direct loans, provided that certain conditions — in particular, progress on economic reforms and the fight against corruption — were met.

1. Can the Commission provide details as to how that allocation is being spent?

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**OLAF's role in the reforms and anti-corruption initiatives in Ukraine**, E-004173/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris, Oreste Rossi (EPP), 03-04-2014

Within the context of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, and following the crisis that has led to a change of government in Kiev, the EU is doing a great deal to reform the eastern country’s economic system, which has been weakened by high levels of corruption. In order to face up to this significant challenge, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy — one of the figureheads of the EU — has made several visits to Ukraine, and the Commission is now also seeking to involve the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and make best use of its vast levels of experience.

1. In light of the above, can the Commission provide a more detailed explanation of how exactly OLAF will be involved in the reform process in Ukraine?

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**Fraud safeguards for macro-financial assistance to Ukraine**, E-003308/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD), 20-03-2014

It has been reported in the press that the EU has promised EUR 1.6 billion in macro-financial assistance to Ukraine.

1. Given the breakdown of the rule of law in Ukraine, and the potential for corruption and wastage, could the Commission detail how the transfer of funds will be safeguarded?

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On 19 March, the Commission proposed a new programme of macro-financial assistance to Ukraine worth EUR 1 billion. That assistance is in addition to the package already agreed on 6 March 2014. The assistance will also be in addition to the amount offered by the International Monetary Fund.

2. Is the Commission contemplating other similar measures (making various amounts available in the form of macro-financial assistance) for other Eastern neighbourhood countries, in circumstances where pressure from Russia on the EU’s neighbours could intensify in the months to come?

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The current situation with regard to the budget in Ukraine and developments in the country’s relationship with Russia on gas issues show very clearly that without any additional funding Ukraine will not be able to resolve its financial problems. This will all but dash hopes for an association agreement, even if Ukraine meets all the relevant requirements.

1. Does Commission see a possibility for the involvement of international financial institutions such as the IMF and the EBRD with a view to providing financial assistance to help Ukraine implement reforms connected with the signing of the association agreement?

2. If so, what would the timeframe for such involvement and assistance be?
**Special report No 33/2016 of 18 January 2017**

**Union Civil Protection Mechanism: the coordination of responses to disasters outside the EU has been broadly effective**

Humanitarian Aid

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<th>Policy Area</th>
<th>Humanitarian Aid</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Report No / Date / Title</strong></td>
<td>Special report no 33/2016 of 18 January 2017 Union Civil Protection Mechanism: the coordination of responses to disasters outside the EU has been broadly effective</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Questions asked:</strong> The audit aimed to assess whether the Commission had been effective in facilitating the coordination of the responses to disasters outside the Union since the establishment of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) in 2014. In particular, this included the facilitation of coordination with</td>
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<td>• Participating States,</td>
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<td>• other EU institutions and agencies,</td>
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<td>• the UN,</td>
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<td>• the affected country and</td>
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<td>• other relevant actors.</td>
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<td>The Court looked at how this coordination was implemented within existing structures and processes and examined the collection, dissemination and exchange of information with all of the aforementioned stakeholders.</td>
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<td>The Court looked at the activations of the UCPM in response to three recent international disasters:</td>
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<td>• the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014);</td>
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<td>• the Ebola virus outbreak in west Africa (2014–2016);</td>
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<td>• and the Nepal earthquake (2015)</td>
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<td>The audit work was carried out between December 2015 and May 2016, and was primarily based on a review of the documents provided by the European Commission and European External Action Service.</td>
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<td><strong>Findings:</strong></td>
<td>1. EU civil protection teams facilitated on-the-ground coordination but their selection process and reporting from the field had shortcomings</td>
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<td>2. Although the voluntary pool was still of limited use at the time of the crises examined, the Commission played an active role in extending its scope</td>
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<td>3. The Commission played an active role in extending the capacities of the voluntary pool</td>
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<td>4. EU civil protection teams benefited from substantial support from the EU delegations</td>
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5. The Commission made use of the existing ECHO Field Network, but greater civil protection synergies could be sought
6. The Commission respected UN OCHA’s leading role and adopted flexible coordination structures in coherence with the overall UN set-up
7. The Commission took steps towards ensuring a smooth transition into the recovery phase
8. The Commission’s CECIS communication platform is useful for information sharing, but further improvement is needed to enhance its impact
9. Information products and maps were widely shared and there are indications that they were useful
10. The Commission organised inclusive meetings which sought to promote information exchange with EU bodies and consistency in the delivery of assistance
11. By acting as a forum for information exchange, the Ebola Task Force added value to the response, but should have been established sooner
12. The Commission does not make full use of the information at its disposal to report on both its own and the UCPM’s overall performance

**Recommendations:**

1. In order to gain time in the critical early stages of a response, the Commission should:
   a) make earlier use of the pre-alert phase in CECIS for slow-onset disasters— as soon as first indicators of impact and/or needs arise — to allow Participating States to mobilise resources ahead of UCPM activation;
   b) following requests for assistance, send out requests for nominations of experts immediately if a substantial response from Participating States to a major disaster can be reasonably expected;
   c) identify ways to speed up the selection and deployment of EUCP teams, and invite Participating States to develop, together with the Commission, peer based expert performance evaluations as well as post-mission feedback sessions between the team and Commission headquarters;
   d) develop a written log of any contact made with Participating States having close ties to the affected country, which may therefore be in a good position to assist.

2. In order to improve the overview of assistance provided and requested, to allow for a better follow-up of priorities and to enhance user-friendliness, the Commission should redesign a number of key features in CECIS, including:
   a) automating the gap analyses of requests made versus requests fulfilled and introducing a sorting option;
   b) providing EUCP teams in the field with a simplified, real-time version of the summary of requests and offers;
   c) automating the workflow for transport support requests to enable a faster end-to-end process and the production of statistics and real-time overviews;
   d) taking further steps to filter operational and administrative messages effectively and identifying measures to strengthen the usage of this feature.

3. In order to strengthening coordination and potential synergies on the ground, the Commission should:
   a) enhance the EUCP teams’ reporting from the field by requiring clearer descriptions of the needs assessments carried out and concrete follow-up of identified needs;
   b) identify how the ECHO Field Network might be further exploited to support the work of the EUCP teams in general, and situation and needs assessments specifically;
   c) identify more opportunities for strengthening reciprocal knowledge between civil protection and humanitarian assistance providers, including those in the UN cluster system;
   d) designate ‘civil protection focal points’ within the ECHO Field Network national and regional offices; it should also — together with the EEAS — designate ‘civil protection focal points’ among staff in EUDs in at-risk countries. These focal points, would be provided with regular training on developments in the UCPM and procedures for its activation.

4. In the event that the EU decides to deploy epidemiologists through the UCPM in response to future large-scale emergencies with health consequences outside
the Union — and taking full account of WHO’s lead in this regard — the Commission and the ECDC should jointly explore possible changes to the existing administrative and financial arrangements that might facilitate rapid and flexible deployments.

5. To provide itself and the Participating State with information that could further enhance the performance, added value and acceptance of the UCPM, the Commission should:
   a) set key performance indicators in respect of those parts of the response that fall within its control and for which it can be held accountable;
   b) develop automatically generated statistics and reports based on CECIS data to compare the responses to different activations and identify areas for improvement of the UCPM;

[Recommendations by the rapporteur,]

1. Welcomes the special report concerning the coordination of the responses to disasters outside the European Union through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, endorses its recommendations and approves of the Commission’s readiness to take them into account;
2. Stresses the high significance of a prompt and coherent reaction to natural and man-made disasters in order to minimise their human, environmental and economic impact;
3. Takes note of the overall satisfaction with the Commission’s way of handling the process of disaster response;
4. Encourages the Commission to further enhance its resource, including budgetary, mobilisation and expert selection procedures so that the affected countries are provided with an immediate, needs based delivery of EU assistance; stresses the importance for ‘civil protection focal points’ to be designated within the ECHO Field Network national and regional offices and among staff in the European Union’s delegations in at-risk countries;
5. Welcomes the launch of the “European Medical Corps” in February 2016 that substantially expanded the EU Civil Protection Mechanism’s “voluntary pool” with a “reserve” of medical and public health teams available to deploy as lessons learnt of the Ebola crisis. This approach, of having a reserve of medical teams and other specialised assessment and support teams, must be continued and further improved;
6. Suggests removing all the unnecessary administrative burdens that are time-consuming and hinder both the Participating States and the ERCC from replying more instantaneously, notably at the outset of the crisis;
7. Asks the Participating States to register more assets in the voluntary pool in order to enhance preparedness to react to disasters;
8. Highlights the importance of information exchange and cooperation between the Commission, other EU bodies and the United Nations in facilitating a structured response in the case of emergency; welcomes the cooperation agreements signed with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the World Food Programme (WFP), and urges the Commission to sign further cooperation agreements with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other involved actors;
9. Recalls that quality and interoperability requirements are defined and expanded in accordance with the new WHO standards for medical modules and as well as with other strategic partners and their framework conditions to ensure early action associated with a more thorough coordination in international missions. To guarantee the immediate availability/mobilisation of capacities from the outset of an emergency and to avoid financing errors, provisioning processes need to be optimised and largely standardized;
10. Urges to keep exploiting potential synergies with the other involved actors and instruments, in particular with humanitarian and development aid, and to avoid a duplication of actions that have already been undertaken;
11. Calls on the Commission to improve the functionality of ERCC’s communication platform, CECIS, so that the information can be retrieved more easily by the stakeholders, including a mobile access for the EUCP teams deployed in the field;
12. Is of opinion that humanitarian aid and civil protection should be followed by other activities aimed at fostering a culture of prevention as well as building the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster affected communities.

|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

25. Acknowledges the value of the EU’s comprehensive approach in the coordination and coherence of its wide array of external policy instruments to invest in durable political solutions; draws attention to the specific characteristics of humanitarian aid, and stresses that it is imperative to differentiate the humanitarian response from foreign, political, security and counter-terrorism considerations through the adoption of safeguards; deplores any misuse of, or disrespect for, the principles for humanitarian action, since such misuse significantly undermines aid delivery and the security of humanitarian staff; insists that counter-terrorism measures should neither undermine nor obstruct humanitarian efforts, and invites the WHS to address this issue in an appropriate way;

34. Emphasises that global action is needed to address the funding gap; calls for the establishment of a global fund for humanitarian assistance (GFHA) that supports the participation and inclusion of non-DAC donors and brings together all existing international financial mechanisms, domestic resources and pooled funds (UN emergency response funds, CERF funds, trust funds, etc.), and that is complemented by voluntary financial payments by governments, the private sector and regional organisations; suggests that payments could be used to fill gaps in humanitarian pledges for Level 3 emergencies, support preparedness, provide social protection resilience package for long-term refugees or cope with unforeseen emergencies, such as Ebola, among others;

43. Stresses the importance of disaster risk reduction for resilience in four priority areas: 1) understanding disaster risks; 2) strengthening risk governance to manage disaster risk; 3) investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience, contingency plans and early warning systems; and 4) enhance disaster preparedness for effective response, and to “build back better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction;

44. Calls on the Member States and on other donors to strengthen and develop national legal frameworks for humanitarian action, and disaster risk reduction and management, based on international disaster response laws, rules and principles; underlines that disaster preparedness, risk reduction and resilience should systematically be incorporated into the response plans to be provided by local, regional and national administrations, industry and civil society, and should, at the same time, be supported by sufficient financing for, and increased innovation in, forecasting and risk management modelling;

50. Emphasises the role of new technologies and innovative digital tools in the organisation and delivery of the humanitarian aid, especially with regards to aid delivery and tracking, disaster surveillance, information sharing, coordination between donors and facilitating relations between aid agencies and local governments, particularly in remote areas and disaster zones; highlights that Africa, and especially sub-Saharan Africa, is currently undergoing a mobile digital revolution with a surge in mobile subscriptions (and mobile internet use), making such tools and services crucial for putting in place early warning systems and for providing speedy information on health matters, danger areas and aid contacts;

52. Calls on the EU to explore and encourage partnerships with start-ups, and with insurance and technology companies, amongst others, with a view to developing tools for preparedness and deployment in emergencies; underlines the need to support and further develop the global mapping by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) of available private sector assets and capacities to enhance technical cooperation for disaster response efforts;

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European Parliament resolution of 11 June 2015 on the situation in Nepal following the earthquakes, 2015/2734(RSP)

[The European Parliament,]

3. Welcomes the swift aid provided by the Commission and the Member States to Nepal and calls on the international community to continue to assist the Government of Nepal with short-term humanitarian support and long-term recovery and rehabilitation efforts, with a special focus on the agricultural sector and hard-to-reach areas, and to honour its pledges;

4. Stresses the importance of emergency healthcare and of the measures aimed at preventing the outbreak of communicable diseases; calls on the EU and the international community to support the revitalisation of health facilities and services in the country, in particular in remote areas, including through the delivery of medical tents and equipment for damaged or destroyed health facilities;

5. Calls on the Government of Nepal and the international community to ensure that children who have been separated from their families are reunited with them as quickly as possible and to place children at the heart of the humanitarian intervention; calls, furthermore, for special attention to be paid to the particularly vulnerable situation of children, including the many cases of malnutrition and the risks of abuse and trafficking; stresses the importance of bringing children back to school;

6. Is concerned at reports of abuse and harassment of women and children in makeshift camps, and calls on the Government of Nepal to take additional measures to ensure the safety of vulnerable people and the swift investigation of such reports;

7. Calls on the international community to assist the Government of Nepal with salvaging and restoring damaged cultural, religious and historical heritage;

9. Urges the Government of Nepal to resolve the remaining problems with customs procedures for humanitarian supplies, to lift any so-called ‘relief taxes’ being levied on humanitarian supplies by local police at Nepal’s borders, and to work alongside aid agencies to ensure that the aid swiftly reaches the places where it is needed;

10. Expresses its concern at reports of discrimination in the distribution of humanitarian aid, and calls on the Government of Nepal to ensure that aid reaches those who need it, regardless of who they are and where the aid is coming from; calls, furthermore, on the Vice-President/High Representative to address this issue at the highest possible political level in her contacts with Nepal;

11. Commends governments in the region, in particular the Government of India, for their assistance in the international aid effort; calls on the Commission, the Member States and international stakeholders to continue to work with the Government of Nepal and other governments in the region on the issue of improving preparedness and resilience in the face of natural disasters, including with regard to building codes, infrastructure and emergency plans; stresses that the National Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Plan should also address other key issues, including the fight against poverty, environmental protection and climate change;

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European Parliament resolution of 18 September 2014 on the EU’s response to the Ebola outbreak, 2014/2842(RSP)

[The European Parliament,]
3. Calls upon the Commission to intensify efforts and coordinate actions with the United Nations to combat the Ebola virus outbreak; asks the UN Security Council, together with the affected partner countries, to look into the possibility of using military and civil defence assets under the leadership of the Secretary-General and coordinated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs;

5. Congratulates the work done on the ground by partner organisations despite the challenges and warmly welcomes their great input and help to control this outbreak;

7. Regrets the underestimation of the crisis by the international community and the delay in providing any adequate coordinated strategy;

8. Welcomes the commitments made by the Member States at the European Commission’s High Level Event of 15 September 2014, and urges the Council of the European Union to hold a ministerial meeting to establish an emergency plan to mobilise a medical response to agree and provide humanitarian aid from the Member States, under the coordination of the Commission;

9. Calls on the Commission to draw up needs assessments and country-specific plans to determine and coordinate the demand for, and deployment of, qualified health personnel, mobile laboratories, laboratory equipment, protective clothing and treatment centres with isolation wards;

10. Calls on the Member States to coordinate flights and establish dedicated air bridges to move health personnel and equipment to the affected countries and the region, and to provide medical evacuation if necessary;

11. Stresses the need to strengthen scientific collaboration and technological support in the areas affected by this outbreak, with a view to setting up clinical, epidemiological and diagnostic infrastructures, including sustainable infrastructures and surveillance, and paying particular attention to the engagement of local staff, including training;

13. Calls on the Commission to put in place control systems to ensure that the entire budget allocated to stopping the Ebola outbreak is actually used to fight the epidemic in the countries affected by the virus and not for other purposes;

17. Stresses that the current crisis cannot be solved by health systems alone, but that a concerted approach involving different sectors (healthcare, education and training, sanitation, food aid) is needed to address the critical gaps in all essential services;

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[European Parliament resolution of 11 December 2013 on the EU approach to resilience and disaster risk reduction in developing countries: learning from food security crises, (2013/2110(INI))]

[The European Parliament, ]

11. Stresses that investing in DRR measures in advance of disasters is far more cost-effective than funding disaster response after the event; therefore encourages further investment in DRR and resilience strategies in developing countries, particularly in the most vulnerable areas, and its inclusion in national development plans;
12. Highlights that effective disaster response management takes into account the setting in place of a framework allowing for the immediate mobilisation of all necessary resources;

13. Stresses that DRR should be prioritised accordingly in future development programming and mainstreamed into development and humanitarian programming in all fragile and risk-prone countries;

14. Calls on the EU, its Member States and its partner countries’ governments to improve and develop DRR strategies in developing countries by implementing risk assessment programmes and enhancing early warning systems, particularly in fragile and crisis-prone countries, by strengthening disaster preparedness with a view to effective responses at all levels and by supporting more sustainable development planning in partner countries;

15. Calls on partner countries to establish accounting systems capable of recording local losses and sharing information between the local and national levels for planning and statistical purposes; notes that a certain degree of standardisation may help to record losses better at regional level and thereby support regional cooperation;

16. Calls on the EU and its Member States, as well as on the partner countries to consider environmental sustainability and disaster risk management in programmes of land governance reform and land registration mechanisms;

18. Supports a complementary and coherent approach to the MDG and DRR post-2015 frameworks; considers that the post-MDG and post-HFA (Hyogo framework for action) processes need to take account of the outcomes of the current frameworks and to address the experiences faced by those most affected by disasters and crises; reiterates that DRR, climate risk management and resilience need to be strongly integrated into the post-2015 framework.

Oral / Written Questions

Civil protection against natural disasters, E-002064/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Enrico Gasbarra (S&D), 27-03-2017

Article 6 TFEU stipulates that in the civil protection sector the EU has competences that supplement and support the actions of the Member States. Article 196, meanwhile, specifies that the ordinary legislative procedure has to be used for the adoption of legislation concerning civil protection. Article 196 also stresses that the EU’s aim is to encourage Member States to improve the effectiveness of their systems for preventing natural disasters.

Given the European dimension — due to the seriousness of the damage to the natural and artistic heritage — of some recent natural disasters:

1. Can the Commission give an overview of the activities of the European Emergency Response Capacity (EERC) since it was launched in 2014, as regards coordination of prevention measures?

2. Is it considering introducing further pilot projects and significantly increasing resources to improve synergies and the sharing of best practices among national civil protection authorities?

EU civil protection mechanism, E-006468/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 31-08-2016

In the week from 6 to 12 August alone, 96,477 hectares of land in Portugal were ravaged by fire, 20 times more than since the beginning of 2016. This was an exceptional situation necessitating extraordinary measures, prompting the Portuguese Government to activate the EU civil protection mechanism. However, aid from the EU in the form of two Canadair firefighting aircraft, one from Spain, with which Portugal has a bilateral agreement, and one from Italy, was woefully inadequate, especially compared with the prompt assistance provided by Russia (two Beriev aircraft) and Morocco (two Canadair aircraft). An EU spokesperson attempted to justify this to the press by indicating that fires had broken out in other Member States also. In view of this:

1. What explanation can the Commission give for such a paltry level of assistance, given that, in terms of surface area, over half the fire damage in the EU
In 2014, the European Union set up a Civil Protection Mechanism to replace the Civil Protection Financial Instrument which had existed up to 2013. Its objective is to strengthen cooperation between the Union and Member States, and to help coordinate civil protection in order to improve the effectiveness of prevention, preparation and response systems in the event of natural or man-made disasters.

1. What is the Commission’s initial assessment of the functioning of this instrument following its update and what has been the response from Member States?
2. How many grants have been requested up to now under the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism and which areas have generated the most requests?

European emergency aid for Nepal, E-008339/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Dominique Bilde (NI), Sophie Montel (NI), 22-05-2015

On Monday 4 May, the Commission announced that additional aid would be sent to Nepal, following the terrible earthquake that took place in the country. Official sources are currently reporting 7.060 deaths. Commissioner Mimica has stated that an additional EUR 16.6 million in aid would be paid directly to the Nepalese Government, taking total European aid to EUR 22.6 million. In addition, the EU should be paying Nepal EUR 306 million by 2020 as development aid, mainly for farming and rural development.

1. Can the Commission give us details of the emergency measures that have been taken and how the EU distributes its humanitarian aid in Nepal?
2. What means does the Commission have available for monitoring the aid sent, and whether the funds are actually used to help people and re-establish infrastructure?
3. Following this disaster, is the Commission considering rerouting the development aid into priority projects and programmes?

European Aid for Nepal, E-008107/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Pablo Iglesias (GUE/NGL) ++, 20-05-2015

The earthquake in Nepal, the worst such catastrophe to befall the country in 80 years, is one of the most serious international disasters of recent years. Whole towns have been destroyed and basic needs such as food and water are in very short supply. At the time of writing, the earthquake has left some 4.000 people dead, 6.500 injured, and 100.000 children in urgent need of humanitarian aid. The United Nations estimates that more than 8 million people have been affected by the earthquake, more than a quarter of the population. The European Commission has already sent the Nepalese Government humanitarian aid worth some EUR 3 million to assist in the aftermath of the earthquake.

In the light of previous aid granted by the EU, and given the ongoing problems of countries that have suffered similar disasters in the past (for example, Haiti, where more than 80.000 people are still sleeping in tents), what mechanisms does the EU envisage to safeguard and guarantee humanitarian aid in Nepal in the medium to long term?
The death toll of the 7.8 earthquake that devastated Nepal a week ago reached 7,040, with 14,398 other people injured, as announced on Saturday evening by the National Emergency Operation Centre, CNN reports. The UN estimates that over three million persons are in urgent need of food assistance, which is half of the persons in difficulty. Also, 200,000 children and pregnant or nursing women need food supplements, and approximately 15,000 children suffering from severe malnutrition and 70,000 others from moderate malnutrition need special food. The lack of shelters, food and water represents the most severe problems. The UN estimates that half a million homes were destroyed all over the country. The earthquake response pledges, commitments and humanitarian aid total USD 61 million, according to the latest UN report on the situation, but the needs are much higher, and the intervention has to be stepped up before the monsoon season.

1. What concrete measures has the Commission taken so far in order to approach the Nepal humanitarian crisis?
2. What other measures will be taken in the following period?
3. How will it exercise control over the use and distribution of the humanitarian aid, if sent to Nepal?

A further EUR 16.6 million (around HUF 5 billion) in financial support has recently been approved by the Commission for Nepal after it was hit by an earthquake. Brussels has thus promised a total of EUR 22.6 million (HUF 6.8 billion) in aid from the EU budget to the stricken country. The Commission has stated that the aid will go directly to the Nepali Government, but that its use will be the responsibility of the aid organisations working in the area.

1. International news networks have reported that the aid has not yet reached those affected, or only to a limited extent. In what way is the Commission able to monitor the arrival of the aid at its destination and its use?
2. Over and above financial aid, how is the Commission able to help the victims of the disaster in Nepal?
3. In addition to the EU’s central budget, around 18 EU Member States have recommended special measures to deal with the situation. Who will supervise these measures and by what means?
## Special report 34/2016 of 17 January 2017

**Combating food waste: an opportunity for the EU to improve the resource-efficiency of the food supply chain**

Agriculture and Rural Development

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<th>Policy Area</th>
<th>Agriculture and Rural Development</th>
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<tr>
<td>Report No / Date / Title</td>
<td>Special Report No 34/2016 of 17/01/2017: Combating food waste: an opportunity for the EU to improve the resource-efficiency of the food supply chain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
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<td>Questions asked:</td>
<td>Does the EU contribute to a resource-efficient food supply chain by combating food waste effectively?</td>
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<td>1. To what extent has the Commission translated the high-level political statements to fight food waste into action?</td>
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<td>2. What are the opportunities to combat food waste that existing policies have missed?</td>
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<td>Findings:</td>
<td>1. High level political statements have not been translated into sufficient action</td>
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<td>Despite repeated political statements the Commission’s response has decreased in ambition over time and the action taken until now has been fragmented and intermittent.</td>
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<td>2. Decreasing ambition in the Commission’s strategic documents over time</td>
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<td>Waste reduction targets have been lowered, the obligation for Member States to report on food waste has been delayed, the deadline for the Commission to adopt an implementing act to establish a common methodology for measuring food waste has been repeatedly postponed and there is still no EU-wide definition for food waste. Together with this, a baseline (a reference level for a given year) from which to target reduction in food waste has never been defined</td>
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<td>3. While there is no specific EU policy on food waste, various EU policies have or could have an impact on it. However, the Commission has not reviewed these policies in order to assess whether they are sufficiently aligned with the need to combat food waste</td>
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<td>4. Fragmented and intermittent action at the technical level</td>
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<td>The Commission’s action at a technical level has been limited to establishing working and expert groups. The meetings of the working and expert groups did not take place often enough to create a momentum for real change. Moreover, action on food waste suffered from a lack of continuity due to changes in the areas of responsibility within the Commission on the one hand, and to a change in the meeting participants on the other hand.</td>
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<td>5. Existing policies could be better aligned to combat food waste more effectively</td>
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<td>The Court identified a number of opportunities to integrate the fight against food waste into existing policies. These opportunities have yet to be exploited.</td>
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6. Clarification and alignment of the policies and provisions for facilitating the donation of food
At the level of the different EU policy areas, there are still a number of barriers to donation, such as a lack of clarity in existing legal provisions, missing legal provisions or legal provisions that are not used in practice. Overcoming these barriers would contribute to aligning the EU policies for facilitating the donation of food.

Recommendations:
1. The EU efforts to combat food waste should be strengthened and better coordinated; in doing this, the EU could take a greater role in the appropriate forums at a global level. This implies concerted action by the EU bodies and MS to agree a common strategy as soon as possible. At the technical level, the Commission should now develop an action plan for the years ahead covering various policy areas. This should include agreed descriptions of what constitutes food waste at all stages of the food chain and a methodology for measuring the impacts of its strategy.

2. In order to coordinate the various policies with the potential to combat food waste the Commission should consider it in future impact assessments. The Commission should better align the different policies and consider ways in which they could be developed to target the problem. In particular:
   a) As regards the CAP, the topic of food waste should be included in the forthcoming review of the policy. The Commission should also encourage MS to prioritise the objective of combating food waste when programming future expenditures.
   b) As regards the CFP, closer monitoring of landing obligation for fish is needed and the Commission should from now on facilitate the use of available EU funds for investments that combat food waste.
   c) When developing its food safety policy, the Commission should further facilitate the exchange of good practices on hygiene and traceability. As regards food labelling, it should assess the need to intervene in order to prevent labelling practices that generate food waste.

3. The Commission should promote the option of donating food that is safe for consumption and that would otherwise be wasted. In particular, and as soon as is practicable, by:
   a) clarifying the interpretation of legal provisions that discourage the donation of food, in particular with reference to the waste framework directive and the General Food Law;
   b) carrying out an assessment of the impact of extending donation to those policy areas where it is not taking place, particularly in relation to the CFP;
   c) completing the legislative requirement to allow the use of food from agricultural stocks from public intervention; and
   d) promoting among MS the use of existing provisions for donation, with particular reference to fruit and vegetables withdrawn from the market and to the FEAD.
additional costs and should aspire to do so; however notes with regret that despite the hopeful rhetoric, there has been a lack of political will to translate the commitments into policy measures;

4. Deeply regrets that demonstrably the ambitions of the European Commission in combating food waste have rather decreased over time; deplorers that a targeted policy action in the area of food waste is missing and arising positive effects of some policy areas are rather coincidental; looks forward to assessing the results of the Circular Economy Package in the area of combating food waste;

5. Considers it to be a sign of inconsistent approach of the European Commission that

a) while the EU is regarded as a leader in combating climate change, it offers only insufficient commitment to combating food waste that directly contributes to negative climate effects, and

b) while the EU annually invests hundreds of millions EUR in development aid, fight against hunger and compliance with fair trade, it does not sufficiently address the issue of combating food waste that is one of the direct driving forces behind the above mentioned problems;

6. Reiterates its call on the European Commission to take immediate action against food waste; calls on the Commission to deliver on its commitments with regard to relevant policy documents related to combating food waste;

7. Calls on the Commission to provide a complex coordination on the EU level and on the national level in order to unify the different approaches of various Member States with regard to food waste prevention, food donation, food safety and good hygiene practices; calls on the Commission to build-up a platform for sharing the best practices in combating food waste that would better align its work with the activities of the Member States;

8. Regrets that the Commission’s action on a technical level has been limited to establishing working and expert groups, that have nevertheless not delivered any applicable input; calls on the Commission to improve its action on a technical level and deliver concrete results; invites the Commission to establish closer cooperation with the European agencies EEA and EIT that are able to provide solid expert and technical assistance;

9. Regrets that the Commission does not consider it necessary to create a common definition of food waste and does not consider it necessary to lay down a specific food waste hierarchy; calls on the Commission to prepare in cooperation with the Member States a common definition of food waste, a common methodology for measuring and monitoring food waste, and guidelines on use of waste hierarchy in the case of food waste;

10. Calls on the Commission to draft an action plan that would identify policy areas with potential to address food waste, with stress on prevention and donation, and to define the opportunities that could be exploited in the framework of these policies; calls on the Commission to draft action plans that would include measurable targets and performance indicators and to draft impact assessments in specific policy areas;

11. Regrets that although food donation represents the second most preferred option in preventing food waste, there has been many obstacles on various levels that make food donation underutilized; draws attention to the difficulties faced by Member States’ authorities to comply with the current legal framework applying particularly to the food donation; calls on the Commission to create a specific platform for exchange of good practices among the Member States in order to facilitate food donation; invites the Commission to take into account the local and regional authorities' contributions in revision of relevant legal provisions;

12. Invites the Commission to finalize and publish the guidelines on food redistribution and donation, including tax arrangements for donors, that would be based on best practices shared between the Member States that currently take active action in combating food waste; encourages the Commission to draw up guidelines on overcoming various obstacles in food donation and on tax concessions for chains and companies that donate food;

13. Regrets that the concepts ‘best before’ and ‘use by’ are generally unclear to the participants at all levels of the food supply chain; calls on the Commission to clarify these concepts and make the guidelines on its usage binding in order to avoid any misconception;

14. Encourages the Member States to provide for necessary education in the area of food management and food waste among general public;

15. Deplores that, despite individual and limited initiatives in some of the EU institutions, the European bodies have neither legislative framework nor common guidelines that would regulate handling of unconsumed food provided by the institutions’ catering services; calls on the Commission to draft common provisions addressing the issue of food waste in the European institutions, including guidelines on food waste prevention and rules on food waste donation in order to minimalize the food waste caused by the European institutions.

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<th>Resolutions of other committees</th>
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<tr>
<td>[The European Parliament, ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Stresses the urgent need to reduce the amount of food waste, and to improve resource efficiency in the Union at every step of the food chain, including production, processing, transport, storage, retail, marketing and consumption, taking into account that in highly industrialised countries food is wasted predominantly at the sales and consumption stages, while in developing countries food begins to be wasted at the manufacturing and processing stages; underlines, in this regard, the importance of political leadership and of a commitment from both the Commission and the Member States; recalls that the European Parliament has repeatedly asked the Commission to take action against food waste;</td>
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<td>4. Calls for a coordinated policy response at EU and Member State level, in line with the respective competences, that not only takes into account policies on waste, food safety and information, but also elements of economic, fiscal, financial, research and innovation, environment, structural (agriculture and fisheries), education, social, trade, consumer protection, energy and public procurement policies; calls, in this regard, for coordination between the EU and the Member States; emphasises that the EU’s efforts to reduce food waste should be strengthened and better aligned; notes that businesses along the food supply chain are for the most part SMEs, which should not be burdened with unreasonable additional administration;</td>
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<td>5. Urges the Commission to involve all the relevant Commission services which deal with food waste and to ensure continued and strengthened coordination at Commission level; calls on the Commission, therefore, to employ a systematic approach that addresses all aspects of food waste and to establish a comprehensive action plan on food waste covering the various policy areas and outlining the strategy for the years ahead;</td>
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<td>6. Calls on the Commission to identify European legislation that might hamper the effective combating of food waste and analyse how it might be adapted to meet the food waste prevention objective;</td>
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<td>7. Calls on the Commission, when conducting impact assessments on new relevant legislative proposals, to evaluate their potential impact on food waste;</td>
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<td>8. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to put existing financial support for combating food waste on a permanent footing; calls on the Member States to make better use of the opportunities offered in this area by the various European Union policies and funding programmes;</td>
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<td>10. Calls on the Commission and Member States to engage in awareness-raising and communication campaigns on how to prevent food waste;</td>
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<td>13. Calls on the Commission to examine, by 31 December 2020, the possibility of setting up binding Union-wide food waste reduction targets to be met by 2025 and 2030 on the basis of measurements calculated in accordance with a common methodology; calls on the Commission to draw up a report, accompanied by a legislative proposal, if appropriate;</td>
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<td>15. Urges the Commission and Member States to use the following definition of ‘food waste’: ‘food waste means food intended for human consumption, either in edible or inedible status, removed from the production or supply chain to be discarded, including at primary production, processing, manufacturing, transportation, storage, retail and consumer levels, with the exception of primary production losses’;</td>
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<td>40. Welcomes the recent creation of the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, which is intended to identify priority measures to be adopted at EU level to prevent food losses and food waste, and facilitates the exchange of information between the operators involved; stresses, to that end, that the relevant involvement of the European Parliament in the Platform’s work would be desirable; calls on the Commission to provide Parliament with a precise list of measures</td>
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currently being taken and the objectives and sub-objectives pursued, as well as the progress being made on a common methodology and on donations; considers that the Platform could be the right tool for measuring not only how much is wasted but also food surplus and recovery quantities; remains convinced, however, that this can only be a very first step to address the problem of food waste;

55. Urges the Council and the Commission to designate a European Year against Food Waste, as a key information and awareness-raising initiative for European citizens, and to seek to focus the attention of national governments on this important topic view to making sufficient funds available to tackle the challenges of the near future;

65. Encourages Member States to use the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to reduce food waste in primary production and the processing sector;

95. Is concerned that ‘clarification of relevant EU legislation related to waste, food and feed in order to facilitate food donation and utilisation of former foodstuffs for animal feed’, as announced for 2016, has not yet been tackled;

98. Calls on the Commission to explore the modalities for donating food to charities from companies in the country of production, regardless of the language on the product packaging; points out that donations of said goods should be made possible when the information critical for maintaining food safety, e.g. on allergens, is made available to recipients in official languages of their Member States;

113. Calls on the Commission to undertake a study on the impact of reforms of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) on the generation and reduction of food waste;

117. Encourages the Member States to harness the full potential of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) in order to reduce food waste from fish discards and improve survival rates of aquaculture-grown organisms;

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European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on enhancing innovation and economic development in future European farm management (2015/2227(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

19. Stresses the need to tackle food wastage, in particular systemic food wastage, since each year 100 million tonnes of food in Europe is wasted or thrown away, which amounts to approximately 30%-50% of the food produced in the EU; considers that greater cooperation is also needed in the food chain to reduce current levels of waste; points out that out-dated regulatory frameworks should not form barriers to innovative ways of processing food waste and the sharing of best practices and prioritising innovative projects should be encouraged to combat food waste and losses including under Horizon 2020;

20. Underlines that for every tonne of food waste avoided, approximately 4,2 tonnes of CO₂ could be saved, which would have a significant impact on the environment; stresses, in addition, the importance of a legal framework consistent with the circular economy principle, whereby clear rules are laid down on by-products, the use of raw materials is optimised, and residual waste is reduced as much as possible;

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**European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016** on the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (2015/2277(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

46. Stresses the need for strategies to minimise food waste throughout the food chain;

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[The European Parliament, ]

47. Calls on the Commission to propose, by the end of 2015, targets, measures and instruments to efficiently tackle food waste, including setting a binding food waste reduction target of at least 30% by 2025 in the manufacturing, retail/distribution, food service/hospitality sectors and the household sector; calls on the Commission to promote the creation in Member States of conventions proposing that the retail food sector distributes unsold products to charity associations; calls on the Commission, when conducting an impact assessment on new relevant legislative proposals, to evaluate their potential impact on food waste;

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**Written Declaration** of 12/01/2015 on food wastage, submitted under Rule 136 of the Rules of Procedure

4. The Commission is urged to encourage the Member States to take action against food wastage at every level of the food supply chain, from production through to consumption.

5. The Commission is exhorted to open a dialogue with stakeholders to ensure that unsold edible food is made available to charitable organisations.

6. On 19 January 2012 Parliament adopted a resolution on ‘how to avoid food wastage: strategies for a more efficient food chain in the EU’.

7. The Commission is hence called upon to encourage Member States to educate citizens, promote best practices, conduct analyses and initiate social campaigns on food wastage.

8. The Commission is also called upon to designate 2016 as the European Year against food wastage.

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<td><strong>Adverse impact of the regulation on the provision of food information to consumers</strong>, E-009365/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Adam Szejnfeld (EPP), 13-12-2016</td>
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<td>I have been informed by consumers in Poland and elsewhere in Europe of a drastic reduction in the number of shops offering offcuts of cured meats free of charge or at a low cost. These perfectly good offcuts are mainly of interest to the poor, the unemployed, the elderly and pensioners, who often cannot afford to buy meat products. This situation has come about as a result of Regulation No 1169/2011 of 25 October 2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, which requires food to be accurately labelled: customers must be given information about the production, ingredients and batch number of each product and its use-by date. Of course, in the case of offcuts of cured meats, which in the shops are usually mixed together, this is not possible and so they cannot be sold. Not</td>
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only does this limit the opportunity for less well-off customers to purchase meat products, it also creates substantial food waste. This is completely at odds with the notion of a circular economy advocated by the EU, which requires the added value in products to be retained for as long as possible and the elimination of waste.

1. Is the Commission planning to take action to adapt the existing Regulation to the needs of consumers, also bearing in mind the need to address the problem of food waste?

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Forthcoming legislation - the fight against food waste, E-006040/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Jana Žitňanská (ECR), 25-07-2016

Civil society associations and non-profit organisations in the Member States of the European Union have come up with a number of initiatives to prevent food waste. However, these initiatives often run up against various legal and administrative barriers. Slovakia has, for example, banned non-profit organisations from setting up ‘public refrigerators’ in public places in which people could put uneaten food and which volunteers would maintain and keep clean. Although this idea has proved its worth in other countries and has demonstrably reduced waste, in Slovakia it is prohibited on the grounds that these organisations are not registered food business operators. In this context, I would like to ask the Commission the following questions:

What new legislation to tackle food waste is in preparation in the Commission, and in what time frame will it be presented?

1. Is the Commission preparing legislation or initiatives that would motivate municipalities, restaurants and cafés to operate ‘public refrigerators’, or legislation that would allow non-profit organisations to locate such refrigerators in public spaces without excessive red tape?

2. Is the Commission contemplating new legislation inspired by the recent French law banning large stores from discarding food?

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Curbing food waste in the European Union, E-004723/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Adam Szejnfeld (EPP), 08-06-2016

Every year, almost 90 million tons of food, i.e. around 180 kg per person, is wasted in the European Union. Studies show that a significant majority of that food waste occurs in our homes. This situation is not only unethical and uneconomic: it is also damaging the environment. The causes of food waste are bad habits on the part of millions of people, poor storage, overly short use-by dates and advertising that encourages consumers to buy more food than they need.

Unfortunately, there are also highly questionable rules that prevent out-of-date food and food waste from being fed to livestock. Another significant factor in food waste is the fact that producers and shops throw away products that are out of date. In response to this, many EU countries have made efforts to support such products being donated to food banks, although more often than not companies have to pay high taxes — in particular VAT — on those donations. In May 2013 the Commission called on the Member States to reduce or abolish VAT on food donations. Unfortunately, however, giving food products away is still very costly in many countries, meaning that it is cheaper to throw food away than it is to give it to those in need.

In the light of the foregoing, what steps is the Commission planning to take in order to encourage Member States to curb food waste?

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Food waste, E-004537/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Jonás Fernández (S&D), Clara Eugenia Aguilera García (S&D), 01-06-2016

Eating enough and having a balanced diet are essential to human life. According to the FAO, however, more than 1.300 million tonnes (USD 1 trillion’s worth) of food are wasted every year, at a time when at least 1 billion people around the world are going hungry. In the EU, 100 million tonnes of food are thrown away every year. In an attempt to put an end to this situation, some Member States now require supermarkets and distribution centres to donate unsold stock to non-profit organisations or food banks. Given that food waste is morally unacceptable, and that it would be better to avoid regulatory fragmentation in this instance, the EU would be justified under the subsidiarity principle in tabling a legislative proposal on food waste to prevent supermarkets from throwing away unsold food...
1. What is the Commission’s view of the legislation adopted by France?
2. What legislative measures will the Commission propose to put a stop to food waste in the EU?

Food waste in the EU, E-004425/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Andrejs Mamikins (S&D), 31-05-2016
Approximately 88 million tonnes of food is wasted annually in the EU, with the associated costs estimated at EUR 143 billion. About 40% of food loss and waste in developed countries occurs at the retail and consumer levels, but in the EU this share is somewhat higher. For example, France alone wastes around 10 million tonnes every year, which otherwise could have cut national greenhouse gas emissions by 3%. In Europe the yearly food and waste loss per person is 280 kg, compared with just 125 kg in south and southeast Asia. Only North America and Oceania account for more — 295 kg.
1. How feasible, or indeed necessary, is it to introduce a limitation/fine system somewhat similar to greenhouse gas emission quotas — i.e. in the event of excessive food waste or overproduction?
2. With the Commission’s Circular Economy Package under way, what are the Commission’s forecasts for potential financial savings, a decrease in overproduction, and environmental impact until 2020 in the area of food waste?
3. What programmes is the Commission currently implementing in order to tackle the problem of food waste during the post-harvest and processing stages in the world’s poorest regions (particularly in the ACP countries)?

The donation of unsold consumable food to charities, E-004187/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Edward Czesak (ECR), 25-05-2016
One in four Europeans — approximately 125 million people — is at risk of food poverty. The ever growing influx of migrants from outside the EU is making the situation worse. Some 100 million tonnes of food are wasted every year in the EU.
1. Will the Commission work with the food sector to develop a programme encouraging markets to donate unsold food to charitable organisations?
2. Will the Commission present an action plan to prevent food waste?

Food loss and food waste, E-004146/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Javier Nart ++ (ALDE), 24-05-2016
According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), throughout the supply chain, i.e. from agricultural production to final household consumption, one third of the food produced for human consumption in the world is lost or wasted. Horrifyingly, 1.3 billion tons of food is lost or wasted every year.
An FAO report issued in 2011 entitled ‘Global food losses and food waste’ states that per capita food loss in Europe is 280-300 kg per year, and that the largest losses occur at the final phase in the process, i.e. the consumer phase.
1. What initiatives has the Commission promoted, or will it promote, to ensure that food is consumed responsibly, with a view to bringing these large numbers down?
2. Is the Commission considering encouraging initiatives involving distributing to people in need food that would otherwise be thrown away?
Initiatives against food waste, E-003718/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Jana Žitňanská (ECR), 03-05-2016

Each year in the European Union alone we throw away about 100 million tonnes of food. Most of this food waste is generated in households. To try and remedy this situation, 2014 was declared the European Year against Food Waste. In this context, I would like to ask the Commission the following questions:

1. What initiatives is the Commission planning in order to raise awareness of this problem in private households? Will these initiatives be aimed only at improving understanding of the differences between the ‘use by’ and ‘best before’ labelling on foods, or is the Commission also planning other types of initiative?

2. On its website the Commission says that one of the options envisaged is the extension of Annex X to Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011, which contains a list of foodstuffs which are exempt from the obligation to indicate a date of minimum durability (‘best before’ date). Has the Commission already started work on extending this list? Approximately when will such an amendment of the annex to the regulation be published?

3. Although European Union law does not prohibit the sale of safe foods after expiry of their date of minimum durability, some countries, such as the Slovak Republic, do ban such foods from being placed on the market, on pain of financial penalties (Section 6(5d)) of Act No 152/1995 Coll.). This contributes to food waste and exacerbates the public’s failure to understand the distinctions used in food labelling. Is the Commission taking specific action to encourage these countries to amend their legislation?

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Measures to reduce food waste, E-002658/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Gianluca Buonanno (ENF), 01-04-2016

Roughly 89 million tonnes of food, an average of 180 kg per person per year, are wasted in Europe, and studies have shown that 42% of food waste occurs in the home. According to reliable surveys, 8 out of 10 Italians are saying no to food waste for economic, ethical and environmental reasons. Not one EU policy has been implemented to tackle the problem, however. The main causes of food waste are the fact that millions of people have developed bad habits and do not store food properly, that sell-by-dates are excessively short and that special offers encourage consumers to buy more food than they need.

1. How is the Commission tackling the problem of food waste at a time when thousands of European citizens do not have enough to eat?

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Altering ‘best before’ dates on products with a long shelf life in order to prevent food waste, E-000045/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ivo Belet (EPP), 05-01-2016

Up to one third of European consumers confuse ‘best before’ labels with labels indicating ‘use by’ dates, which are placed on highly perishable foods. In order to prevent food waste, it would be possible to abolish ‘best before’ labels on products with a very long shelf life. As long ago as 2012, the European Parliament called on the Commission, in a resolution, to clarify the meaning of the two labels and investigate other forms of labelling(1). In 2014, various Member States called for amendments to the annexes to Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 in order to amplify the list of products with very long shelf lives(2). These products are not required to bear a ‘best before’ label. In response to the request by the Member States, the Commission proposed setting up a working party to formulate proposals by the end of 2015. At the two meetings of the experts’ group, date labelling was discussed.

2. What were the findings of the working party concerning date labelling, and when can we expect proposals?

3. Can the labelling change be considered in conjunction with definite proposals concerning the circular economy, which are also intended to include measures against food waste?

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VAT on donations of food, clothing, etc., E-005997/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Tom Vandenkendelaere (EPP), 20-07-2016

As it currently stands, the VAT Directive makes no provision for exemption of food and clothing donations. In order to ensure that this obligation to pay VAT does not discourage food donations, the Commission recommends that, in making VAT assessments, the value of the goods should be aligned with the circumstances and the condition that they are in at the time of donation. In the case of food close to its best-before date, or unsuitable for sale, this may even result in a zero rating.

A study by the EESC indicates that Member States interpret this recommendation differently and that the nature of these national ‘abandonments’ or ‘exemptions’ is unclear. Moreover, this indirect approach by means of the ‘reduced value’ of the goods can create an undesirable incentive, for example, to give food away only as its best-before date approaches. Moreover, this ‘zero valuation’ may interfere with other tax credits calculated on the basis of net book value.

1. Is the Commission still opposed to the insertion of an exemption or an additional abandonment derogation in the second paragraph of Article 6 of the VAT Directive?
2. If so, is the Commission considering incorporating the VAT Committee’s recommendation on food donations in the VAT Directive in order to make its national application more uniform and clearer?

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Food waste and the fight against poverty in the EU, E-015955/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), 17-12-2015

Today, every fourth European, i.e. 125 million people, is at risk of poverty, while 16 million people are experiencing food insecurity. However, due to our consumption habits, particularly in the case of marketing centres, many products still suitable for consumption are either unsold, or removed from the market and destroyed. It has been estimated that every year Europeans waste 100 million tonnes of foodstuff. Many Member States have already taken measures to promote the donation of unsold foodstuff to charities.

1. Does the Commission not consider it necessary to examine the possibility of, in cooperation with the food sector, determining an EU-wide system, whereby marketing centres would be encouraged to distribute to charitable organisations its unsold but suitable-for-use foodstuff?

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Need for a social dimension to the development of the circular economy, E-015830/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Claudia Tapardel ++ (S&D), 15-12-2015

The amount of food being wasted is reaching alarming proportions across the EU. Every year, over 100 million tonnes of food go to waste, in a manner that brings no benefit to society or to farmers. Since 2011 — when the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe was drawn up — there has been a constant increase in food wastage. This trend is set to continue and, by 2025, 120 tonnes of food will be wasted each year.

1. What guarantees can the Commission offer as to how efficient the circular economy programme will be in terms of reducing food waste by half by 2030?
2. Is there a social dimension to that programme? How much of the total budget of over EUR 6 billion earmarked for the circular economy programme will be invested directly in social programmes for the distribution and redistribution of foodstuffs?

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Food waste and redistribution of unsold food by large-scale retailers, E-015541/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Aldo Patriciello (EPP), 08-12-2015

According to data provided by the FAO, over a third of all food produced each year worldwide is lost or wasted along the food chain. In the more developed countries, it is the final consumers and large-scale retailers who are responsible for over 40% of wasted food. The Commission’s strategy to support the transition
from a linear to a circular economy must take into account the issue of food waste and deal with it as a challenge of primary importance.

1. Given the above, and considering that it is the duty of the EU institutions to reduce economic and social inequalities and achieve sustainable development goals, will the Commission promote the redistribution of unsold food by large-scale retailers to those who really need it, laying down some rules on this matter?

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**Food waste: logo concerning ‘best before’ and ‘use by’ dates**, E-014438/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Louis Michel (ALDE), 04-11-2015

Confusion among many consumers about the difference between ‘best before’ and ‘use by’ dates contributes to food waste. As a result, huge quantities of foodstuffs which are still fit for consumption are thrown away. Against that background, and in the context of consumer information campaigns, introducing throughout the Union a logo which specifies what the two dates actually mean and the implications for the quality or safety of the product in question if it is not consumed by either of the dates given could help to reduce food waste.

1. Will the Commission encourage the introduction of such a logo as part of the measures concerning a circular economy which it plans to put forward before the end of this year?

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**Tackling food waste**, E-014253/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Jérôme Lavrilleux (EPP), 29-10-2015

The UN estimates that one third of the world’s food is lost or wasted (Eurostat). By 2050, there will be over 9 billion people living on this planet, and feeding them will be a real challenge. With demographic pressure increasing across the world, it is vital to cut food loss and waste in order to combat poverty, feed European citizens and protect the environment. If every European citizen took practical action to cut food loss and waste, there would be fewer food shortages and the environmental pressure on Europe and the world would be eased to a considerable extent.

1. How does the Commission intend to make tackling waste a priority with a view to protecting the environment and guaranteeing genuine food security?

2. What does the Commission intend to do with regard to attaining the objective of cutting food waste in half by 2020?

3. How does the Commission intend to provide information to Member States and European citizens and make them feel accountable when it comes to protecting food resources when buying and consuming food, so as to boost environmental protection and food security in the European Union?
**Special report 35/2016 of 28 February 2017**

**The use of budget support to improve domestic revenue mobilisation in sub-Saharan Africa**

EU Development Aid | Foreign Affairs

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<td>Special report no 35/2016 of 28/02/2017: The use of budget support to improve domestic revenue mobilisation (DRM) in sub-Saharan Africa</td>
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<td>Summary</td>
<td><strong>Questions asked:</strong> Did the Commission effectively use budget support contracts to support domestic revenue mobilisation (DRM) in low- and lower-middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa?</td>
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The audit focused on three key areas:

1. Did the Commission adequately assess partner countries’ revenue policies and administration in coordination with other donors?
2. Did the Commission use budget support conditionality, policy dialogue and capacity development to support DRM effectively?
3. Are there clear indications that EU budget support made a positive contribution to DRM in the partner countries?

The audit covered budget support contracts signed after 1 January 2013, i.e. after the entry into force of the new budget support approach. The audit involved an analytical review of 15 budget support contracts amounting to 1.25 billion euros (24.5% of the value of all contracts signed since 2013) in nine low- and lower-middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal and Sierra Leone. The audit included visits to three countries, each of which had concluded a different type of budget support contract with the Commission: Cape Verde (Good Governance and Development Contract), Rwanda (Sector Reform Contract) and Sierra Leone (State Building Contract). The audit was carried out between October 2015 and April 2016.

**Findings:**

1. The Commission’s new approach had led to better assessment requirements of DRM in partner countries, but these were not yet comprehensively implemented in practice
   
   a) With respect to the Commission’s new approach, the Court stated that it had led to better assessment requirements of DRM in partner countries, but these were not yet comprehensively implemented in practice. The framework for DRM examination provided by the new guidelines was extensive in its scope, which was an improvement on the previous techniques. According to the current regulations, the Commission should include the efforts made by the concerned country to strengthen DRM (notably fiscal reforms and their expected impact) while evaluating its macroeconomic stability. Moreover, public financial management (PFM) appraisal ought to encompass tax administration.

   b) The Commission’s guidelines provide for an in-depth macroeconomic analysis of a country. However, the Court found that, in practice, the majority of
the DRM assessments were limited to a presentation of fiscal policy, recent developments in revenue levels (tax-to-GDP ratio) and a comparison with peers, and they lacked essential information about a country’s ability to mobilise domestic revenue. The tax effort was not estimated for any of the audited countries, neither were the total cost and potential effect of tax exemptions. The composition and the relevance of different types of taxes and other revenue was presented only in four countries (Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal), and the ratio of direct to indirect taxes was only given for Cape Verde, the Central African Republic and Sierra Leone. In addition, the Commission did not report on the absence of key DRM data, which can be a signal of the partner countries’ weak capacity in that area.

c) The assessment of the Public Financial Management (PFM) also did not address all the envisaged aspects. In most cases the Commission outlined the structure of administration and government efforts to strengthen revenue agencies, yet no reference was made to the staffing and material constraints. All the assessments mentioned existing or planned anti-corruption measures and most of them analysed transparency issues as well. Nevertheless, the verification of public access to information on tax legislation and tax incentives were carried out only in Mali and Mozambique. Another element often escaping the Commission’s attention was the audited countries’ involvement in international initiatives aimed at tackling the leakage of funds through tax evasion, money laundering and other financial crimes.

d) The Court observed that the risk management framework for budget support did not allow for a comprehensive assessment of the risk associated with DRM. Although the Commission’s questionnaire contained a very relevant question, related directly to revenue mobilisation, the response evaluation procedure does not actually enable to draw conclusions about the risks concerning the tax assessment, collection and transfer to the treasury. Furthermore, the risks connected with non-tax revenue (e.g. royalties paid for access to natural resources and extraction dividends), as well as the extent and nature of tax exemptions, were not considered.

e) Disbursement conditions and the associated performance indicators are equally important components of aid in the form of budget support. When it comes to the disbursement of variable tranches, the fulfilment of specific conditions is frequently demanded. They are usually translated into measurable indicators and targets, thus ensuring a direct link between budget support payments and DRM reforms. The selected indicators should be justified and incentivize governments to implement reforms.

2. The effectiveness of budget support conditions, policy dialogue and capacity development was undermined by design weaknesses and challenging local circumstances

a) The Court observed that the Commission used DRM-related specific conditions in only five of the 15 audited contracts. All of them were state-building contracts with a limited duration of 1 or 2 years, which focus on improving DRM in the short term and in the most fragile countries. This is contradictory to the declared objective of laying a stronger emphasis on DRM through good governance and development contracts in particular.

b) When using variable tranche conditions, in three out of five contracts the Commission did not select those most relevant to the national context. In Sierra Leone, it focused on administrative reforms at the revenue authority, rather than promoting essential new legislation which would have had a broader impact on DRM. In three cases the specific conditions that were applied did not produce the expected incentive effect because they had already been achieved when the contract was signed (Central African Republic, Sierra Leone), or because they were unenforceable due to the existing legal obligations (Niger).

c) The Court assessed positively the monitoring of the partner countries’ compliance with the arranged conditions. Only the contract with the Central African Republic did not include adequate provisions. On the other hand, the Commission’s annual budget support reports did not provide sufficiently detailed information on the contracts with DRM specific conditions. Consequently, no comprehensive data on the totality of funding for DRM through budget support and other forms of aid is available.

d) Policy dialogue is another core element of budget support. As it often takes place in a challenging context, a dialogue strategy with clearly listed objectives is indispensable to track progress and address issues identified as essential. The Court pointed out that although the Commission had determined specific DRM problems to be tackled, it had not developed strategies for policy dialogue. In their absence, it was difficult to objectively
assess whether this tool has effectively contributed to DRM reforms. The Court stated that dialogue was generally well coordinated with other development partners as joint planning and review meeting were organised. However, the policy dialogue often did not take place on a regular basis due to difficult country circumstances.

e) With regard to the capacity development component, budget support was provided in the broader area of PFM, which may include direct or indirect support for DRM. Nine of the 15 contracts allocated a total of 60.4 million euros to capacity development. Nevertheless, a very small part of that was earmarked for the area of DRM - it was targeted only in one contract with support totalling 3 million euros.

3. The Commission did not have appropriate tools to provide evidence that EU budget support contributed to improve DRM in partner countries

a) Finally, the Court noted that the Commission did not have appropriate tools to provide evidence that EU budget support contributed to improve DRM in partner countries. High-level impact indicators used for evaluation can be influenced by many external factors and thus cannot record outputs and outcomes that were specifically induced by budget support.

b) One standard indicator for assessing DRM progress is the revenue-to-GDP ratio. In several of the partner countries, it was highly variable from year to year because of seasonal circumstances that were not linked to budget support, such as record mining export in Mauritania, political and security crisis in the Central African Republic or windfall capital gains from the sale of gas concessions in Mozambique.

c) Another set of DRM-specific indicators used by the Commission to assess improvements in the tax system came from the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability framework. They deliver information on important aspects of tax policy and administration. However, for the period after the endorsement of the new budget support guidelines in 2012, they were available only for two countries (Mauritania and Sierra Leone), and hardly any improvement could be observed in comparison with the levels registered a few years earlier.

d) To demonstrate whether budget support contracts have a direct impact on DRM, it would be necessary to develop appropriate data-collection tools and to assess specific areas of a tax system in detail, with a comparison over time and the attribution of progress achieved to individual components of budget support

Recommendations:
1. Strengthen DRM assessments and risk analysis

a) Before approving new budget support contracts and disbursements, the Commission should ensure that DRM assessments are comprehensive and consistently implemented. In particular, it should verify that assessments cover all the appropriate aspects of tax policy and administration described in its budget support guidelines. When the relevant statistics and data are not available, this should also be noted in the assessments as it can provide valuable information concerning capacity needs in the partner countries.

b) The Commission should, with immediate effect, complete its risk assessment framework by including risks linked to non-tax revenue and tax exemptions. It should extend the sources of information used to answer risk assessment question 38, concerning tax revenue, to PEFA indicators PI-14 and PI-15 on the assessment and collection of taxes. DRM assessments should also use TADAT as a source of information, wherever available.

2. For future budget support contracts, the Commission should take greater account of DRM in the specific disbursement conditions linked to variable tranches by:

a) Strengthening the focus of good governance and development contracts on DRM by increasing the use of DRM specific conditions, notably in countries where this area is not appropriately addressed through other forms of EU aid and/or by other development partners.

b) Ensuring that DRM conditions used in variable tranches effectively promote DRM, are achievable and enforceable, so that they are more likely to provide partner countries with the necessary incentives to advance in the implementation of their reform agenda.
3. From 2017 onwards, the Commission should provide more information in its budget support reports concerning the use of budget support contracts for DRM. In particular, the reports could include information about the number, type and value of contracts with DRM as specific objective as well as case studies illustrating the budget support contributions to DRM improvements in partner countries.

4. The Commission should devise dialogue strategies for future budget support contracts, comprising a clear statement of the issues to be addressed (including DRM), the interlocutors, the expected results/outcomes and an indicative timetable. The Commission should subsequently assess how well the objectives of its dialogue strategies have been achieved.

5. For all existing and future budget support contracts with a capacity development component earmarked for DRM, the Commission should increase partner countries’ awareness of the availability of this support and facilitate its use, in particular to address capacity development needs not yet covered by other donors.

6. In its future evaluations of budget support, the Commission should strive to provide a clear conclusion (based on more detailed data) on how budget support operations could have contributed to improve the mobilisation of domestic resources in the beneficiary countries. In particular, the contribution made through DRM specific conditions should be taken into account in the evaluations.

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<th>[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]</th>
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<td>CONT Working Document of 22/05/2017 on Special report No 35/2016 (2016 Discharge): The use of budget support to improve domestic revenue mobilisation in sub-Saharan Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapporteur: Bart Staes (Greens)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Welcomes the special report examining the budget support to improve domestic revenue mobilisation in sub-Saharan Africa, endorses its recommendations, expresses satisfaction with the Commission’s willingness to put them into practice; regrets the Commission’s answers which are quite vague and lack ambition;</td>
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<td>2. Stresses the importance of domestic revenue mobilisation (DRM) in the less-developed countries as it reduces dependence on development aid, leads to improvements in public governance and plays a central role in state-building;</td>
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<td>3. Stresses that, according to the ECA, the Commission has not yet effectively used budget support contracts to support DRM in low- and lower-middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa; however notes that the Commission’s new approach increased the potential of this form of aid to effectively support DRM;</td>
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<td>4. Points out that strengthening tax systems contributes not only to raising more predictable revenue, but also to accountability of governments by creating a direct link between taxpayers and their government; supports the explicit inclusion of DRM improvement on the Commission’s list of key development challenges addressed through budget support;</td>
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<td>5. Regrets that the Commission gave insufficient consideration to DRM when designing its budget support operations; and stresses that key risks related to tax exemptions and to the collection and transfer of taxes and non-tax revenues from natural resources were not evaluated;</td>
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<td>6. Recalls the importance of revenue mobilisation in developing countries while pointing at challenges related to tax avoidance, tax evasion and illicit financial flows; encourages the strengthening of financial and technical assistance for developing countries and regional tax administration frameworks, and the adoption of principles for the negotiation of tax treaties;</td>
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<td>7. Points out that the audit revealed a lack of appropriate monitoring tools to assess the extent to which budget support contributed to overall improvements in DRM.</td>
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<td>8. Believes that it is crucial to continue promoting fair and transparent domestic tax systems in the tax policy field, to scale up its support for oversight</td>
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processes and bodies in the area of natural resources, and continue to back governance reforms promoting sustainable exploitation of natural resources and transparent; stresses that free-trade agreements reduce the tax revenue for the low- and lower-middle-income countries and might be counter-productive for those countries; demands to the Commission that the fiscal consequences of free-trade agreements with low- and lower-middle-income countries to be taken into account in the risk assessments while negotiating free-trade agreements;

9. Calls on the Commission to stick to its guidelines when conducting macroeconomic and Public Financial Management (PFM) assessments of DRM aspects in order to obtain a better overview of the most problematic issues e.g. the scale of tax incentives, transfer pricing, tax evasion;

10. Underlines that in order to improve the design of budget support operations, the procedure of identifying risks threatening the achievement of the set objectives should be more comprehensive and make use of Tax Administration Diagnostic Assessment Tool (TADAT) wherever available;

11. Emphasises the necessity to apply DRM-specific conditions more often as they clearly associate the disbursement of budget support payments with the partner country’s progress in DRM reforms; asks the Commission to choose the conditions that are relevant and will have the broadest impact on DRM;

12. Acknowledges that the Commission has to operate in a complicated political and institutional context; recalls the significance of a structured policy dialogue, involving interlocutors from the national government and other donors, in order to determine crucial areas of interest and to conceive a tailored aid strategy;

13. Encourages the Commission to extend the capacity building component of budget support as it lays firm foundations for a long-term economic and social transformation, and addresses major obstacles to the efficient collection of public revenues;

14. Points out that confirming a direct influence of budget support efforts on the mobilisation of domestic resources requires a more detailed evaluation of specific areas of a tax system that would allow attributing the advances made to individual parts of the provided assistance.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees


[The European Parliament, ]

4. Recalls that budget support is the best way to carry out appropriation, providing governments with the means to determine their needs and priorities; recalls that general or sector-specific budget support enables development policies to be supported and ensures maximised take-up

39. Deplores the fact that, each year, some USD 50 billion is drained out of Africa in the form of illicit financial flows, which exceeds the total annual amount of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and undermines efforts in the field of domestic revenue mobilisation; calls, therefore, on both parties to:

- create effective tools to combat tax evasion, tax fraud and corruption, including public transparency on ultimate beneficial ownership of legal entities, trusts and similar arrangements,
- promote the UN-supported Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI),
- support initiatives to increase the efficiency and transparency of public financial management systems;

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European Parliament resolution of 14 February 2017 on the revision of the European Consensus on Development (2016/2094(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

47. Recognises that general budget support promotes national ownership, alignment with partner countries’ national development strategies, a focus on results, transparency and mutual accountability, but underlines that it should only be considered when and where the conditions are right and effective control
49. Recalls that developing countries face major constraints in raising tax revenue and are particularly affected by corporate tax evasion and illicit financial flows; calls for the EU and its Member States to strengthen policy coherence for development (PCD) in this field, to investigate the spill-over impact on developing countries of their own tax arrangements and laws and to advocate a better representation of developing countries in international fora set up to reform global tax policies;

50. Calls for the EU and its Member States to support low- and middle-income countries in creating fair, progressive, transparent and efficient tax systems, as well as other means of domestic resource mobilisation, in order to increase the predictability and stability of such financing and reduce aid dependency; calls for such support in areas such as tax administration and public financial management, fair redistribution systems, anti-corruption, and fighting transfer mispricing, tax evasion and other forms of illicit financial flow; stresses the importance of fiscal decentralisation and the need for capacity building to support subnational governments in the design of local tax systems and tax collection;

51. Calls on the EU and its Member States to establish compulsory country-by-country reporting on multinational companies, together with the compulsory publication of comprehensive and comparable data on companies’ activities so as to ensure transparency and accountability; calls for the EU and its Member States to consider the spill-over effect on developing countries of their own tax policies, arrangements and laws, and to undertake the reforms needed to ensure that European companies making profits in developing countries pay their fair share of tax in those countries;

57. Calls for the European Union and its Member States to promote binding measures to ensure that multinational corporations pay taxes in the countries in which value is extracted or created and to promote compulsory country-by-country reporting by the private sector, thus enhancing the domestic resource mobilisation capacities of countries; calls for spill-over analysis to study possible profit shifting practices;

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European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2016 on increasing the effectiveness of development cooperation (2016/2139(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

20. Encourages recipient countries’ parliaments to adopt national policies on development aid in order to improve the accountability of donors and of recipient governments, including that of local authorities, enhance public financial management and absorption capacity, eradicate corruption and all forms of aid wastage, make tax systems effective, and improve conditions for receiving budget support, as well as, in the long run, reducing dependence on aid;

21. Considers it important to promote participation by all Member States in the Addis Tax Initiative, in order to double technical assistance by 2020 and strengthen the taxation capacity of partner countries;

22. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to engage with national parliaments of partner countries with a view to constructively supporting the development of such policies, complementing them with mutual accountability arrangements; welcomes the Commission’s efforts to improve domestic accountability in the context of budget support by reinforcing the institutional capacities of national parliaments and Supreme Audit Institutions;
European Parliament resolution of 8 July 2015 on tax avoidance and tax evasion as challenges for governance, social protection and development in developing countries (2015/2058(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

2. **Insists** that effective mobilisation of domestic resources and a strengthening of tax systems will be an indispensable factor in achieving the post-2015 framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which represents a viable strategy to overcome foreign aid dependency in the long term, and that efficient and fair tax systems are crucial for poverty eradication, fighting inequalities, good governance and state-building; recalls that certain transnational economic activities have affected the ability of countries to generate domestic government revenues and to choose their taxation structure, while the increased mobility of capital, combined with the use of tax havens, has greatly altered the conditions for taxation; expresses as well concerns about the level of corruption and non-transparent public administration that hinder tax revenues from being invested in state-building, public services or public infrastructure;

5. **Asks** the Commission to give good governance in tax matters, and fair, well-balanced, efficient and transparent tax collection, a high place on the agenda in its policy dialogue (political, development and trade), and in all development cooperation agreements, with partner countries, enhancing ownership and domestic accountability by fostering an environment in which national parliaments are able to contribute meaningfully to the formulation and oversight of national budgets, including on domestic revenues and tax matters, and supporting the role of civil society in ensuring public scrutiny of tax governance and the monitoring of cases of tax fraud, inter alia by setting up effective systems for protecting whistleblowers and journalistic sources;

8. **Calls** for the fiscal conditions and regulations under which extractive industries operate to be revised; calls on the EU to increase its assistance to developing countries in support of the aim of taxing adequately the extraction of natural resources, strengthening the bargaining position of host governments to obtain better returns from their natural resources base, and stimulating the diversification of their economy; supports the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and its extension to producing firms and commodity trading companies.

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**Oral / Written Questions**

**Ineffectiveness of EU aid to Africa**, E-001596/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Olaf Stuger (ENF), 08-03-2017

Efforts by the EU to help countries in sub-Saharan Africa to generate more income of their own are not proving successful. The EUR 1.7 billion that the EU spent on budget support for that region of Africa between 2012 and April 2016 ‘has not yet been effective’, according to the Court of Auditors of the EU.

1. Does the Commission agree with the PVV that this EUR 1.7 billion in taxpayers’ money has been wasted by pouring it into the bottomless pit known as ‘Africa’?

2. How many African countries and/or dictatorships has the Commission specifically ‘aided’ with taxpayers’ money (including tax revenue from the Netherlands)? Please provide an overview.

**EU support for the generation of public revenue in developing countries**, E-001585/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Adam Szejnfeld (EPP), 08-03-2017

The generation of public revenue, in particular through tax collection, is key to sustainable development in developing countries. For that reason, it has become a priority in EU development policy. The EU earmarked more than EUR 5 billion for that purpose between 2012 and 2016, half of which went to Sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, many sources have suggested — and the European Court of Auditors (ECA) has confirmed — that these EU funds are not being put to the most
effective use. What is more, not only are public finances in Sub-Saharan Africa not growing at a satisfactory rate, the situation has actually been getting worse in some countries over the last few years. According to the ECA, the Commission has not been paying enough attention to the mobilisation of countries’ revenues, and its assessments have not always been sufficiently thorough. They have not, for example, covered certain key aspects of policy and budget administration in particular countries, nor have they taken account of important risks associated with tax exemptions, tax collection and revenue derived from natural resources.

1. Given that the EU is paying out significant sums of money to help developing countries generate public revenues and that these efforts are yielding unsatisfactory results, is it planning to modify its action and applicable instruments in such a way as to make development policy more effective?

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Tax evasion: a problem for developing countries, E-001861/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Hugues Bayet (S&D), 20-03-2017

The EU has always maintained that helping the poorest African countries increase their tax revenue is a priority for its development assistance strategy. The European Court of Auditors, however, recently highlighted a series of inconsistencies both in the implementation of the measures put in place to that end and in the initial conditions imposed on beneficiaries. Tax evasion costs Africa almost USD 60 billion per year. Europe is doing very little to remedy this and the majority of reports, such as those produced under the country-specific reporting system proposed by the Commission, do not cover non-EU countries.

1. Why does the Commission not take extraterritoriality into account when publishing country-specific data?
2. Does it intend to take any other steps with a view to putting an end to tax evasion in African countries?

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Aggressive tax planning and developing countries, E-013926/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Louis Aliot (ENF), 19-10-2015

On 5 October 2015, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) announced its action plan to combat aggressive tax planning and ensure that multinationals pay tax in the countries where they actually operate. Tackling tax planning helps to reduce social inequality in developing countries, which are hit hardest by this phenomenon. Businesses use tax planning schemes to avoid paying tax on profits earned by exploiting natural resources in developing countries.

1. Given that tax revenues play an important role in financing development aid, how will the Commission react to these new measures and adapt its development policy accordingly?
2. Does the Commission intend to make development aid contingent on compliance with these new measures?

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Tax evasion in developing countries, E-010849/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 03-07-2015

According to a report published this Wednesday by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), developing economies lose around EUR 90 billion in tax revenue every year because of investment through offshore companies. The report estimates these losses based solely on foreign direct investment originating in offshore companies, particularly through special purpose vehicles. Perhaps because the available information is limited, perhaps because the hidden profits do not appear in official reports, or perhaps even because companies combine different tax-evasion schemes, it is difficult to quantify the revenue taken out of developing countries to tax havens. As a result, it is clear from the report that this estimate is not high enough. This sum comfortably exceeds the EU’s overall budget for aid to developing countries. Can the Commission state:

1. Whether it is aware of this rapport?
2. What is its assessment of the report?
|   | 3. **What conclusions could be drawn from the need to incorporate the legitimate interests of developing countries into the Commission’s work on combating tax fraud and evasion?** |
Special report 36/2016 of 31 January 2017
An assessment of the arrangements for closure of the 2007-2013 cohesion and rural development programmes

Cohesion Fund (CF) | Agriculture and Rural Development | EAFRD Fund

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<td>Report No / Date / Title</td>
<td>Special report N°36/2016: An assessment of the arrangements for closure of the 2007-2013 cohesion and rural development programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
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<td>Questions asked:</td>
<td>Through the audit, the Court examined whether the rules and procedures for cohesion and rural development provide a basis for the Commission and Member States to close the programmes in an efficient and timely manner. The Court analysed in particular:</td>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>whether the regulatory provisions governing closure in cohesion and rural development require the final acceptance of programme expenditure as legal and regular and assurance that outputs and results were achieved;</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>whether the budgetary authority (the European Parliament and the Council) is informed about the outcome of the closure of multi-annual spending programmes; and</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>whether the closure process is timely.</td>
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<td>Findings:</td>
<td>1. The concept of closure has evolved over the last three programme periods, in line with improvements to the management and control systems in both cohesion and rural development. Increasingly, assurance has been provided at regular intervals throughout the programme period, resulting in a reduced focus at the end of the period and limiting the work that needs to be carried out specifically at closure.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>The closure arrangements in cohesion and rural development need to be still further aligned for the post-2020 period.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Closure, as defined in the regulations, does not yet encompass the Commission’s final acceptance of the legality and regularity of expenditure and the programmes’ results.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>The Commission should inform the budgetary authority about the final outcome of the closure procedure.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>A residual risk rate should be calculated to assess the legality and regularity of expenditure in the course of programme implementation and at closure.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Closure should include an evaluation of programme performance and the achievement of outputs and results.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>There should be no overlap of eligibility periods and closure should take place as soon as possible after the end of the eligibility period.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>The Commission provided adequate and timely support to help Member States prepare for the closure of 2007-2013 programmes, but needs to remain vigilant to ensure a robust implementation by the Member States.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>The Commission’s closure guidelines go beyond the regulatory provisions.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>The Commission needs to remain vigilant to guarantee the robustness of the 2007-2013 closure exercise.</td>
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Recommendations: |
The Commission should:
1. Propose further alignment of the regulatory provisions for closure between cohesion and for the investment-related measures under rural development, aiming to achieve a harmonised annual assurance process in both areas;
2. Introduce a final acceptance concerning the legality and regularity of programme expenditure and the outputs and results achieved at programme closure. In this connection, in both policy areas the Commission should
   a) lay down procedures for calculating a residual risk rate at programme level after implementation of all financial corrections, and ensure that the rate does not exceed the materiality threshold at closure; and
   b) assess whether programme targets have been achieved and, if necessary, impose financial corrections for underperformance;
3. Specify how it will inform the budgetary authority about the outcome of the closure procedure once the Commission has issued its final acceptance;
4. Ensure that eligibility periods no longer overlap with the subsequent programme period and that the closure procedure is finalised promptly after the end of the eligibility period;
5. Ensure that Member States pay all beneficiaries the full amount to their European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion Fund and European Social Fund projects on time;
6. Adopt major project decisions still pending for the 2007-2013 period promptly;
7. Ensure, at closure, that Member States implement specific procedures to verify, in particular, the eligibility of expenditure relating to financial instruments and contractual advances;

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

Rapporteur: Boguslaw Liberadzki (S&D)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Welcomes the Court’s special report and endorses its recommendations;
2. Notes with satisfaction that the Commission provided adequate and timely support to help Member States prepare for the closure of 2007-2013 programmes;
3. Welcomes the Commission’s readiness to seek further harmonisation of regulatory provisions between the funds, including on terminology, assurance and closure processes, whenever it enables to improve the management of EU funds and it contributes to a simpler and more effective implementation in Member States and regions;
4. Notes that six major project decisions for the 2007-2013 period are still outstanding;
5. Notes with astonishment the Commission’s refusal to consider specific commitment in relation to legislative proposals for the post 2020 period, knowing that they can already build on the experience of two complete financial periods (2000-2006 and 2007-2013); is however reassured by the fact that this refusal was induced rather by the Commission’s concerns about their legal prerogatives than by disagreement on the content;
6. Supports the Court’s call for further alignment of the regulatory provisions for closure between cohesion and for the investment-related measures under rural development;
7. Considers that calculated residual risk rates remain an unknown quantity based on experience and can at best be used as pointers;
8. Notes the Court’s demand that eligibility periods should no longer overlap with the subsequent programme period after 2020 and its concern that extended eligibility periods (i.e. n+2, n+3) are one of the reasons for financial backlogs and the late start of the subsequent programming period along with delays in finalisation of revised programming and funding legislation and associated implementation rules, particularly in 2014/2015; emphasises
in this regard the importance of ensuring maximum absorption and the smooth-running of multiannual projects;

9. Notes that the final closure of the financial period only occurs every seven years; shares therefore the Court’s opinion that the Commission should inform the budgetary authority and its Committee on Budgetary Control about the final outcome of the closure procedure in a separate document; such a document should not only confirm the legality and regularity of the expenditures but it should also measure the result and impact of the programmes (performance approach).

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<td><strong>European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2017</strong> on building blocks for a post-2020 EU cohesion policy (2016/2326(INI))</td>
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[The European Parliament, ]

15. Points out that increasing administrative and institutional capacities – and therefore strengthening national and regional agencies for supporting investments – in the area of the programming, implementation and evaluation of operational programmes, as well as in the quality of professional training, in the Member States and regions is crucial for timely and successful cohesion policy performance and for bringing about convergence towards higher standards; stresses, in this context, the importance of the Taiex Regio Peer 2 Peer initiative which improves administrative and institutional capacity and produces better results for EU investments;

16. Highlights the need to simplify the cohesion policy’s overall management system at all governance levels, facilitating the programming, management and evaluation of operational programmes, in order to make it more accessible, flexible and effective; emphasises, in this context, the importance of combating gold-plating in the Member States; asks the Commission to increase the possibilities for e-cohesion and specific types of expenditure, such as standard scales of unit costs and flat-rate amounts under CPR, and to introduce a digital platform or one-stop shops for information for applicants and beneficiaries; supports the conclusions and recommendations hitherto adopted by the ‘High Level Group monitoring simplification for beneficiaries of ESI Funds’, and encourages Member States to implement these recommendations;

17. Asks the Commission to reflect on solutions according to proportionality and differentiation in the implementation of programmes, based on risk, objective criteria and positive incentives for programmes, their scale and administrative capacity, especially with regard to the multiple layers of audit, which should focus on combating irregularities, namely fraud and corruption, and the number of controls, to achieve greater harmonisation between cohesion policy, competition policy and other Union policies, in particular state aid rules, which apply to the ESI Funds but not to EFSI or Horizon 2020, as well as with regard to the possibility of a single set of rules for all ESI Funds to make financing more efficient while taking into account the specificities of each Fund

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**European Parliament decision of 27 April 2017** on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2015, Section III – Commission (2016/2151(DEC))

40. Requests that the Commission take measures to strictly observe the rules and timetables regarding outstanding commitments including:
   i) closure and decommitment of the 2007-2013 programmes;
   ii) proper use of net correction in cohesion;
   iii) a reduction of cash held by fiduciaries; and
   iv) the compilation of payment plans and forecasts where outstanding commitments are significant;

181. Shares the Court’s view that the Commission should ensure that all the expenditure related to ERDF and ESF financial instruments for the 2007-2013
programming period are included sufficiently early in the closure declarations to enable audit authorities to carry out their checks; considers, in addition, that the Commission should encourage all Member States that implemented financial instruments to carry out specific audits on the implementation of these instruments in view of the closure;


E. Whereas duplication of audits and differences in auditing approaches and methodologies call for the implementation of the ‘single audit principle’ and a stronger focus on performance auditing, which could better assess the efficiency and effectiveness of operations and lead to proposals for simplification;

[The European Parliament, ]

1. Considers that the Commission should introduce detailed guidelines on simplification in order to make the Member States and their regions aware of their task of eliminating, or at least significantly reducing, the administrative burden and gold-plating arising at national and local levels in the processes of procurement, project proposal selection and monitoring and control activities, including avoiding frequent changes in rules, simplifying language and standardising procedures, as well as focusing the EU budget on tangible results; states furthermore that an integrated EU regional funding package delivered via a single interface or ‘one-stop shop’ could be an option, thus moving towards common processes and procedures wherever possible;

2. Asks the Commission to provide the Member States and their regions with a roadmap for streamlining and simplifying control, monitoring and reporting activities, including for beneficiaries, in order to do away with the current bottlenecks;

4. Invites the Commission to establish and implement, in coordination with the Member States and in line with the principle of proportionality, a light-touch approach to data and information requirements for beneficiaries in the process of application and reporting related to EU funding under shared management, and to encourage the sharing of good practices;

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European Parliament resolution of 14 January 2014 on EU Member States preparedness to an effective and timely start of the new Cohesion Policy Programming period (2013/2095(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

9. Welcomes the improvements made to the regulation that will introduce a stronger and more integrated approach to cohesion policy funding through the Common Strategic Framework; recognises that this is vital to ensuring that projects have a greater impact and produce tangible results; calls on the Member States to introduce even more measures simplifying the bureaucracy and administration of the programmes; believes that this should lead to smooth implementation of these programmes and efficient drawing of the funds;

40. Highlights the fact that the focus on a results-led approach was mentioned by many Member States as a target for preparing the next round of funding; welcomes the examples given by some Member States of ways of taking a more efficient approach to defining expected results in advance in order to allow funding to be directed towards proposals to achieve these objectives;
48. Welcomes the positive steps taken towards simplification and greater transparency in the management of ESI funds; points out that a simplified application process for beneficiaries, with clear and accessible information on the procedure and on funding possibilities, was identified by many Member States as an important aspect of preparations for the programming period 2014-2020; welcomes this as a way of ensuring that the preparation and implementation of projects run smoothly, with reduced bureaucracy for applicants; calls on Member States and regional and local authorities to exchange best practice geared to simplifying procedures, and, while acknowledging that stringent rules on controls and auditing are necessary, to ensure that they are proportionate so as not to add an unnecessary burden;

Resolution of 20/09/2012 on Special Report No 3/2012 (Discharge 2011) - Structural Funds - Did the Commission successfully deal with deficiencies identified in the Member States' management and control systems?

7. Is concerned, however, in particular about the following observations:
   - Corrective actions took 30 months on average and delays were mainly attributable to the Member States concerned although the Commission was partially responsible for 39 % of cases and fully responsible for 5 % of cases,
   - In only 67 % of cases the Commission obtained a high degree of assurance that financial corrections were accurate,
   - In only 28 % of cases the Commission obtained a high degree of assurance that the Member States' management and control systems improved following corrective actions, which means that considerable effort will need to be undertaken in the closure process;

11. Reiterates the importance of the supervisory role the Commission exercises in order to be able to bear the ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the budget including the areas of shared management; recalls the action plan to strengthen the Commission's supervisory role under shared management of structural actions and the improved legal framework for the 2007-2013 programming period which aimed at reducing the level of error in structural actions and thus to protect the EU budget; notes, however, that the action plan of 2008 came only into force at the end of the programming period 2000-2006 and could therefore cover the closure process of that period only; calls on the Commission therefore to fully enforce measures as stated in the action plan for the 2007-2013 programming period and beyond; expects in this context from the Commission a considerable and steady decrease in error rates, in particular of programmes that are expected to have the highest error rates; proposes that the Court of Auditors carry out a regular assessment of the technical and ethical quality of national audit authorities, with particular regard to their independence, and that it report its findings and conclusions to the Parliament and the Council;

18. Calls on the Commission to finalise the closure of the 2000-2006 programming period duly taking into account the Court of Auditors' observations and to report to Parliament on how the Commission will ensure legality and regularity in the process.

Oral / Written Questions

Closure of Operational Programmes 2007-2013, E-003531/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Iskra Mihaylova (ALDE), 03-03-2015

Closure of Operational Programmes 2007-2013 is approaching and authorities have to plan the closure process and procedures according to the Commission Guidelines on Closure 2007-2013. Managing the 2007-2013 programmes towards full absorption and closure continues to be a challenging task, while at the same time negotiating the new 2014-2020 programmes, moving towards closure of one set of programmes, and at the same time developing the new Cohesion Policy programmes. All this requires enough staff allocated to closure, as well as the necessary administrative capacity. This being the case:

1. Has the Commission performed any preliminary assessments, by Member State, of the risk of non-absorption of funds by closure in March 2017?
2. Has the risk been estimated and has any action plan been prepared to reduce it?
3. What measures and specific steps have been undertaken by the Commission to ensure improved capacity of all authorities involved in the process of
### Simplification of EU cohesion policy, E-015956/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Vilija Bliūkevičiūtė (S&D), 17-12-2015

Although, at the beginning of the new 2014-2020 financial programming period, the reform of the cohesion policy, in order to simplify it, has been implemented, the implementation, management of the European Structural and Investment Funds as well as related reporting and control are still complex for both beneficiaries, and authorities, in particular with minor administrative and financial capacity. Because of the complex procedures for beneficiaries, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, NGOs and municipalities in need of EU funding, they suffer a large burden, as these entities generally have neither financial or human resources, nor the necessary knowledge to successfully apply for EU subsidies and subsequently to manage them.

1. Does the Commission not think that it would be appropriate for Member States and regions to provide guidance which would specify how to streamline and simplify the control, monitoring and reporting activities, including the requirements applicable to the beneficiaries, in order to eliminate the weaknesses of the implementation of the cohesion policy and thus ensure the maximum benefits to the citizens?

### Selection and impact of audits on the Structural Funds, E-006707/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Andrea Cozzolino (S&D), 28-04-2015

Title VI of Regulation 1083/2006 lays down rules concerning management, monitoring and controls, including audits by the Commission. The national and regional managing authorities are grappling with extraordinary activities relating to the closure of the 2007-2013 programming period and the launch of the new one. Some regions, which are particularly late in reducing their backlog, are also working to develop and manage the relevant action plans with specific task forces. The top priority should be evaluation and control with a view to achieving the expected results, not only with regard to procedures. Audits carried out at the end of a programming period can be rather untimely when it comes to the effectiveness of spending, with the possibility of re-programming. They can also be a way of surreptitiously imposing financial corrections when programmes are about to close. Can the Commission answer the following questions:

1. What criteria are used in selecting the programmes and geographical areas to be audited?
2. Has the impact of these audits on the day-to-day management of the programming and implementation of the funds by the national and regional managing authorities been assessed?
3. Has the impact of audits carried out at the end of a programming period been assessed?
### More efforts needed to implement the Natura 2000 network to its full potential

**Environment | Cohesion Fund (CF) | European Regional Development Fund | EAFRD**

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<tr>
<th>Policy Area</th>
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<th>Cohesion Fund (CF)</th>
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<td><strong>Report No / Date / Title</strong></td>
<td>Special Report No 1/2017 of 21/02/2017: More efforts needed to implement the Natura 2000 network to its full potential</td>
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<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
<td>Questions asked:</td>
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<td>The objective of the audit was to answer the question ‘Has the Natura 2000 network been appropriately implemented?’</td>
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<td>The main audit question was further broken down into the following sub questions:</td>
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<td>1. Has the Natura 2000 network been appropriately managed? In order to answer this question, the Court assessed whether the Member States had taken the necessary conservation measures and whether appropriate procedures were in place to avoid or compensate for the deterioration of the sites. At Commission level, the Court reviewed the guidance provided by the Commission, the appraisal procedures for major projects with an impact on Natura 2000 sites and the procedures for handling complaints.</td>
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<td>2. Has Natura 2000 been appropriately financed? The Court looked at the design and the use of the available EU funding for Natura 2000 sites over the 2007-2013 programming period, as well as the planned allocation for the 2014-2020 period linked to the prioritised action framework (PAFs). The Court focused on how Natura 2000 had been integrated into other policy instruments and how well the funded measures had been coordinated and adapted to the network’s needs.</td>
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<td>3. Has Natura 2000 been appropriately monitored? The Court examined the various monitoring tools at the disposal of the Member States and the Commission and how these had been used. It assessed the performance indicator systems, the site monitoring arrangements and the system for reporting on habitats and species.</td>
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<td>The focused on the overall implementation framework rather than on the conservation results achieved for individual sites. It carried out its audit at both Commission and Member State level and obtained evidence from five Member States (France, Germany, Spain, Poland and Romania), covering eight of the EU’s nine biogeographical regions. Auditors visited authorities in these Member States and 24 Natura 2000 sites. They also met with representatives from various stakeholder groups, in particular farmers’ organisations and environmental nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). In addition, the Court sent a survey to all the other Member States in order to obtain information on their management systems and the public funding used for their Natura 2000 sites.</td>
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<td><strong>Findings:</strong></td>
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<td>1. Member States did not manage the Natura 2000 network sufficiently well</td>
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<td>a) Coordination between authorities and stakeholders in the Member States was not sufficiently developed</td>
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The necessary conservation measures were too often delayed or inappropriately defined by the Member States. The Member States visited did not adequately assess projects impacting on Natura 2000 sites. The Commission was actively supervising the implementation of Natura 2000.

2. EU funds were not well mobilised to support the management of the Natura 2000 network
   a) The Prioritised Action Frameworks presented an unreliable picture of the costs of the Natura 2000 network
   b) No reliable estimate of EU funds used for Natura 2000 for the 2007-2013 programming period
   c) The assessment of funding needs for the 2014-2020 programming period was not accurate or complete
   d) The 2014-2020 programming documents of the various EU funds did not fully reflect the needs identified in the Prioritised Action Frameworks
   e) EU funding schemes were insufficiently tailored to the objectives of the Natura 2000 sites

3. Monitoring and reporting systems were not adequate to provide comprehensive information on the effectiveness of the Natura 2000 network
   a) There was no specific performance indicator system for the Natura 2000 network
   b) The implementation of Natura 2000 monitoring plans was inadequate
   c) Incomplete and inconsistent data made the monitoring of habitats and species less effective

Recommendations:
1. Achieving full implementation of the Nature Directives.
   a) As regards the systems in place to manage the network, the Member States should, by 2019 ensure appropriate coordination between all authorities involved in the management of Natura 2000 sites. In particular, agriculture and environment departments should closely collaborate with one another. Relevant information should be easily available to departments in charge of managing the network.
   b) As regards the protection of the sites, the Member States should, by 2020, complete the establishment of the necessary conservation measures for sites which have been designated for more than 6 years and ensure that appropriate assessments consider cumulative effects and are of sufficient quality.
   c) Regarding the guidance it provides, the Commission should, by 2019, increase its effort to promote the dissemination and application of its guidance documents and the results of the biogeographical seminars, and promote the exchange of best practices on cross-border cooperation; in doing so the Commission should consider how to overcome linguistic barriers.

2. Financing and accounting for the costs of Natura 2000
   As regards the funding of Natura 2000, Member States should, for the next programming period (commencing 2021):
   a) estimate accurately and completely the actual spending and the future funding needs at site level (by including conservation measures’ cost estimations in management plans) and for the network as a whole;
   b) update the PAFs on the basis of the above and of the established conservation measures for all sites;
   c) ensure consistency between the priorities and objectives set out in the PAFs and the programming documents for the various EU funding instruments and propose measures targeted at the specific needs of the Natura 2000 sites.
   d) give guidance to the Member States on improving the quality of prioritised action frameworks and on estimating, in a reliable and harmonised manner, planned and actual support for Natura 2000 from EU funding programmes.

3. Measuring the results achieved by Natura 2000
   a) As regards the performance indicator system for the EU funding programmes, Member States should for the next programming period (commencing
1) include indicators and targets for the relevant funds which are specific to Natura 2000 and allow more precise and accurate tracking of the results generated by Natura 2000 funding;

b) the Commission should for the next programming period establish cross-cutting Natura 2000 indicators for all EU funds.

c) As regards the monitoring plans for habitats, species and sites, Member States should, by 2020, in order to be able to measure the results of the conservation measures, prepare monitoring plans at site level, implement them and update the standard data forms regularly.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

CONT Working Document of 27/04/2017 on ECA Special Report 1/2017 (Discharge 2016): More efforts needed to implement the Natura 2000 network to its full potential

Rapporteur: Tomáš Zdechovský (EPP)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Welcomes the Court’s Special Report and endorses its recommendations;
2. Underlines the importance of biodiversity for mankind; notes that the Natura 2000 network established under the Birds and Habitats Directives is the centrepiece of the EU’s biodiversity strategy, however notes with concern that its full potential has not been exhausted;
3. Notes that the Commission’s general role is to provide guidance to the Member States; regrets that the Member States did not take the Commission’s into account sufficiently;
4. Regrets that the Court concluded that the Member States did not manage the Natura 2000 sufficiently and that the coordination between national authorities and stakeholders in the Member States was not adequate;
5. Recalls that due to its cross-border character, implementing Natura 2000 requires strong coordination among Member States; calls on the Member States to establish a strong structure on a national level to promote cross-border cooperation; invites the Commission to provide an improved guidance to the Member States for building up a cooperation platform;
6. Notes with a deep concern that the conservation objectives were often not specific enough and not quantified, while management plans were not precisely defined and lacked milestones for their completion; reiterates that this might hinder the added value of Natura 2000; calls on the Commission to harmonise the rules on an effective approach towards setting up conservation objectives and management plans in the next programming period; further calls on the Commission to follow-up on whether the Member States follow the guidance and to provide them with further advisory support where needed;
7. Calls on the Member States to conduct the necessary conservation measures in a timely manner in order to ensure their added value and to update the management plans accordingly; calls on the Commission to thoroughly check on the potentially delayed conservation projects;
8. Notes that in order to make the Natura 2000 network effective, involvement of key stakeholders such as land users and owners is essential; regrets that in most Member States effective communication channels are missing; calls on the Member States to improve the coordination between national authorities and various stakeholders;
9. Is concerned that the Member States failed to adequately assess projects negatively impacting on Natura 2000 sites, that the compensatory measures were not utilised sufficiently and that the approach among the Member States varies widely; calls on the Commission to provide the Member States with a more structured guidance on how and when to apply compensatory measures in practice and to supervise their utilisation;
10. Regrets that the 2014-2020 programming documents were not fully reflecting funding needs and the Commission did not address the shortcomings in a structured manner; calls on the Commission to prepare the next programming period with a bigger vigour;
11. Regrets that the monitoring and reporting systems for Natura 2000 were not adequate to provide comprehensive information on the effectiveness of the network; is concerned that no specific performance indicator system for the use of EU funds was developed to reflect on the performance of Natura 2000 network; is of the opinion that this hinders the efficacy of Natura 2000 network; welcomes that the Commission introduced a set of
compulsory comprehensive indicators for all projects for the 2014-2020 programming period under LIFE; invites the Commission to apply the same approach also to other programmes in the next programming period;

12. Notes with concern that at site level the monitoring plans were often not included in the site management documents, they were not detailed or time-bound; is further concerned that the standard data forms were not updated and the data provided by the Member States for the State of Nature report were incomplete, inaccurate and incomparable; calls on the Member State and Commission to remedy this issue in the intended action plan;

13. Welcomes that the Commission developed a central registry for recording complaints and enquiries related to Natura 2000; notes that majority of the cases was closed without further procedural steps; invites the Commission to follow-up all complaints and enquiries rigorously;

14. Welcomes the establishment of the Biogeographical Process providing a mechanism for cooperation and networking for the stakeholders on management of Natura 2000, however invites the Commission to resolve a language barrier issue that hinders its reach;

15. Deeply regrets that the Prioritised Action Framework presented an unreliable picture of the costs of the Natura 2000 network and that the data presented by the Member States were inaccurate and limited; notes with concern that funding estimates were not reliable and comparable thus hindering the possibility to precisely monitor the amount of the EU funds devoted to Natura 2000; regrets that this caused that the PAFs had a limited usefulness in ensuring the consistency of EU funding for biodiversity protection under Natura 2000; encourages the Commission to provide the Member States with more structured guidelines on reporting and monitoring and on PAF completion; calls on the Member States to ensure that the data provided are accurate;

16. Is of the opinion that financial allocations for Natura 2000 must be identifiable and its use traceable, otherwise the impact of investments cannot be measured; to the extent Natura 2000 is co-financed by ERDF/CF and EAFRD, calls on the respective Commission directorates general to add a specific chapter on Natura 2000 to their annual activity reports;

17. Welcomes the establishment of the expert group and ad hoc working groups on harmonising practices and invites the Commission to utilise the outputs of their activities in the next programming period;

18. Calls on the Commission to inform its relevant committees about the action plan to improve the implementation of the Nature Directives, to be adopted in 2017.

**Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees**


[The European Parliament, ]

1. Welcomes the Action Plan for nature, people and the economy as a step in the right direction with regard to delivering the objectives of the Nature Directives;

2. Notes, however, with concern that the targets of the EU’s 2020 Biodiversity Strategy and the CBD will not be met without immediate, substantial and additional efforts; underlines that the targets of the EU’s 2010 Biodiversity Strategy were not met;

6. Reiterates the need for additional, substantial and continuous efforts to be made in order to achieve the 2020 targets, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to give this greater political priority;

12. Recalls that the European Court of Auditors stated in its Special Report No 1/2017 that coordination between the responsible authorities and other stakeholders in the Member States was not sufficiently developed;

13. Calls on the Commission to provide effective support to national and regional actors in implementing nature legislation and in improving environmental inspections, including through competence and capacity building and better allocation of resources;
14. Welcomes the fact that the Commission intends to update and further develop guidance documents in all EU official languages in order to promote greater understanding of the legislation on the ground and to help public authorities apply it correctly, and calls on the Commission in this regard to involve and consult all stakeholders in this process;

17. Welcomes the fact that, without jeopardising the conservation objectives and requirements laid down in the Nature Directives, flexible approaches to implementation that take into account specific national circumstances help reduce and progressively eliminate unnecessary conflicts and problems which have arisen between nature protection and socioeconomic activities, and also address the practical challenges resulting from the application of the annexes to the directives;

19. Underlines that Member States must ensure that there is no deterioration of Natura 2000 areas and must implement conservation measures in order to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of protected species and habitats;

26. Stresses that protecting our shared natural environment in Europe is essential for both our economies and well-being, that the Natura 2000 network is estimated to have an economic value of EUR 200-300 billion annually and can generate income for local communities through tourism and recreation, and that healthy ecosystems provide essential services such as fresh water, carbon storage, pollinating insects, and protection against floods, avalanches and coastal erosion; points out therefore that investing in the Natura 2000 network makes sound economic sense;

27. Recalls that the Natura 2000 network marine sites are significantly less well established than the terrestrial sites; calls on the Member States concerned to address this and on the Commission to facilitate the necessary cooperation with third countries to improve environmental protection in marine areas;

28. Welcomes the action aimed at integrating ecosystem services into decision-making; regrets, however, the absence of a concrete No Net Loss of Biodiversity Initiative in the Action Plan;

40. Welcomes the European Court of Auditors report on the Natura 2000 network and concurs with its assessment that EU funds have not been mobilised sufficiently to support the management of the network;

41. Underlines that the funding of the Natura 2000 areas is mainly the responsibility of the Member States and emphasises the fact that a lack of funding is likely to have contributed the most to the gaps in the implementation of the Nature Directives, as stated in the ‘Fitness Check’;

42. Underlines that the possibility of establishing new financial mechanisms for biodiversity conservation with a view to achieving the 2020 targets is unlikely given the time frame of the current multiannual financial framework (MFF); calls for maximum use to be made of existing means, including L’Instrument Financier pour l’Environnement (LIFE), the CAP and structural funds;

43. Welcomes the upcoming Commission proposal to increase the nature and biodiversity envelope by 10% under the LIFE programme;

44. States that more preparatory work is needed in view of the next MFF in terms of both reviewing and forecasting, in order to ensure adequate financing for nature conservation, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture in Natura 2000 sites; considers that a comprehensive review of past spending, highlighting lessons learnt in terms of the performance of past measures, would be key in this regard;

45. Calls for new financial mechanisms for biodiversity conservation to be included in the next MFF; calls on the Commission to ensure that future financial instruments for agriculture, rural and regional development contain dedicated envelopes for biodiversity and management of the Natura 2000 network, which
are co-managed by national and regional environmental authorities;

46. Calls on the Commission to tailor funding schemes more effectively to the Natura 2000 objectives and to establish cross-cutting Natura 2000 performance indicators for all relevant EU funds; calls on the Commission to also establish a tracking mechanism for Natura 2000 spending in order to improve transparency, accountability and effectiveness, and to integrate these into the next MFF;

47. Reiterates that the Natura 2000 programme is customarily funded through co-financing; calls on the Member States to increase their Natura 2000 funding substantially, in order for co-financing to be set at more attractive rates and to improve uptake of the fund as a result, and for measures to be taken to reduce administrative burdens on applicants and project beneficiaries;

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European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2017 on EU action for sustainability (2017/2009(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

31. Stresses the environmental significance and socio-economic benefits of biodiversity and notes that according to the latest ‘Planetary boundaries’ report, current values of biodiversity loss have crossed the planetary boundary, while biosphere integrity is considered a core boundary which when significantly altered brings the earth system into a new state; notes with concern that the targets of the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy and of the Convention on Biological Diversity will not be met without substantial additional efforts; recalls that around 60 % of animal species and 77 % of protected habitats are in less than optimal conditions; calls on the Commission and the Member States to step up their efforts in order to achieve these targets, by, inter alia, fully implementing the Nature Directives and recognising the added value of the ecosystems and biodiversity of the European environment by allocating sufficient resources, including in future budgets for biodiversity conservation, in particular to the Natura 2000 network and the LIFE programme; reiterates the necessity for a common tracking methodology that takes into account all direct and indirect spending on biodiversity and the efficiency of that spending, while stressing that overall EU spending must have no negative impact on biodiversity and should support the achievement of Europe’s biodiversity targets;

32. Stresses that the full implementation, enforcement and adequate financing of the Nature Directives is a vital prerequisite for ensuring the success of the biodiversity strategy as a whole and meeting its headline target; welcomes the Commission’s decision not to revise the Nature Directives;

33. Urges the Commission and the Member States to quickly complete and bolster the Natura 2000 ecological network, while stepping up efforts to ensure that a sufficient number of special areas of conservation (SACs) are designated as such in accordance with the Habitats Directive and that a designation of that kind is combined with effective measures to protect biodiversity in Europe;

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European Parliament resolution of 4 July 2017 on the role of fisheries-related tourism in the diversification of fisheries (2016/2035(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

10. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop and support partnerships with the fishing tourism sector promoted by MPA management bodies
in the MPAs and in Natura 2000 sites with a view to combining the protection of natural resources with the promotion and development of culture through responsible enjoyment;

18. Stresses the need for these activities to be compatible with the protection of biodiversity, Natura 2000 sites and MPAs (EU Biodiversity strategy, Birds and Habitats directives) and thus the need to enhance dialogue and synergies with other concerned Member States;

41. Considers it essential for Member States, regions, and stakeholders to share best practices, given the lack of synergy among businesses in the EU’s sea basins, resulting in fragmentation and limited economic advantages; notes that research institutes, museums, tourism companies, managers of Natura 2000 sites and MPAs, traditional canning and fish processing industries, and other stakeholders should be encouraged to work together to develop sustainable innovative products which, in addition to bringing economic added value, also meet visitors’ expectations; stresses that these activities should be incorporated into a consistent general framework for promoting sustainable and responsible tourism in the basins concerned; considers that FLAGs can play an important role in this connection and therefore need to be provided with appropriate funding;

European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2016 on the mid-term review of the EU’s Biodiversity Strategy (2015/2137(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

21. Notes that in 2012 only 58 % of the Natura 2000 sites had management plans; is concerned by the divergent levels of implementation; urges the Member States to complete the designation of terrestrial and marine Natura 2000 sites and draw up management plans, in consultation with all stakeholders;

22. Stresses that while the management of Natura 2000 sites across the EU costs a minimum of EUR 5,8 billion, they bring environmental and socio-economic benefits worth EUR 200 billion to EUR 300 billion annually; calls on the Member States to ensure that Natura 2000 sites are managed transparently;

23. Acknowledges the vital contribution that Marine Protected Areas established under the Natura 2000 network will play in achieving a Good Environmental Status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and in delivering the global target of 10 % of coastal and marine areas being protected, as set out in Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, by 2020; regrets that this target is still far from being achieved;

26. Reiterates its previous calls for EU co-funding for the management of Natura 2000 sites, which should be complementary to the rural development, structural and fisheries funds, and to funds made available by the Member States;

28. Calls, in that context, for additional efforts to halt all illegal killing, trapping and trading of birds and to resolve resulting local conflicts; calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop new tools for detecting illegal activities within Natura 2000 sites;

37. Recalls that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) already has instruments for restoring, preserving and enhancing biodiversity, such as the Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs); points out that restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry, including in Natura 2000 areas, is highlighted as one of six key priorities for rural development in the EU;

64. Stresses that Natura 2000 is still a relatively young network, whose full potential is far from having been achieved; considers that the Nature Directives
remain relevant and that best practices in implementation demonstrate their effectiveness; stresses that there is ample flexibility in the Nature Directives, including the option for adaptation according to technical and scientific progress; notes that smart implementation and international cooperation are essential for reaching the biodiversity targets;

73. Encourages the Member States to ensure, by means of urban planning initiatives, the carefully considered use of space and adequate protection of the Natura 2000 network, to preserve open spaces – in particular by opting for a pastoralist approach rather than abandoning the land, which increases natural risks such as avalanches, mudslides and ground movements – and to establish a coherent network of blue-green infrastructure in rural and urban areas, while at the same time creating the requisite legal certainty for economic activities; calls on the Commission to produce an overview of best practices in this area;

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European Parliament resolution of 12 December 2013 on Green Infrastructure – Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital (2013/2663(RSP))

[The European Parliament, ]

8.Stresses the contribution of green infrastructure as a vital accompaniment to the Natura 2000 network, enhancing the coherence and resilience of the network, which serves the conservation of key species and habitats of Europe’s nature, and helping to maintain the delivery of ecosystem services estimated at several hundred billion euros per year; points, in this connection, to the complementarity between Natura 2000 legislation and the green infrastructure initiative;

13.Notes the vital role of green infrastructure in adapting to climate change, as it increases ecological coherence between Natura 2000 sites, facilitates the increase in movements and changes in species distribution between and among Natura 2000 sites, and provides landscape scale adaptation for biodiversity, and thus contributes to the implementation of the EU’s nature policies, and also encourages and provides ecosystem-based adaptation to other sectors, including water management and food security.

Oral / Written Questions

Action Plan for nature, people and the economy, O-000067/2017, Question for oral answer to the Commission, Rule 128, Herbert Dorfmann (EPP) ++, 01-09-2017
In December 2016, the ‘Fitness Check’ evaluation of the Nature Directives found that the Nature Directives were fit for purpose, but that achieving their objectives depends upon substantially improving their implementation. The Action Plan for nature, people and the economy aims to rapidly improve practical implementation of the Nature Directives, and is therefore an important step forward, but it is considered insufficient to meet the 2020 biodiversity goals.

1. Why did the Commission make no reference to the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy other than to state that the Action Plan aims to ‘accelerate progress toward the EU 2020 goal of halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services’? How will the Commission respond to the wider calls made by Parliament to achieve the 2020 targets? Which strategy does the Commission consider necessary from 2020 onwards?

2. When is the Commission planning on coming forward with a proposal for the development of a Trans-European Network for Green Infrastructure (TEN-G), an EU initiative on pollinators, and a legislative proposal to implement the Aarhus Convention’s Access to Justice pillar? What action is the Commission taking to address the illegal killing of birds, including migratory species in the Mediterranean and birds of prey in some Member States?

3. How does the Commission plan to mainstream Natura 2000 and wider biodiversity measures with the CAP, cohesion policy, CFP, integrated maritime policy and research and innovation policy? How does the Commission plan to evaluate the impact of the CAP on biodiversity and address the coherence between these two policy areas? What action is the Commission taking to tackle issues arising from the coexistence between people and certain protected species such as large carnivores in certain agricultural areas?

4. In view of the next MFF, what measures does the Commission intend to take in order to increase the financial resources required to adequately fund
nature conservation and biodiversity? Is the Commission planning on introducing a tracking mechanism for Natura 2000 spending in order to improve the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of EU funds, as recommended by the European Court of Auditors?

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European Court of Auditors’ Natura 2000 Report, E-005295/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Rosa D’Amato (EFDD), 28-08-2017

The management, funding and monitoring of the Natura 2000 network for the protection of habitats and endangered species are unsatisfactory. This was the conclusion reached by the European Court of Auditors after it analysed 24 sites and conducted investigations in every Member State. Funding from ad hoc programmes such as the rural development programme has not been used to meet the real and specific needs of each site. In addition, the Court of Auditors highlights the fact that it remains difficult to understand how much each country actually spent in the 2007-2013 period, and how much money has been allocated for the subsequent period ending in 2021. The Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAF) that were reviewed provided an insufficiently clear picture, and estimates of the funding needed for the current period are incorrect. In its Special Report No 1/2017, the Court made a number of recommendations with the aim of ensuring that the network is established in full, that the reference framework for funding is clarified and that the results are measured.

1. To what extent have the recommendations provided by the Court in its Special Report No 1/2017 been followed?

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Specific financial instrument for the management of the Natura 2000 Network, E-003972/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), 15-06-2017

Last month saw the signing of a joint declaration proclaiming 21 May ‘European Natura 2000 Day’. Despite the statements made at this event and the praise heaped on the Natura 2000 network, the fact is that it still does not have a specific EU financial instrument designed to support its management, which is jeopardising the integrity of its objectives and threatening the proper conservation of the environmental treasures that prompted its creation. The cross-domain approach supported by the Commission — according to which the Natura 2000 network should be managed through a range of non-specific instruments from rural development policy to the Life programme — has proved limited and has produced inadequate results. It might be pointed out that a number of countries have cut rural development spending while the Life programme’s objectives have been expanded to include climate action.

What is the Commission’s assessment of this situation?

1. Is it looking into the possibility of proposing a specific instrument geared to the management of areas included in the Natura 2000 network, in line with the principle of greater EU accountability, bearing in mind the value and significance of this network at European level?

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European contributions under the LIFE programme, E-003507/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Renata Briano (S&D), 24-05-2017

In its action plan to increase the protection of nature and biodiversity in the EU, for the benefit of people and the economy (COM(2017)198), the Commission has announced that it will strengthen investment in the Natura 2000 network, calling for a 10% increase in the LIFE budget dedicated to projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity (Action 8(b)). Given that the benefit, provided by a number of ecosystem services, to the EU economy has been estimated at EUR 200-300 billion, the management costs of which are borne mostly by private entities and fund managers, the Commission has provided for just less than EUR 3.5 billion (2014-2020), or EUR 583 million per year, as regards the overall LIFE programme.

1. Does the Commission believe that the ratio between benefits, in terms of production of public goods (ecosystem services), and EU LIFE contributions is proportionate?

2. If not, what measures will the Commission take to increase funding for the production of ecosystem services more effectively?
Implementation of ECA recommendation for full implementation of Directive - Natura 2000, E-002476/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Igor Šoltes (Verts/ALE), 03-04-2017

Biodiversity loss is one of the major environmental changes that the EU is facing. The Natura 2000 network was set up under the Birds and Habitats Directive as a key issue of the EU strategy, up to 2020, to halt biodiversity loss. Natura 2000 includes over 27,000 sites all over Europe, covering more than 18% of the EU’s landmass and approximately 6% of its seas. Member States should ensure that the state of the areas is not deteriorating and adopt conservation measures. A new report by the auditors from the Court of Auditors has revealed weaknesses in management and a lack of reliable information on costs and financing of Natura 2000. Namely, the funding was not sufficiently tailored to the needs of environmental areas. Information provided by Member States was too often incomplete and their comparability was problematic. Auditors also report the need to improve management, financing and monitoring of the programme. Monitoring and reporting systems have not been adequate, as no special performance indicators system exists for how the EU funds are used.

1. How does the Commission intend to implement the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors to ensure full implementation of the Nature directives, and to clarify the financing and accounting for Natura 2000?
2. Will appropriate indicators be developed to enable the results achieved by the programme to be measured?

Access to finance for Natura 2000 network, E-001469/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Maria Grapini (S&D), 03-03-2017

The European Court of Auditors’ new report No 1/2017, published on 21 February 2017, points to the fact that the management, financing and monitoring of Natura 2000 network should be improved. Natura 2000 is a diversified European network of sites with protected natural habitats and species within the European Union. Taking into account the limited integration of Natura 2000 network in EU funding schemes and the fact that this is not among the priority objectives, there is a risk that the available funds for 2014-2020 do not meet the needs of the sites. The Court recommends that the Commission and Member States clarify the form of funding and accounting for the Natura 2000 network, and provide a more reliable measurement of the outputs following implementation of this network.

1. How will the Commission manage these recommendations, taking into account the fact that the EU financing programmes were not adapted to the objectives of Natura 2000 sites and, in particular, the priority action frameworks do not offer a full image of the scheduled allocation of the funds for the 2014-2020 period?

To mobilise Natura 2000 to safeguard the seas and the oceans, E-008099/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Claude Rolin (EPP), 27-10-2016

The European Environment Agency underlined in a 2015 report that only 7% of marine species and 9% of habitats are considered as being in a good state of conservation.

1. While the pan-European Natura 2000 network, a major instrument for saving species and habitats, only covers 4% of marine waters in the whole European Union, could the Commission envisage extending it by 2017?
Launched in 1992, Natura 2000 is a European programme to guarantee the protection of biodiversity. The programme is based on two founding texts, the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive, which promote some important ideas, such as the preservation of biological diversity, the enhancement of our natural heritage, and the survival of endangered species and their habitats. The Natura 2000 network currently includes 27,000 sites in Europe and 1,000 animal and plant species under special protection.

1. What are the main achievements the Commission would put forward as regards the current assessment of Natura 2000?

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Progress in implementation of EU biodiversity strategy, E-005350/2014, Question for written answer to the Council, Rule 117, Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (ALDE), 23-04-2014

In its Council conclusions of June 2012 the Council stresses the need to mobilise additional resources from all possible sources and ensure adequate funding through, inter alia, the future EU financial framework, national sources and innovative financial mechanisms, as appropriate, for the effective implementation of the strategy, including predictable, adequate and regular financing for the Natura 2000 network. It also expresses the importance of further analysing this need and exploring and promoting the use of the innovative financial mechanisms in support of biodiversity policy objectives.

1. Has the Council mobilised additional resources to ensure adequate funding?

2. Does the Council believe that the current funding is adequate to reach the targets of the biodiversity strategy?

3. Has the Council developed innovative financial mechanisms in support of biodiversity policy objectives?

4. If so, can the Council give an overview of these? If not, why not?
## Special report 02/2017 of 5 April 2017

**The Commission’s negotiation of 2014-2020 Partnership Agreements and programmes in Cohesion**

Regional Development | Cohesion Fund (CF)

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### Short summary of questions asked, observations, findings and recommendations

#### Questions asked:
Has the Commission effectively negotiated the Partnership Agreements (PAs) and Operational Programmes (OPs) with the Member States for the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy so that EU funding is more effectively targeted on Europe 2020 Strategy priorities, so that interventions are better justified in terms of investment needs and intended results, and so that the conditions against which the performance of these programmes would be measured had been adequately set.

In particular, the Court assessed whether:

1. the Commission had completed the negotiation of the PAs and OPs with the Member States as quickly as possible and within the regulatory deadlines;
2. the Commission succeeded in ensuring an alignment of Cohesion spending with the Europe 2020 strategy in its negotiation of PAs;
3. the OPs showed clearly which investment needs remained to be addressed and what results are expected from the planned interventions; and
4. the financial monitoring arrangements and the performance indicators for outputs and results allowed for cost-effective monitoring of spending priorities and of performance, and set a solid basis for better performance-based arrangements in allocating funding for the post-2020 programme period.

The audit the period from December 2013 to December 2015, and included:

- an analysis of the timeframe in which the negotiations took place and an assessment of the Commission’s internal procedures for negotiation;
- in-depth analysis of Partnership Agreements and 14 Operational Programmes for five Member States - Spain, Ireland, Croatia, Poland and Romania. We also carried out a study visit to Denmark;
- interviews with staff at the Commission and with officials in the Member States and their permanent representations in Brussels;
- consultations with experts in the field of EU regional, structural and cohesion policies and performance budgeting.

### Findings:

1. Compared to the previous period, the Commission presented its legislative proposal for the 2014-2020 programme period three months later (i.e. October of 2011 compared with July of 2004). The European Parliament and the Council adopted the Cohesion policy legislative package in December 2013, just before the start of the 2014-2020 programme period. Compared to the 2007-2013 period, where the legal base was adopted in July 2006, this represents a delay of five months. More time was needed to find an agreement, due to the need to wait for the adoption of the Financial Regulation (adopted in October of 2012) and of the MFF (adopted in December of 2013), as well as due to the comparatively greater power of the
2. The adoption of the secondary legislation, i.e. a total of 17 implementing and delegated acts was gradually completed until January 2016, i.e. in parallel with adoption of the OPs by the Commission. The Commission provided a considerable number of general and thematic guidance notes to its own staff and to the Member States containing detailed recommendations and instructions on the different topics under negotiation. However, this guidance was made available late in the process also due to the fact that the cohesion policy package was adopted only in December 2013.

3. To help mitigate the impact of the late adoption of the regulations, the Commission started informal negotiations with the Member States as early as 2012. The Commission encouraged Member States to present drafts of the PAs and OPs as early as 2013. However, they were less active in consulting the Commission on draft OPs. Only five of the 14 OPs examined had been informally sent for review.

4. The Court concludes that despite difficulties, the Commission adopted PAs and OPs within the deadlines specified in the Common Provisions Regulation 1303/2013 (CPR) and on average, the time taken to adopt an OP was comparable with the previous programme period, but the time period from the moment when the Commission sends the observations to the Member State until the Member State resubmits the OPs that can be adopted (i.e. where observation made by the Commission has been adequately taken into account) is not counted towards this regulatory timeline. By December 2014, only 64% of the OPs (198) under the Investment for growth and jobs goal had been adopted, almost all of them (151) during the month of December. In the previous programme period 2007-2013, 98% of the OPs had been adopted by the equivalent month (December 2007).

5. The negotiations between the Commission and the Member States were more demanding than in previous periods. The main reasons for this were additional requirements, such as ex-ante conditionalities or the requirement to set out a more explicit intervention logic, IT problems and complex approval process. This, and the quality issues with the initial drafts of programming documents submitted by Member States contributed to long duration of negotiations of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes.

6. Partnership Agreements have proven to be an effective instrument for ring-fencing ESI funding for thematic objectives and investment priorities and supporting the focus on the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs.

7. For most of the 2014-2020 OPs examined, the Commission and Member States have been successful in developing programmes with a more robust intervention logic, i.e. setting out the interventions aims (specific objectives/results) and how these are expected to be achieved (required funding, actions to be undertaken and expected outputs). Where weaknesses did exist, these were due to development needs not being documented and objectives not seeming to address the needs identified. Objectives were often also defined too broadly, or there were doubts as to whether the actions presented in the OP would contribute to the achievement of its objectives and to its results. In such cases, there is a risk of public spending not being correctly allocated or not used in the most effective way.

8. The Court found that the way the OPs are structured resulted in a significant increase in the number of performance indicators for outputs and results that need to be monitored. The fund specific regulations have introduced different requirements for collecting and reporting performance data on outputs and results and for the financial monitoring of investments. There is no common definition of ‘output’ and ‘result’ and no harmonised approach between the different funds as to the use of common indicators (which need to be reported to the Commission). Moreover, Member States have the option of defining additional programme specific output indicators and splitting indicators between regions.

9. The Court’s analysis showed that thousands of performance indicators were created by Member States and the common indicators are significantly outnumbered by programme-specific indicators. This high number of indicators, according to the Court, will result in an additional administrative burden, while it remains to be seen what use will be made by Member States of this data. Given the differences in approach, in particular for the programme-specific indicators, the question whether a meaningful aggregation of performance data will be possible exists. On the positive side, more and better performance data on outputs could pave the way for a more performance-based budget in post-2020.

Recommendations:

The Member States should:
1. provide the Commission with the financial information necessary to effectively monitor compliance with the thematic concentration requirements (including the derogations set out in the ERDF regulation).
2. discontinue the use of unnecessary programme-specific indicators in case of programme modifications.
3. ensure that the data that is relevant to establish the effects of the ERDF interventions is collected.

The Commission should:
1. ensure that its Cohesion policy legislative proposals for the post-2020 period are presented in time to complete the negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council before the start of the programme period.
2. ensure that the ring-fencing of ESI funding to the thematic objectives is respected by the Member States.
3. define a common terminology for ‘output’ and ‘result’ and propose it for inclusion in the Financial Regulation and ensure that the proposals for the sectorial regulations follow these definitions for the post-2020 periods.
4. carry out an analysis of the 2014-2020 programme-specific and common indicators for outputs and results to identify those which are most relevant and best suited to determining the impact of EU interventions.
5. disseminate ‘good practices’ by Member States for evaluations which can best determine the impact of EU interventions and assist the Member States in updating their evaluation plans which include such ‘good practice evaluations’. – use the data collected via the annual implementation reports and the results of ad-hoc and ex-post evaluations for comparative analysis of performance and, where appropriate, to promote benchmarking and allow for policy learning during 2014-2020 period;
6. apply the concept of a performance budget, which links each increment in resources to an increment in outputs or other results, to the funding of Cohesion policy interventions for the post-2020 period, where appropriate. In this context, the Commission should make use of data on the actual unit costs determined during the 2014-2020 period.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

Rapporteur: Georgi Pirinski (S&D)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Welcomes the Court’s findings, conclusions and recommendations in its Special Report No2/2017; considers the Court’s analysis of the 2014-2020 programming phase of ESIF implementation as useful and timely in assisting the legislators and the Commission to draw appropriate conclusions for the post-2020 period;
2. Notes the Commission’s replies and that the Commission accepts fully five of the Court’s recommendations and partially two recommendations; welcomes the Commission’s readiness to implement them and calls on it and the Member States to implement the recommendations fully and in a timely manner;
3. Disagrees with the Court’s and the Commission’s opinion that the EP’s enhanced powers in themselves were a factor for undue delay for adoption of the relevant regulations for the 2014-2020 period;
4. Expects that the Commission will implement in practice its obligation to present its proposal for the post-2020 MFF before 1 January 2018 and that it will present a proposal for a legislative framework for post-2020 Cohesion policy immediately after that;
5. Stresses that the proposal for new regulations for post-2020 Cohesion policy consisting of a single set of rules or otherwise must ensure in practice simplification, enhanced accessibility to funds and successful implementation of the objectives of this policy;
6. Stresses the need to avoid the repetition of the delay in adoption of the OPs, as well as the problems identified by the Court such as more complex, demanding and long negotiations of the ESIF regulations for the 2014-2020 period, late adoption of secondary legislation and guidelines and the need
for multiple rounds of OPs approvals by the Commission; regrets that these shortcomings run counter to the objective of simplification of the Cohesion policy management system;

7. Notes that in SR 2/2017 the Court concludes that the PAs have proven to be an effective instrument for ring-fencing ESI funding for thematic objectives and investment priorities and for supporting the focus on the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth and jobs; underlines, however, that the successful implementation of the objectives requires an adequate budget for Cohesion policy post 2020;

8. Observes that, unlike in previous periods, the Commission’s observations on the draft OPs were required to be adopted by the College of Commissioners while in the previous programing period only the final OPs needed to be adopted by the College; urges the Commission to reconsider the added value of such a procedure when drafting its proposal for the post-2020 programing period;

9. Calls on the Commission to carefully analyse the problems indicated above and to take measures for avoiding them in the post-2020 period, including all necessary improvements and allowing swift and quality programming;

10. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to enhance their consultation in the drafting of the OPs which should facilitate a speedy process of their approval;

11. Underlines the importance of the use of precise and harmonised terminology which allows proper measurement of the cohesion policy achievements; regrets that the Commission has not proposed common definitions of “results” and “output” in its proposal for the new Financial Regulation; calls on the Commission to introduce clear common definitions of terms like ‘output’, ‘results’ and ‘impact’ as soon as possible and well before the beginning of the post-2020 period;

12. Recalls that adequate administrative capacity especially at national and regional level is crucial for smooth management and implementation of OPs, including for monitoring and reporting of objectives and results achieved through relevant indicators; insists, in this regard, that the Commission and Member States use the available technical assistance for improvement of administrative capacity at different levels;

13. Calls on the Commission to strengthen and facilitate sharing of “best practices” at all levels;

14. Is concerned about Member States applying a multitude of additional outcome and result indicators in addition to the indicators provided by the basic legal acts; fears a “gold plating” effect, which could render the use of structural funds more cumbersome and less effective; calls on the Commission to discourage Member States from following such an approach;

15. Highlights the relevance of measuring mid- and long-term impact of programmes as only when impact is measured can decision-makers ascertain whether political objectives were accomplished; calls on the Commission to explicitly measure ‘impact’ during the post-2020 programming period.

**Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees**

European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2017 on building blocks for a post-2020 EU cohesion policy (2016/2326(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

D. whereas the last reform of cohesion policy in 2013 was extensive and substantial, shifting the focus of the policy towards a result-oriented approach, thematic concentration, effectiveness and efficiency on the one hand and principles including partnership, multi-level governance, smart specialisation and place-based approaches on the other;

2. Underlines that growth and regional, economic and social convergence cannot be achieved without good governance, cooperation, mutual trust among all stakeholders and the effective involvement of partners at national, regional and local level, as is enshrined in the partnership principle (Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)); reiterates that the EU cohesion policy’s shared management arrangement provides the EU with a unique tool to directly address the concerns of citizens in relation to internal and external challenges; is of the opinion that shared management, which is based on the partnership principle, multilevel governance and the coordination of different administrative levels, is of significant value in ensuring better ownership and responsibility for policy implementation among all stakeholders;
4. Regrets the late adoption of several operational programmes and the late designation of the managing authorities in some Member States during the current programming period; welcomes the first signs of the accelerated implementation of the operational programmes observed during 2016; urges the Commission to continue with the Task Force for Better Implementation in order to support implementation and to identify the causes of the delays, and to propose practical ways and measures of avoiding such problems at the outset of the next programming period; strongly encourages all actors involved to continue to further improve and accelerate implementation without causing bottlenecks;

6. Recognises that in some Member States the partnership principle has led to closer cooperation with regional and local authorities, while there is still room for improvement in order to ensure the real and early involvement of all stakeholders, including from civil society, with a view to ensuring increased accountability and visibility in the implementation of cohesion policy without increasing administrative burdens or causing delays; underlines that stakeholders should continue to be involved in accordance with the multi-level governance approach; is of the opinion that the partnership principle and the code of conduct should be further strengthened in the future by, for example, introducing clear minimum requirements for partnership involvement;

15. Points out that increasing administrative and institutional capacities – and therefore strengthening national and regional agencies for supporting investments – in the area of the programming, implementation and evaluation of operational programmes, as well as in the quality of professional training, in the Member States and regions is crucial for timely and successful cohesion policy performance and for bringing about convergence towards higher standards; stresses, in this context, the importance of the Taiex Regio Peer 2 Peer initiative which improves administrative and institutional capacity and produces better results for EU investments;

16. Highlights the need to simplify the cohesion policy's overall management system at all governance levels, facilitating the programming, management and evaluation of operational programmes, in order to make it more accessible, flexible and effective; emphasises, in this context, the importance of combating gold-plating in the Member States; asks the Commission to increase the possibilities for e-cohesion and specific types of expenditure, such as standard scales of unit costs and flat-rate amounts under CPR, and to introduce a digital platform or one-stop shops for information for applicants and beneficiaries; supports the conclusions and recommendations hitherto adopted by the ‘High Level Group monitoring simplification for beneficiaries of ESI Funds’, and encourages Member States to implement these recommendations;

35. Reiterates that it is high time to prepare the post-2020 EU cohesion policy in order to launch it effectively at the very start of the new programming period; calls therefore for the Commission’s preparation of the new legislative framework to start in due time, namely swiftly after the presentation and translation into the official languages of the Commission proposal for the next MFF; calls, furthermore, for the timely adoption of all legislative proposals for future cohesion policy, and for guidance on management and control before the start of the new programming period, with no retro-active effect; underlines that the delayed implementation of operational programmes affects the efficiency of cohesion policy;

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[The European Parliament, ]

A. whereas the late conclusion of the 2014-2020 MFF negotiations and the late adoption of the ESI Funds regulations resulted in delays in the process of adoption and implementation of partnership agreements and operational programmes, designation of managing, certifying and auditing authorities, the process
of defining and fulfilling ex-ante conditionalities, and project implementation at local, regional and national level; whereas, although factual information and analysis are missing on the reasons for these delays, they are impacting in the first part of the programming period on the potential of the ESI Funds to increase competitiveness and enhance social, economic and territorial cohesion;

1. Reiterates the contribution made by ESI Funds investments to reducing economic, social and territorial disparities within and between the European regions, as well as to generating smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and job creation; expresses concerns, therefore, that further delays in the implementation of cohesion policy operational programmes will impact negatively on the achievement of these goals, contributing moreover to a widening of the differences in regional development;

2. Acknowledges that the introduction of several new requirements, such as thematic concentration, ex-ante conditionalities and financial management, despite ensuring increased performance of the programmes, contributed in the context of the late adoption of the legislative framework to the delays in implementation; draws attention to the fact that the current pace of implementation risks leading to large amounts of decommitments in the following years, and emphasises that necessary measures should be taken to avoid this; calls on the Commission to indicate the actions it foresees in this regard;

3. Stresses that, due to these implementation delays, the use of financial instruments under the ESI Funds operational programmes might increase the already existing risk of low disbursement rates, excessive capital endowments, an inability to attract satisfactory levels of private capital, a low leverage effect and problematic revolving; notes that further clarifications and actions are needed to achieve an equal level of capacity to work with financial instruments as leverage tools in the Member States, and calls on Member States to make a balanced use of these instruments put in place by the Commission and the EIB; recalls also the possibility of combining funding from the ESI Funds and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) in order to address the fall-off in investment, in particular in sectors best placed to boost growth and employment;

8. Calls on the Commission to consider and develop solutions, including additional forms of flexibility such as flexibility among priorities and among operational programmes at the request of the relevant managing authorities, in keeping with the Europe 2020 strategy objectives while ensuring the required stability and predictability, and the already proposed reflow of decommitments, including from heading 1b, as a result of total or partial non-implementation, into the EU budget, also with a view to the future programming period;

9. Calls for efforts to be increased with a view to ensuring and facilitating synergies between the EU funding opportunities, such as ESI Funds, Horizon 2020 and EFSI, through joint funding, close cooperation among the competent authorities, support for actions in smart specialisation, and through closer coordination with national bodies underwriting preferential loans for projects in line with the objectives of operational programmes;

11. Reiterates the added value of the adoption of a performance-oriented approach and welcomes the Commission’s efforts to ensure the policy performance in practice; notes the conclusions of the Summary Report of the programme annual implementation reports covering implementation in 2014-2015 and awaits the upcoming Strategic Report by the Commission planned for the end of 2017 that will provide more information on implementation of the priorities by reference to the financial data, common and programme-specific indicators and quantified target values and progress towards the milestones, as well as the situation regarding the completion of the action plans linked to outstanding ex-ante conditionalities.

13. Expects the Commission to continue discussions on these issues in the Cohesion Forum and to come forward with solutions in the 7th Cohesion Report, with a view to ensuring full implementation of cohesion policy and to meeting the EU’s investment needs; calls also for the necessary steps to be taken for a timely start to the post-2020 programming period;
14. Asks the Commission to draw lessons based on the information contained in the annual reports, with a view to the debate on the post-2020 Cohesion Policy;

15. Urges the Commission to submit the legislative package concerning the next programming period by the beginning of 2018 at the latest, and to facilitate a smooth and timely negotiation of the post-2020 MFF, including a regulatory and procedural cushion, in order to avoid system shocks to cohesion policy investments and implementation; believes that the UK referendum result and the upcoming Brexit arrangements should be duly taken into consideration;

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European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on investing in jobs and growth – maximising the contribution of European Structural and Investment Funds: an evaluation of the report under Article 16(3) of the CPR (2016/2148(INI))

D. whereas the negotiations for PAs and Operational Programmes (OPs) for the period 2014-2020 have been a modernised, strongly adjusted and intensive exercise with a new framework for performance, ex ante conditionalities and thematic concentration, but have also resulted in serious delays in the actual commencement of cohesion policy implementation, also because of shortcomings in the administrative capacity of several regions and Member States, matters being further slowed down by the procedure for designation of managing authorities;

47. Welcomes the code of conduct agreed during the negotiations on the current funding period, which outlines the minimum standards for a well-functioning partnership; observes that the code has improved the implementation of the partnership principle in most Member States, but regrets the fact that many Member States have centralised large parts of the negotiation and implementation of the PAs and OPs; stresses the need to actively involve regional and local authorities and other stakeholders at all stages, and therefore calls for their real participation to be guaranteed in future in the negotiation and implementation process in respect of countries’ specific structures; believes that overcentralisation and lack of trust have also played a role in the delayed implementation of ESI Funds, with some Member States and managing authorities less keen to place greater responsibility for management of EU funds in the hands of local and regional authorities;

48. Stresses that clarification is needed from the Commission regarding the performance of Member States and regions on the Article 5 CPR principles, with an emphasis on how government can be encouraged to fully apply the partnership principle; stresses that shared ownership is a precondition for stronger recognition of EU cohesion policy;

49. Supports the Commission’s new approach of setting up special working groups, that is to say project teams intended to ensure better management of ESI Funds in Member States, and calls for this approach to be developed further

56. Is convinced that the future performance-oriented cohesion policy must be founded on data and indicators that are appropriate for measuring efforts, outcomes and impacts achieved, as well as experience at regional and local level in the area (performance-based budgeting, ex ante conditionalities and thematic concentration), as this provides clear practical guidelines for local and regional authorities — including those which have not so far attempted to apply this approach – on the implementation of its principles

57. Underlines that faster take-up of the available funds and a more balanced progression of expenditure during the programming cycle will be needed in
future, also in order to avoid frequently turning to ‘retrospective projects’, which are often aimed at avoiding automatic decommitment at the end of the programming period; takes the view that after adoption of the general regulation and the fund-specific regulations, implementation of the OPs in the next funding period as from 2021 will be able to start more quickly, as Member States will already have experience with a performance-oriented policy after the efforts made for cohesion policy in the period 2014-2020; points out in this regard that Member States should avoid delays in appointing managing authorities for the OPs;

58. Insists that the legislative process to adopt the next MFF should be concluded by the end of 2018, so that the regulatory framework for future cohesion policy can be adopted swiftly after that and can come into force without delay on 1 January 2021;

European Parliament resolution of 11 May 2016 on acceleration of implementation of cohesion policy (2016/2550(RSP))

[The European parliament, ]

D. whereas cohesion policy investments should be coordinated and harmonised with other EU policies, such as the digital single market, the Energy Union, social policy, macro-regional strategies, the Urban Agenda, research and innovation, and transport policy, in order to better contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 strategy’s goals;

2. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to use the ESI Funds to their full potential and in line with the Europe 2020 strategy, in order to enhance social and economic cohesion and reduce territorial disparities by enabling all regions to become more competitive and to facilitate investment, including from private sources

10. Is concerned about the delays experienced by Member States in the designation of the programme and certifying authorities, which in turn delay the submission of payment applications by Member States, thus preventing the smooth implementation of programmes;

11. Believes that over-centralisation and lack of trust can also play a role in delaying the implementation of ESI Funds, with some Member States and Managing Authorities less keen to place greater responsibility for management of EU funds in the hands of local and regional authorities, including through new development tools such as Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD); while acknowledging the part played by the EU regulatory framework in fostering this attitude, calls on the Commission to help further facilitate exchanges of best practice between Member States and regions on successful examples of subdelegation;

13. Underlines the fact that assessing (the acceleration of) the implementation of cohesion policy now could provide some important learning points for the Commission with a view to the discussion of future cohesion policy post-2020; asks the Commission to formulate key learning points and to engage with Parliament, the Member States and other relevant stakeholders on the future of ESI Funds post-2020 as early as possible, with a view to increasing their targeted use and timely implementation;

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European Parliament resolution of 4 February 2016 on the role of local and regional authorities in the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) (2015/3013(RSP))
whereas for the first time (for the 2014-2020 period), a coherent framework, the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), was created, setting common rules for all five European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds): the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF);

whereas the partnership and multilevel governance principles, as set out in Article 5 of the CPR, are among the core principles of the ESI Funds;

Underlines the key role of local and regional authorities in shaping and implementing EU strategies, while recognising the role of a wide range of stakeholders from Member States to community groups; believes, furthermore, that the proximity of these authorities to citizens and the diversity of governance at local and regional level is an asset to the EU;

Is in favour of synergies and complementarity between the ESI Funds and other EU programmes, in which local and regional authorities can play a useful role in attaining the objectives of cohesion policy; stresses, however, that any reprogramming of ESI Funds should be done in accordance with CPR rules and that new initiatives should not weaken the core of the ESI Funds;

Points to the reinforced partnership principle and the European Code of Conduct on Partnership, which set out the legal involvement of local and regional authorities and provide for minimum requirements for their involvement in all phases of the preparation and implementation of operational programmes; recognises that, although local and regional authorities were consulted in most cases during the negotiations on the partnership agreements and operational programmes, their involvement did not amount to full partnership; urges the Member States, therefore, to fully comply with these requirements and increase efforts to address deficiencies;

Stresses that enhancing the administrative capacity and tackling the structural weaknesses of local and regional authorities are pivotal to both the programming and the implementation phases of the operational programmes and to achieving a higher absorption rate of ESI funds; calls, therefore, on the Commission to ensure that support is provided for capacity building for local and regional authorities and their administrations and institutions, so that they are in a position to play a meaningful role in cohesion policy, especially in the event of sub-delegation of implementation tasks to lower levels of administration, in particular urban authorities;

Calls on the Commission to continue to build upon previous and ongoing initiatives, including public consultations, in order to identify measures to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities in the management and implementation of the ESI Funds through the partnership agreements and operational programmes;

European Parliament resolution of 28 October 2015 on cohesion policy and the review of the Europe 2020 strategy (2014/2246(INI))
relevant civil society stakeholders and interested parties from the target-setting and development of objectives to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy; insists on the crucial importance of a strengthened governance structure based on multi-level governance, incentive structures, an effective mixed top-down / bottom-up approach, the partnership model of cohesion policy and public-private partnerships in general, with a view to the consultation and cooperation of all stakeholders, in order to ensure effective capacity to deliver on the long-term objectives; recalls that, in accordance with Member States’ institutional and legal frameworks, regional and local authorities are also responsible for public investment and should therefore be acknowledged as key actors in the implementation of the strategy;

19. Suggests, moreover, that the commitment by LRAs and stakeholders in the Europe 2020 strategy project should be renewed in the form of a pact between those partners, the Member States and the Commission, in order to ensure ownership and participation and that a code of conduct similar to the one on partnership, introduced by cohesion policy 2014-2020, should be adopted;

28. Considers that the review of the Europe 2020 strategy, which will precede the launch of the proposal for the mid-term revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2014-2020, will provide the basis for the future cohesion policy architecture post-2020, as well as for other MFF instruments; stresses, in this context, the importance of effectively addressing all the concerns raised above, while ensuring the continuity of the strategic approach; recalls, also, the added value of an EU-wide cohesion policy, which must continue to be one of the main EU investment instruments for growth, job creation and climate protection, while ensuring balanced, harmonious development across the EU, as a catalyst for change and a stimulator of prosperity, including in the less developed regions; underlines, in this regard, the need to ensure a sustainable level of financing for the ESI Funds after 2020;

29. Points out that both future cohesion policy and the future EU long-term strategy should be drafted before the end of the Commission’s current term, bearing in mind that there will be elections to the European Parliament in 2019, and that this imposes significant specific time constraints on the co-legislators as regards the negotiation calendar, and on the new Commission and the Member States as regards the preparation and adoption of the new partnership agreements and operational programmes before the start of the next MFF; notes, at the same time, that negotiations will also be entered into on the future MFF; calls on the Commission, therefore, to take into consideration all the specific constraints generated by interlinkages and timing coordination requirements and to develop a coherent approach as regards the EU’s future long-term sustainable growth and jobs strategy, the EU budget, cohesion policy in particular, and other instruments under the MFF;

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C. whereas the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes are strategic tools for guiding investments in Member States and regions, in line with the overall Europe 2020 goal of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;

D. whereas Articles 14, 16 and 29 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 lay down the timeline for the submission and adoption of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes, according to which Partnership Agreements should have been adopted by the end of August 2014 and Operational Programmes by the end of January 2015 at the latest;

E. whereas there is a clear delay in the programming process, with only a limited number of Operational Programmes (just over 100) expected to be adopted by the end of 2014;
G. whereas two scenarios are envisaged for the adoption of Operational Programmes, both implying further delays as regards the start of implementation, namely: (i) the carry-over procedure for those programmes considered ‘ready for adoption’ by 31 December 2014, and (ii) the rebudgeting of the unused 2014 allocation for the European Structural and Investment Funds – entailing a technical revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) – for those considered ‘not ready for adoption’ by the end of 2014;

[The European Parliament,]

1. Expresses its serious concern as regards the significant delay in the implementation of cohesion policy for the 2014-2020 period, while recognising the importance of adopting high-quality Operational Programmes at the start of the programming period in order to avoid reprogramming at a later stage;

2. Stresses that the current delays are challenging national, regional and local authorities’ capacity to plan effectively and implement the European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2014 2020 period;

7. Stresses, moreover, that in order to have the Operational Programmes adopted, a corresponding draft amending budget covering the respective commitment appropriations for 2015 also needs to be approved, and that this implies, in the best-case scenario, a delay in the effective start of the implementation of those programmes until mid-2015;

11. Requests that the EUR 315 billion investment package to be announced by the Commission be fully complementary with the 2014-2020 cohesion policy;

<table>
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<th>Oral / Written Questions</th>
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<td><strong>Delayed implementation of European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds operational programmes – Impact on cohesion policy and the way forward</strong>, 000005/2017, Question for oral answer to the Commission, Rule 128, Iskra Mihaylova, on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development, 24-01-2017 Owing to the late conclusion of the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF) negotiations and the ESI Funds regulations, there are significant delays in the implementation of operational programmes, the designation of managing, certifying and auditing authorities and project implementation at local and regional level. The magnitude of the delays resulted in a nearly 24 % decrease in payment appropriations under Heading 1b in the 2017 draft EU budget as compared with the 2016 EU budget appropriations. Delayed implementation already led, in 2016, to a proposed reduction in payments under Heading 1b by EUR 7 billion through draft amending budget (DAB) No 4/2016. 564 ESI Funds operational programmes had been adopted by September 2016, and authorities had been designated for 334 programmes. Execution of interim payments equalled EUR 11.5 billion. The submission of new payment applications in 2016 reached EUR 10 billion. Outstanding payment claims for the programming period 2007-2013 totalled EUR 3.9 billion. The Committee on Regional Development (REGI) underlines the need for an implementation action plan in the first quarter of 2017. On the basis of the implementation reports to be made available by the Commission by the end of 2016, we propose a debate on this action plan, with a view to receiving answers to the following questions:</td>
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<td>1. Is the Commission considering forms of further flexibility such as the proposed reflow of decommitments, including from Heading 1b, as a result of total or partial non-implementation, into the EU budget?</td>
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<td>2. Will it maintain an adequate payments plan until 2023 and propose increasing payment ceilings, if necessary, until the end of the current programming period?</td>
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<td>3. Given the challenges that lie ahead, how will it deploy the needed technical assistance and advisory services to managing, certifying and auditing authorities with a view to facilitating and speeding up implementation of the policy on the ground?</td>
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<td>4. Is it prepared to continue the discussion on these issues in the Cohesion Forum and to come forward with solutions in the 7th Cohesion Report, while also taking the necessary steps to ensure the timely start of the post-2020 period?</td>
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Consequences of delays in the implementation of the EU structural and investment funds, E-009174/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Laurenţiu Rebega (ENF), 02-12-2016

We are now almost three years into the programming period for operational programmes financed under the structural and investment funds, and significant delays have arisen in the implementation of those programmes. Those delays are due to the introduction of new conditions imposed by Member States, such as the requirement to meet a host of ex-ante conditions and the requirement to concentrate financial support on measures that contribute most effectively to achieving the EU Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

This has meant that the budget allocations for the first part of the programming period 2014-2010 could not be spent and were reassigned to subsequent years, thus creating a major risk of structural and investment funding being decommitted in the future.

The current delays are hampering the efforts of the competent national authorities to plan and implement the funding for the period 2014-2020.

1. Given these circumstances, what steps will the Commission take to counteract the consequences of the delays in the implementation of the European structural and investment funds?

Further details regarding Commission answer to question E-007571/16, E-009379/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Raffaele Fitto (ECR), 13-12-2016

In its answer, the Commission says it is aware of the delays and points out that these depend on several factors, such as: the late adoption of the programmes; delays in the designation of the authorities responsible for the management and the control of the funds; delays depending on requirements to be complied with both by the national government (preparation of programmes and designation of authorities) and the Commission, in the programme approval procedure which ended in 2015. To date, it appears that project selection procedures to the tune of only EUR 6 billion have been launched, compared to overall programmed funding of EUR 105 billion.

Can the Commission therefore clarify the following:

1. What were the reasons for the delay in adopting the programmes and what role did the Cohesion Agency play in the launch of the 2014-2020 programming period, given that up to now there have been only delays, partly due also to tasks this agency has been assigned?
2. What were the reasons for the belated designation of the authorities responsible for management and control, given that the partnership agreement adopted in 2014 and the individual plans adopted in 2015 laid down stringent rules in this regard and identified the bodies which were to perform these important tasks?
3. Will the selection procedures launched enable legally binding commitments to be made in 2016, so that the funds can actually be spent?

State of play in the accreditation of ESIF Managing Authorities by Member States, P-006356/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Victor Boştinaru (S&D), 29-08-2016

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) are managed based on the principle of shared management. The Managing Authorities designated by each Member State are essential for the implementation of the Funds, as they are responsible for the management of the Operational Programmes, including the selection of projects, financial management and anti-fraud measures. In addition, interim payments cannot take place without the relevant Managing Authority being designated. Could the Commission answer the following questions:

1. What is the state of play in the accreditation of Managing Authorities by the Member States for the 2014-2020 programming period?
2. What is the situation as regards Romania, and when does the Commission expect the accreditation process to be completed?
EU cohesion policy, with a budget of over EUR 350 billion until 2020, represents in some Member States the main source of public investment. The objectives of growth enhancement and job creation can be achieved through coherent interaction within the EU economic policy mix of structural reforms and growth enhancing investment, all supported and accelerated by cohesion policy investments.

Under Article 136(1) of the Common Provision Regulation (1303/2013), the Commission ‘shall decommit any part of the amount in an operational programme that has not been used for payment of the initial and annual pre-financing and interim payments by 31 December of the third financial year following the year of budget commitment under the operational programme’. While the fact that the N+2 rule from the 2007-2013 perspective is extended to N+3 for all Member States is positive, serious concern is expressed at the significant delay in the implementation of cohesion policy 2014-2020, including the delay in adoption of Operational Programmes.

1. How does the Commission intend to speed up implementation of cohesion policy? What measures are being envisaged to facilitate the implementation of the Operational Programmes in order to avoid the decommitment of funds?

2. Also, looking back to the 2007-2013 programming period, can the Commission provide information about the major obstacles and problems in the Member States during implementation which hampered absorption of the funds? Can the Commission also indicate the amounts at risk of decommitment envisaged at this stage? Can the Commission provide information on the results of the intervention of the Task Force for better Implementation in the eight Member States covered between 2014 and the end of 2015?

3. What will be the focus of the activities of the Task Force for Better Implementation for the 2014-2020 programming period?

4. Since administrative capacity is a key precondition for timely and successful performance of cohesion policy, will the Commission support strengthening administrative capacity for implementation and evaluation? What actions are being envisaged in this regard?

5. Bearing in mind that a correlation exists between good governance and absorption capacity, what measures will be suggested in order to encourage structural reforms, growth and investment-friendly fiscal consolidation, and also to improve financial management?

6. Timely payments are important for the proper implementation and credibility of the policy. What measures are being envisaged to ensure full implementation of the Payment Plan in the context of the 2016 budget and for the coming years?

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Ex ante conditions in partnership agreements

The new legal framework governing European structural and investment funds in the period from 2014 to 2020 has established the concept of ex ante conditions, that is to say, conditions which are based on predetermined criteria and considered a sine qua non for the effectiveness and efficiency of EU support and which are to be encompassed within partnership agreements. In this way the Commission has imposed a requirement on Member States both to carry out internal assessments to determine whether such conditions are fulfilled and how they are being met and to incorporate summaries of those assessments in the partnership agreements submitted in 2014. When drawing up ERDF, CF, and ESF operational programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period, Member States must themselves assess whether the ex ante conditions are fulfilled. If they conclude that conditions are not fulfilled, they have to draw up action programmes ensuring their fulfilment by 31 December 2016. Once that deadline has passed, the Commission, should it consider that a given Member State has failed to fulfil the requisite conditions, may suspend payments to that Member State.

1. To avoid possible suspension of payments, will the Commission draw up measures to help Member States prevent that from happening?
On 29 October 2014, in response to my question on the European Structural Funds 2014-2020, Commissioner Hahn stated that the Commission had adopted 17 partnership agreements and 13 operational programmes based on the Member States’ cohesion policy.

1. Can the Commission say how many and which countries have had their partnership agreement and operational programme adopted by the Commission to date?

2. When will the last partnership agreements and operational programmes be adopted?

Following on from the debate at the plenary sitting on 12 November 2014 regarding the delays in the start-up of cohesion policy for 2014-2020, the questioners wish to express their concern over the fact that operational programmes have not been approved for the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and the Cohesion Fund and that, according to estimates, no more than 100 will have been adopted for the whole of the EU by the end of the year.

While realising that the Commissioner has taken up office only this month and therefore no criticism may be made of her, the following questions are posed:

1. Can the Commission indicate the exact state of play as regards the adoption of the partnership agreements and operational programmes, and the estimated timeframe for starting their implementation?

2. What measures does the Commission plan to take to speed up programming and facilitate the implementation of the operational programmes?

3. What are the main problems encountered, and by which Member States?

The implementation of cohesion policy was supposed to start in 2014, but the programming stage is still far from being finalised: only a few Operational Programmes (OPs) have been adopted and – according to the latest information available – only 100 will actually be adopted by the end of this year. Moreover, for programmes not ready for adoption by 31 December 2014, the 2014 commitments can only be preserved by re-budgeting uncommitted amounts from 2014, in accordance with Article 19 of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) Regulation. However, this implies a revision of the MFF on the basis of a Commission proposal, with the Council’s agreement and Parliament’s consent. As a direct consequence, there will be significant delays in the concrete start-up of project implementation. However, 2014 should not be a lost year as regards investments from the five European Structural and Investment Funds.

1. In the light of the above, can the Commission indicate the exact state of play as regards the adoption of the Partnership Agreements and OPs, and the estimated timeframe for starting their implementation?

2. What were the main problems encountered, and by which Member States?

3. What is the Commission’s current position regarding the treatment of commitments for OPs co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and the Cohesion Fund which will not be adopted by the end of 2014? Why was the issue of re-budgeting uncommitted amounts from 2014 in 2015 through an MFF revision not brought to Parliament’s attention until now? What can be done to ensure that the revision process goes smoothly and is finalised before 1 May.
2015, as specified in Article 19 of the MFF Regulation, so as to avoid losing uncommitted amounts from 2014? In this connection, does the Commission envisage taking any measures to facilitate the implementation of OPs?

4. What measures does the new Commission plan to take to speed up programming in order to ensure that the adopted OPs are implemented as soon as possible, without prejudice to their quality?

5. Can the Commission provide information as to how the situation with regard to unpaid bills from the 2007-2013 programming period affects the adoption of OPs and the start of the new implementation period?

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**Structural Funds 2014-2020 - Partnership Agreement**, E-008592/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Cláudia Monteiro de Aguiar (EPP), 31-10-2014

Last year, the Member States agreed a multi-annual budget for 2014-2020 of 960 billion euros, with 322 billion euros being allocated to cohesion policies. Several countries have already submitted partnership agreements for the period 2014-2020, and are now drawing up national and regional programmes. Can the Commission say:

1. Which countries have not yet approved the partnership agreement for 2014-2020 and what point has each of them reached in the process?
2. As regards Portugal, when are all the regulations likely to be approved and actually enforced?
3. Based on the programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, what amounts will Portugal be able to use from cohesion policy funds in 2015?

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**European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020**, E-006726/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Hugues Bayet (S&D), 09-09-2014

In November 2013 the European Parliament adopted the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework of the European Union. Under that framework, EUR 351.8 billion have been earmarked for cohesion policy. This will be the EU’s principal investment tool with a view to attaining the Europe 2020 objectives of creating growth and jobs, tackling climate change, cutting energy dependence and reducing poverty and social exclusion.

With this in mind, each Member State was asked to draw up an operational programme for negotiation with the Commission.

1. What is the state of play with regard to the negotiations with the different Member States?
2. When will it be possible for EU funds to be allocated to each Member State?

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**Preparations for 2014-2020/Partnership Agreement**, E-014359/2013, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, Petru Constantin Luhan (EPP), 19-12-2013

Given that we are very close to starting the next programming period, would like you to clarify what stage national preparations are currently at.

1. How many Member States have already submitted a final or draft version of the Partnership Agreements?
2. At what stage are the negotiations on adopting the Partnership Agreement with Romania and how does Romania fare in relation to the other Member States in this regard?
3. Furthermore, what is the situation regarding the submission of operational programmes at European level, as well as Romania’s operational programmes?

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**Partnership agreements**, E-013637/2013, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, Nikos Chrysogelos (Verts/ALE), 02-12-2013
The 2014-2020 partnerships require priorities to be hierarchized and social partners to be consulted and plans to be prepared that comply with the regulations of the five European structural and investment funds, based on an analysis of data and needs. In view of the fact that

- plans must be prepared based on the principle of multi-level consultation and must be in keeping with the priorities and arrangements of the regulations (common framework and special regulations for each fund);
- the first preliminary draft had to be sent to the European Commission by 17 June 2013 and the second preliminary draft had to be ready by the end of July 2013;
- the final regulations were adopted by the European Parliament following tripartite dialogue (European Parliament, Commission, Council);
- implementation of the new programming period 2014-2020 is due to start on 1 January 2014,

Will the Commission say:

1. How many Member States have filed plans for the Partnership Agreements 2014-2020?
2. How many of those plans satisfy the requirements of the regulations, have been accepted and are progressing and which plans by Member States have been returned for further processing?
3. Which Member States have properly applied the principle of multilevel consultation in order to prepare Partnership Agreements?
4. Did Greece file plans by the deadlines and, if so, what are the Commission’s comments on them?

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Conclusion of partnership agreements between the Member States and the Commission, E-011474/2013, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, Rareş-Lucian Niculescu (EPP), 08-10-2013

In the context of establishing the investment priorities of all Member States in the light of the 2014-2020 financial framework, through a well-defined contractual relationship, can the Commission answer the following questions?

1. How many of the Member States have submitted projects for the conclusion of partnership agreements with the Commission?
2. What is the status of the negotiations on these agreements and how many of them have already been signed so far?
Questions asked:
The audit examined whether the EU assistance delivered to Tunisia after the Arab Spring revolution of 2011 has been well spent. In order to carry out this assessment, the audit of the efficiency and effectiveness of the assistance answered the following sub-questions:

1. Did the EEAS and the Commission address key challenges faced by Tunisia?
2. Did the Commission implement its programmes well?

Findings:
1. The EEAS and the Commission addressed most key challenges with substantial additional funds in coordination with the main donors but aid was not sufficiently focused

While the macroeconomic and democratic reform challenges could be tackled relatively quickly, the same was not true for the security sector reform. The Tunisian government signed up to the Commission’s proposal for a security sector reform in November 2015, four years after the initial request, because it took two years before Tunisian authorities agreed on the terms of reference for a peer review of the country’s security sector.

The Court noted that an excessively wide range of activities was covered and strategic documents set very broad priority areas. The huge variety of actions was contrary to the Commission’s own objective, and at the same time best practice, of focusing aid on a small number of fields. By not sufficiently focusing its efforts, the Commission diluted the potential impact of the funding and made its management more difficult.

With regard to donor cooperation, the EU actions were well coordinated with the main international development stakeholders in Tunisia such as the IMF, World Bank, African Development Bank (ADB) and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). The EU Delegation (EUD) actively facilitated the coordination of the donors who met at least monthly and discussed in detail the planning of the programmes as well as the problems which arose during their implementation. However, despite an ongoing collaboration the Commission and the EEAS did not manage to establish joint programming with the Member States as recommended by the ENI regulation.

2. EU actions substantially assisted Tunisia but there were shortcomings in the Commission’s implementation of programmes
The Court acknowledged that general budget support was disbursed quickly but the conditionality attached was too flexible.

Moreover, when using ‘more for more’ funds, supposed to stimulate the realisation of the reform agenda by linking the support to the progress made, the Commission rarely imposed additional requirements. Only a variable tranche in the PAR3 programme included specific conditions that must have been fulfilled in order to obtain extra funding. It was also noted that the large number of addressed areas diluted the focus of the policy dialogue with the partner country.

The PAR disbursements were conditional on the respect of several specific measures, namely 27 specific measures, covering a wide range of areas such as transparency, democratic participation, justice and the fight against corruption, public finance, regional disparities, micro-finance and economic growth.

The Court pointed out that the Commission took payment decisions having assessed overall progress and the government commitment to a national development plan rather than the completion of each measure required from the Tunisian authorities. This approach reduced the partner’s incentive to take the measures set out in the financing agreement and weakened the leverage the Commission could exert on the Tunisian authorities to implement much needed reforms.

The Commission also focused on output measures as opposed to long term results because of the political instability in the country. In consequence, even in the areas where the Tunisian government has taken some steps, implementation of certain structural reforms continues to be unsatisfactory or slow.

Another shortcoming was the absence of an overall evaluation of the PAR programmes. Although the Commission made use of various evaluations that were carried out by different international organisations on specific aspects of governance, they were not intended to substitute for Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) - a thorough and widely respected overall assessment of public financial management. PEFA would have acted as an indicator of possible weaknesses which might have needed to be urgently addressed. However, major delays in contracting an expert and in discussing the draft report with the Tunisian authorities postponed the finalisation of this instrument by three years, until March 2017.

In general, some progress has been made in the areas covered by the programmes, but the pace of reforms has been slow. The actions undertaken in the domains of transparency and participation, Civil Society participation, public finance management, regional disparities, social inclusion, micro-finance, and economic growth brought about tangible improvements, yet there are still plenty of challenges lying ahead.

The MFA loan was another type of the EU assistance, which the Tunisian government asked for in August 2013. This aid, deemed as urgent, took 21 months from the initial request to the first payment. Although much of the delay could be seen as outside the control of the EU, the Court recognised that, in the context of a request for prompt financing, it still took a considerable amount of time (9-10 months) to process this loan at the EU level.

The MFA programme provided for specific reforms through the conditions for disbursement in the loan agreement. The Commission ensured that the loan was well coordinated with the PAR programmes and the technical assistance provided by the EU and the other donors. As a result, Tunisia was encouraged to adopt additional reforms in exchange for much needed finance at low cost.

The Court considered the sectoral budget support programmes to be relevant but lacking credible strategies. For two out of the three programmes audited relating to the water sector and support to municipalities no detailed comprehensive plan was available showing the priorities and how these were to be tackled.

There were also problems with the design of the conditions. Some of them had unknown baselines at the time of the signature of the programme, others were
not appropriate, and certain eligibility criteria were not met at the time of the signature of the financing agreement.

Furthermore, substantial delays occurred (due to either the programme’s environment or weaknesses in the design) in the execution of the two programmes. In one case the implementation period has been extended by 70% of the originally planned schedule and in another case by 33%.

The delays also concerned two technical assistance projects (accompanying the sector budget support programmes) while there was no technical assistance directly related to the implementation of the third one.

In several cases the impact of the programmes was significantly limited due to slow progress of the required reforms. The last form of the EU assistance were projects. According to the Court, projects tackled relevant issues but were affected by design weaknesses, which made performance assessment difficult. The main reservations comprised a lack of relevant, specific and measurable project objectives, missing indicators which didn’t allow proper measurement of performance, monitoring of activities, and timely corrective actions as well as a lack of baseline indicators which restricted the comparison of the situation before and after the action.

In four out of the fourteen projects examined, it was not possible to properly assess the reasonableness of costs and therefore facilitate an assessment of efficiency.

The Commission’s planning documents were also unable to prove the added value of using an intermediary instead of contracting directly with the final beneficiary with regard to two projects.

Substantial delays in the execution of the projects took place. To a large extent, they were due to the fact that the time needed to achieve certain results had been initially underestimated. In most of the cases, time extensions result in the increase of certain costs categories, such as staff costs, which have to be funded from the Commission’s fixed contribution. Less funding will be then available to finance the core activities.

The impact and sustainability of the results achieved were not safeguarded by a proper exit strategy for three projects. The jobs that they created were mainly temporary and their continuation will depend on the availability of further support from other donors.

Another factor impeding the project impact was the slow progress of required reforms. Despite the obstacles, however, the Court stated that projects generally addressed real country needs and contributed to some important progress in relevant areas.

Recommendations:
1. The EEAS and the Commission should:
   a) use political and policy dialogue to ensure that the Tunisian authorities adopt a comprehensive national development plan;
   b) for the next planning period, develop a limited number of specific priorities and reduce the number of actions in order to increase the focus and potential impact of the EU assistance;
   c) make sure that joint programming with Member States is achieved, in order to improve the focus and coordination of the aid.

2. The Commission should:
   a) for future budget support programmes, reduce the number of measures required to meet the conditions attached to Budget Support and ensure that these measures are significant. In order to incentivise the Tunisian authorities to make significant progress with their reforms, the Commission should
make disbursements conditional on the satisfactory attainment of individual measures and performance indicators, rather than on overall progress;

b) strive to ensure that a PEFA, in view of its significance as a planning and monitoring tool, is carried out every four years as a minimum.

3. The Commission should explore with its co-legislators the available options to accelerate the approval procedures of subsequent MFA programmes, particularly for emergency funding.

4. The Commission should, when planning future projects in Tunisia, establish clear objectives and indicators, which are realistic in the particular circumstances of the project concerned.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

CONT Working Document of 13/07/2017 on ECA Special Report 3/2017 (Discharge 2016): EU assistance to Tunisia
Rapporteur: Gilles Pargneaux (S&D)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Notes that the EU actions were well coordinated with the main donors and within the EU institutions and departments; calls on the Commission to make sure that joint programming with Member States is achieved, in order to improve the focus and coordination of the aid;

2. Acknowledges that the Commission and the EEAS had to work in a volatile political, social and security context, which accounted for a major challenge in the delivery of comprehensive aid;

3. Calls on the Commission to further fine-tune the approach for sectoral budget support by outlining the country’s priorities, the design of conditions and thus facilitate a more structured and targeted EU approach and reinforce the overall credibility of the Tunisian national strategy;

4. Notes that the EU funding made a significant contribution to the democratic transition and to the economic stability of Tunisia; asks the Commission and the EEAS, however, to narrow down the focus of their actions to a smaller number of well-defined areas in order to maximise the impact of the EU assistance;

5. Calls on the Commission to follow the best practices concerning the budget support programmes and apply relevant disbursement conditions that will stimulate the Tunisian authorities to undertake essential reforms; expresses its concern about a lenient allocation of ‘more for more’ funds that was usually unrelated to the fulfilment of further requirements and was not preceded by a thorough measurement of the progress made;

6. Stresses the significance of an extensive assessment of Public Finance Management, preferably with the use of PEFA, in order to identify potential weaknesses in the EU aid provision and address them;

7. Asks the Commission to improve the design of the programmes and projects by establishing a set of precise baselines and indicators that will enable to properly evaluate the realisation of the objectives;

8. Highlights the necessity of focusing on long-term, sustainable economic development rather than actions which bring about only temporary recovery on the job market

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2016 on the EU relations with Tunisia in the current regional context, (2015/2273(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

1. Renews its commitment to the Tunisian people and the political transition process that began in 2011; emphasises the challenges and threats facing the country while it consolidates its democratic process, implements the reforms needed to achieve social and economic prosperity and guarantees its security; urges the EU and the Member States to mobilise and better coordinate substantial technical and financial resources in order to provide concrete support for Tunisia; underlines that, without measures to strengthen Tunisia’s absorption capacity and stability, democracy, good governance, the fight against corruption, economic development and employment in the region, any prospect of reform will be put at risk; calls, therefore, for a genuine deep and comprehensive
partnership between the EU and Tunisia;

26. Welcomes the Commission’s proposal for macro-financial assistance of EUR 500 million and its adoption by the Council and Parliament;

29. Calls for the EU to include civil society, local authorities and other important actors in the process of identification of priorities for funding in the mid-term review of the ENI;

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[The European Parliament, ]

14. Considers it essential that Tunisia should receive substantial financial and technical assistance from the EU so that it can properly implement the provisions of the free trade agreement; calls for the financial aid to be granted in a transparent manner and for steps to be taken to ensure that it actually benefits its recipients;

15. Welcomes the support provided by the European Investment Bank to numerous projects in Tunisia; stresses that this support is contributing to Tunisia’s economic diversification and helping to create jobs, particularly for young people;

16. Welcomes the fact that the EU has made Tunisia one of the priority countries in its neighbourhood policy vis-à-vis the countries of the southern Mediterranean, and that it has granted Tunisia a loan of EUR 300 million in the form of macro-financial aid to carry out economic reforms;

17. Calls, nevertheless, on the EU, as well as the Member States, the EIB and the EBRD, to continue to stand alongside the Tunisians and to step up aid and assistance programmes, including through the introduction of exceptional autonomous trade measures, to help Tunisia consolidate its democratic process; welcomes the establishment by some Member States of ‘partnerships for the transformation’ of Tunisia; calls on the EU to continue its programme to reduce regional inequalities in access to basic medical care in Tunisia;

18. Calls on the EU to take account of Tunisia’s specific situation in these negotiations, in particular as regards the fragile nature of the democratic transition and the difference in economic development between the EU and Tunisia, always bearing in mind that solutions that benefit both partners are best;

23. Strongly encourages the Commission and the Tunisian Government to implement a clear and detailed process for involving Tunisian and European civil society throughout the negotiations, and to take an innovative approach to this issue; in that connection, declares itself satisfied with the role played by Tunisian civil society in the first round of negotiations, and calls for the consultation process to be open and transparent and to take greater account of the diversity of Tunisian civil society, drawing on best practices employed in similar negotiations

Oral / Written Questions
EU aid to Tunisia: report of the European Court of Auditors, E-002334/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Hilde Vautmans (ALDE), 30-03-2017
On 28 March 2017, the European Court of Auditors published a special report on EU assistance to Tunisia. The Court welcomed the fact that EU financial assistance to Tunisia, which amounted to EUR 1.3 billion, was well spent, but outlined four recommendations:

- Strengthening the programming and focus of EU assistance;
- Strengthening the implementation of EU budget support programmes;
Making proposals to speed up the macro-financial assistance (MFA) approval process;
Improving the planning of projects.

1. Given that the Commission accepts these recommendations, how will it ensure follow-up, especially on the last two?
2. Within what timeframe does the Commission expect to act upon the recommendations?

Future of EU assistance to Tunisia, E-002795/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Robert Rochefort (ALDE), 19-04-2017
Special Report No 3/2017 by the European Court of Auditors highlights the fact that EU funds played an important role in the democratic transition and the economic stability of the country, but it also underlines too many priority areas to which the Commission is committed, thereby limiting the impact of its funding. That dispersion seems to go against the principles stated in the European consensus on development and in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which stipulate that donors should be committed to a maximum of three sectors per country.
However, in its Joint Communication to the Parliament and Council on 29 September 2016, entitled ‘Strengthening EU support for Tunisia’, the Commission reiterated its intention to continue to cover a broad spectrum of areas of focus. Bearing in mind the Court of Auditors’ report, can the Commission:
1. Specify whether it is planning to reduce the EU’s areas of focus, with a view to better concentrating the effects of the funding in priority areas?
2. Indicate the areas that it believes to be a priority for the coming years in Tunisia?

At what price the sovereignty of Tunisia?, E-004011/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL), 11-03-2015
The financial support accorded Tunisia by the European Union under the Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) programme was recently validated by the Tunisian parliament. In return for a loan of EUR 300 million, Tunisia therefore agreed to apply the reform programme imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The elected members of the Popular Front rightly spoke out against this agreement, which they called a political and economic dictate which will transfer sovereignty from Kasbah to Strasbourg and Washington.
1. Does the Commission therefore put a price of EUR 300 million on Tunisian sovereignty?
2. Given the fact that IMF conditionality has failed wherever it has been applied, does the Commission intend to abolish them?
3. Rather than loans which put it under the yoke of the IMF, does the Commission intend to defend cancellation of Tunisia’s unlawful loan?
Protecting the EU budget from irregular spending: The Commission made increasing use of preventive measures and financial corrections in Cohesion during the 2007-2013 period

Summary

Questions asked:
Are the Commission’s preventive measures and financial corrections in Cohesion effective in protecting the EU budget from co-financing irregular expenditure?

In particular the Court examined whether:
1. the Commission’s financial corrections had sufficient net impact for ERDF and ESF programmes during the 2000-2006 period;
2. the Commission made effective use of the preventive measures and financial corrections during the 2007-2013 period as provided for in the regulations;
3. whether the Commission, made effective use of the lessons it had learnt when devising the arrangements for 2014-2020 in order to better protect the EU budget in Cohesion.

Findings:

1. Overall, the Court found that the Commission made effective use of the measures at its disposal during the 2007-2013 programme period to protect the EU budget from irregular expenditure.
2. Financial corrections for the 2000-2006 period amounted to EUR 8 616 million or 3.8 % of the total budget. For the 2007-2013 period, financial corrections of around EUR 3 326 million had been imposed by the end of 2015, which corresponds to 1.0 % of the total budget envelope. In addition, payments for around EUR 28 446 million had been interrupted (8 % of the total allocated envelope).
3. For the 2007-2013 period, the Commission used the measures at its disposal to protect the EU budget more extensively and it applied preventive measures earlier than in the past. This earlier, more comprehensive and stricter application of preventive measures by the Commission allowed for more timely improvements to a larger number of management and control systems, and also increased the incentives for Member States to make the necessary improvements. Court’s audits since 2009 have shown that the level of error for the 20072013 period is significantly lower than for the 2000-2006 programme period.
4. For the 2007-2013 period, the Court found that the Commission imposed its preventive measures and financial corrections in a proportionate manner and it confirmed that the Commission’s measures for the 2007-2013 period focused on those Member States with the riskiest programmes. The Court also found that the Commission’s assessment of weaknesses and the related financial corrections were in substance confirmed by the European Court of Justice.
5. The Commission’s corrective measures put pressure on Member States to address weaknesses in their management and control systems. However, preventive measures and financial corrections both generally deal with complex issues which take a considerable time and staff resources to resolve. The resulting payment interruptions and suspensions represent a significant financial risk for Member States. They are likely to cause cash flow problems for the Member States due to the reduced volume of funds coming in. The situation can be aggravated if the volume of projects to be financed is significant and/or if the reasons for interruption or suspension are complex, resulting in lengthy remedial actions. Moreover, towards the end of the programme period the risk increases that the blocked expenditure may actually be lost. Uncertainty about calls for payments can also lead to difficulties for the Commission in its budgetary management. During the 2007-2013 period, the Commission therefore aimed to gradually lift measures to ensure that reimbursement could be resumed as soon as the necessary conditions are met.

6. Procedures resulting in preventive measures were mostly triggered by Member State’s own audits and took half the time. According to the Commission, two thirds of preventive measures were triggered by national audit results. This was also the case for 12 of the 16 cases in the Court’s sample. The duration of these procedures was significantly shorter.

7. The Court found that the Commission faced difficulties in monitoring the implementation of financial corrections. The information provided by the Member States on implementation in the 2007-2013 period did not yet allow for robust monitoring. For the 2007-2013 period, the Commission relied on certificates or letters sent by certifying authorities to ascertain that the agreed amount of financial correction has been deducted by the Member State from its payment claim so that the subsequent interim payment can be authorised. The format and the content of these documents were not governed by any rules or guidelines, rather they contained information that the given certifying authority considered relevant. In some of the cases examined, the information received by the Commission was insufficient for it to check the execution of financial corrections. The Court found mixed evidence of the longterm impact of preventive measures and financial corrections for the 2007-2013 period.

8. The Commission’s reporting on preventive measures and financial corrections makes it difficult to get a comprehensive overview of the situation, largely because the information is presented in several reports and documents. At the same time, not one of the Commission reports for the 2007-2013 period provides an analytical overview of preventive measures and financial corrections and no specific report providing an analytical overview was envisaged for the programme period as a whole.

9. Commission reports do not provide enough Member State comparisons and “good practice” examples on how to prevent, detect or correct recurrent problems.

10. The Commission’s information systems do not provide a consolidated overview of preventive measures and financial corrections. The databases do not always contain the necessary information for a comparative analysis between cases. This would facilitate the work of the Interruptions Suspensions and Financial Corrections Committees to ensure that similar cases are treated in a similar way.

11. The regulatory provisions for the 2014-2020 period significantly strengthen the Commission’s position on protecting the EU budget from irregular expenditure, in particular through net financial corrections. This is mainly due to the fact that the Member State’s reporting on financial corrections is now integrated into the annual assurance package and examined by the respective audit authorities. Moreover, the legal provisions introduced for the 2014-2020 period give more power to the Commission to ensure that irregular expenditure is no longer reimbursed from the EU budget. Finally, there is increased legal certainty for Member States due to the rules being set as regulations rather than guidance. The Court considers that these arrangements are a significant improvement in the design of the system.

**Recommendations:**

1. As of March 2017, the Commission should apply a strict approach to financial corrections at the closure of the 2007-2013 period to ensure that the total amounts reimbursed from the EU budget are free from material levels of irregular expenditure.

2. At the latest in mid-2019, the Commission should issue an ad-hoc report on the financial corrections and status of closure of the ERDF/CF and ESF programmes for the 2007-2013 period similar to the report prepared in 2013 for the 2000-2006 period. This report should present and compare all information on preventive and corrective measures by fund and Member State and display the impact of financial corrections and the residual risk rate.
3. By 2019, the Commission should set up an integrated monitoring system covering both preventive measures and financial corrections for the period 2014-2020.
4. The Commission should make effective use of the significantly strengthened provisions for the 2014-2020 period and impose net financial corrections wherever necessary based on its own checks and/or the audits carried out by the European Court of Auditors.

Rapporteur: Georgi Pirinski (S&D)
[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ] |
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<td>1. Acknowledges the importance of implementing the objectives of Cohesion policy, namely to reduce development disparities between regions, restructure declining industrial areas and encourage cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation, thus contributing to the achievement of the EU's strategic objectives; this importance justifies its significant share of the Union budget and thus, emphasises the importance of its sound financial management, of prevention and deterrence of irregularities, as well as of financial corrections;</td>
<td>1. Notes the Commission’s acceptance of all Court’s recommendations and calls on it to implement them fully and in good time;</td>
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<td>2. Welcomes the Court’s findings, conclusions and recommendations in its Special Report No4/2017;</td>
<td>4. Notes that, overall, the Commission made effective use of the measures at its disposal during the 2007-2013 programme period to protect the EU budget from irregular expenditure;</td>
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<td>5. Welcomes the fact that in the 2007–2013 programme period the Commission started implementing corrective measures and financial corrections much earlier than in the 2000–2006 period and with a greater impact; stresses, however, that such corrective measures must ensure the protection of EU’s financial interests while at the same time recognise the importance of timely and effective implementation of the affected operational programmes;</td>
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<td>4. Notes that, overall, the Commission made effective use of the measures at its disposal during the 2007-2013 programme period to protect the EU budget from irregular expenditure;</td>
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<td>6. Calls on the Commission to remain vigilant when examining the closure declarations submitted by Member States for the 2007-2013 programme period, as well as in the future;</td>
<td>8. Underlines that payment interruptions and suspensions represent a significant financial risk for Member States and can also lead to difficulties for the Commission in its budgetary management; calls on the Commission to ensure balanced efforts to protect the budget and the achievement of the objectives of Cohesion policy;</td>
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<td>7. Calls on the Commission to present an analytical and consolidated report on all preventive measures and financial corrections imposed during the 2007-2013 programme period, building on the report for the preceding period;</td>
<td>9. Underlines that if Member States themselves detect irregularities and undertake preventive measures this will result in less time spent on establishing the problems and more time for resolving them, it will also mean that the management and control systems in Member States work effectively and thus the level of irregularities could be below the materiality threshold; calls, therefore, on the Member States to be more proactive and responsible and to detect and correct irregularities based on their own control and audits, to improve management and control systems at national level in order to avoid further net financial corrections and loss of funds;</td>
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<td>8. Underlines that payment interruptions and suspensions represent a significant financial risk for Member States and can also lead to difficulties for the Commission in its budgetary management; calls on the Commission to ensure balanced efforts to protect the budget and the achievement of the objectives of Cohesion policy;</td>
<td>10. Calls on the Member States to provide the Commission with sufficient information in volume and in quality in cases of financial corrections triggered by Commission audits in order to ensure swift procedures;</td>
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<td>9. Underlines that if Member States themselves detect irregularities and undertake preventive measures this will result in less time spent on establishing the problems and more time for resolving them, it will also mean that the management and control systems in Member States work effectively and thus the level of irregularities could be below the materiality threshold; calls, therefore, on the Member States to be more proactive and responsible and to detect and correct irregularities based on their own control and audits, to improve management and control systems at national level in order to avoid further net financial corrections and loss of funds;</td>
<td>11. Stresses, in this regard, the importance of regulatory certainty and proper Commission guidance and technical assistance for Member States’ authorities, including sufficiently specific formulation of its requirements; calls also on the Commission to work in close cooperation with Member States’ authorities in order to improve the efficiency of first and second level controls;</td>
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<td>10. Calls on the Member States to provide the Commission with sufficient information in volume and in quality in cases of financial corrections triggered by Commission audits in order to ensure swift procedures;</td>
<td>12. Calls on the Commission to provide Member States with guidance for harmonised reporting on implementation of financial corrections which will facilitate</td>
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monitoring and evaluation of the impact of financial corrections executed by Member States;

13. Supports the Court’s conclusion that the legal framework as regard financial corrections for the post-2020 programming period should be reinforced but the primary focus must remain on prevention of irregularities and fraud;

14. Calls on the Commission to set up an integrated monitoring system, which allows the information in the databases to be used for comparative analysis, covering both preventive measures and financial corrections for the 2014-2020 period as soon as possible and to provide timely access to information to the Parliament, the Council and the relevant Member States’ authorities;

15. Calls on the Court of auditors in its future audit activity to focus more on systematic weaknesses and provide recommendations to both the Commission and the Member States on improving the functioning of the overall system for financial management and control.

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Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

**European Parliament resolution of 16 May 2017** on the Annual report 2015 on the protection of the EU’s financial interests – Fight against fraud (2016/2097(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

58. Welcomes the fact that the ex-ante and ex-post ‘Community controls’ are detecting more and more cases of irregularities; considers, however, that prevention is easier than recovery of losses and that provision should always be made for an ex-ante independent assessment of projects to be funded; urges the Member States therefore to better carry out the ex-ante controls with the assistance of the Commission and to use all information available to prevent errors and irregular payments related to EU funds; recalls in this respect that budget constraints cannot be invoked as reasons for reducing the staff dedicated to these ex-ante controls, as preventing irregularities pays for itself;

59. Encourages the Commission to further enhance its supervisory role through audit, control and inspection activities, remedial action plans and early-warning letters with a view to reducing irregularities;

60. Urges the Commission to maintain its strict policy on interruption and suspension of payments as a preventive measure against irregularities affecting the EU budget, in accordance with the relevant legal basis;

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**European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2017** on building blocks for a post-2020 EU cohesion policy (2016/2326(INI))

[The European parliament, ]

35. Reiterates that it is high time to prepare the post-2020 EU cohesion policy in order to launch it effectively at the very start of the new programming period; calls therefore for the Commission’s preparation of the new legislative framework to start in due time, namely swiftly after the presentation and translation into the official languages of the Commission proposal for the next MFF; calls, furthermore, for the timely adoption of all legislative proposals for future cohesion policy, and for guidance on management and control before the start of the new programming period, with no retro-active effect; underlines that the delayed implementation of operational programmes affects the efficiency of cohesion policy;

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5. Urges the Commission to assume full responsibility for the recovery of funds unduly paid from the EU budget, as well as for the better levying of own resources, and to establish uniform reporting principles in all Member States for the purpose of collecting appropriate, comparable and accurate data;

10. Is concerned that the average TOR recovery rate per Member State for both fraudulent and non-fraudulent irregularities for 2014 is, at 24 %, at its historic lowest point; urges the Member States to recover the amounts due more quickly, and especially urges those Member States which need to recover the largest amounts to improve their recovery;

21. Is worried, furthermore, that the overall time lapse in the cohesion field between the occurrence of an irregularity, its detection and its final reporting to the Commission has increased to 3 years and 4 months; recalls that further procedures kick in once an irregularity has been detected (recovery orders, OLAF investigations, etc.); urges the Commission to work with Member States to improve the efficiency of their detection and reporting;

80. Notes that there is a discrepancy between the information collected by OLAF from public and private sources in the Member States concerning fraud (OLAF Report 2014) and the highly uneven financial recovery recommended by OLAF to the Member States; calls on the Commission to support initiatives aimed at increasing the recovery rate in fraud cases;

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which Member States classify cases;

11. Is concerned that in 2013 in the OWNRES database the recovery rate for fraud cases stood at only 23.74%, a figure below the average rate of 33.5% for the 2008-2012 period; points out that the recovery rate for irregularity cases reported for 2013 is 67.9%; underlines, in general, the responsibility of Member State authorities and the Commission’s services towards recovering sums unduly paid and calls on them to properly assume this responsibility and substantially increase the recovery rate in cases of fraud, which is in general at a markedly low level compared to the recovery rate for non-fraudulent irregularities;

20. Draws attention to the alarming 76% increase in the number of irregularities reported as fraudulent regarding EU expenditure and urges the competent authorities to take all necessary measures to prevent such a negative trend in the coming years;

27. Notes with concern that in the area of cohesion policy there has been an increase of 15% in the number of cases of irregularities reported; also notes, however, that decreases of 49% have been noted in the amounts involved in non-fraudulent cases and 22% in cases of fraud;

28. Notes that 321 irregularities reported as fraudulent and 4,672 irregularities reported as non-fraudulent were cohesion-policy related; acknowledges the fact that in both categories the number of reports increased by 15% as compared to 2012 and that, as in previous years, the largest share of amounts that involved irregularities in 2013 (63%) is still related to cohesion policy; points out, however, that in both categories the corresponding amounts decreased, a gradual improvement based on the experience of previous years can be seen and that for the first time, cohesion policy was not the area of budgetary expenditure with the highest number of irregularities reported as fraudulent;

30. Notes that for the expenditures under centralised management in a five-year perspective, the recovery rate is 54.4% for irregularities reported as fraudulent and 63.9% for non-fraudulent irregularities; urges the Commission to further improve the recovery process and to make it more timely;

32. Is concerned by the fact that for the recovery orders qualified as irregularities (both reported as fraudulent and not reported as fraudulent) issued between 2009 and 2013 under centralised management, the average delay between the occurrence of an irregularity and its detection is 3.4 years; more than half of the cases (54%) were detected within 4 years of the year when the irregularity was committed, and for the other half (46%) the delay varied between 4 and 13 years; recalls that after detection of the irregularity, further procedures kick in (recovery orders, OLAF investigations, etc.); requests that the Commission determine the average, minimum and maximum lifespan of a detected irregularity under centralised management;

34. Notes with satisfaction that for the programming period 2007-2013 administrative verifications, on-the-spot checks and audit operations led to the significantly higher rate of 63% in the detection of fraudulent irregularities, compared with a rate of less than 20% for the preceding seven-year period, although there was a slight decrease to 55% in 2013;

39. Underlines its concerns as regards the persisting threats to the EU budget, which stem from both failures to comply with the rules (non-fraudulent irregularities) and purposeful wrongdoings and criminal offences (i.e. fraud); insists on enhanced cooperation between the Member States and the Commission with a view to securing relevant and adequate measures and means for avoiding and rectifying non-fraudulent irregularities and combating fraud;

43. Considers that Member States which detect and report irregularities, including cases of fraud, on their own should be supported and encouraged to further improve their reporting and management systems; expresses concern at the Commission’s inability to establish whether or not the low number of irregularities and cases of fraud detected by certain Member States and the wide gaps in the number of cases reported for different years are due to the ineffectiveness of these Member States’ control systems;
European Parliament resolution of 9 September 2015 on ‘Investment for jobs and growth: promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Union’ (2014/2245(INI))

The European Parliament,

31. Points out that irregularities stem to a considerable degree from complex requirements and regulations; underlines that the number of irregularities in the implementation of cohesion programmes could be reduced through the simplification of management and procedures, early transposition of the newly adopted relevant directives and reinforcement of administrative capacity, notably in the less developed regions; stresses, therefore, the need to minimise the administrative burden for beneficiaries when ensuring the verifications necessary to ensure proper use of ESIF appropriations, as well as the need for efforts to optimise and improve the flexibility of management and control systems, place greater focus on risk assessment and correct the allocation of responsibilities among all authorities, while at the same time not undermining established strengthened control procedures, in order to prevent irregularities more effectively and, as a consequence, avoid financial corrections and interruptions in, and suspensions of, payments; is concerned about the low rates of disbursement of financial instruments to beneficiaries, in particular in view of the objective to increase the use of these instruments; asks, in this regard, the Member States, the managing authorities and other relevant stakeholders working with these financial instruments to make full use of the technical assistance provided through the Financial Instruments-Technical Advisory Platform (FI-TAP) and the fi-compass.

Oral / Written Questions

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<tr>
<th><strong>Financial corrections under Article 99 and Article 98 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006</strong></th>
<th><strong>E-003411/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Iliana Iotova (S&amp;D), 27-04-2016</strong></th>
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<td>Is the Commission to impose financial corrections on Bulgaria under Article 99 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 relating to the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund, and the corresponding operational programmes in Bulgaria for the period 2007-2013, or will these be financial corrections under Article 98, meaning that the amounts cannot be reused, owing to expiry of the deadlines set in that Article and resulting in a net loss of European funding for the Member State concerned?</td>
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<th><strong>Monitoring of Member States’ funding systems</strong></th>
<th><strong>E-001698/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Péter Niedermüller (S&amp;D), 26-02-2016</strong></th>
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<td>Regrettably, the answer to Question E-014161/2015 does not adequately reply to one of the questions put: ‘How will the Commission respond to the fact that in some Member States the national institutional system is either unable or unwilling to monitor programmes appropriately?’ The fact that this is the situation in Hungary has been shown even more unambiguously than previously by OLAF’s launching procedures, inter alia, because of irregularities which have occurred in connection with financial frameworks for national monitoring of the regularity of tenders and public procurement. At the same time, according to OLAF’s report for 2014, 28 procedures were carried out in Hungary, but the authorities did not indicate a single one of them to be well-founded. This makes it clear that the Commission’s current monitoring systems are not capable of guaranteeing the regularity of the expenditure of EU funds in cases where a Member State’s authorities do not cooperate in the investigation of corruption cases.</td>
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<td>How will the Commission alter the monitoring, supervision and control procedures so as to ensure that appropriate and regular use of EU funds is guaranteed even in those Member States whose authorities do not comply with their obligations to monitor the use of those funds?</td>
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<td>What action will the Commission take against such Member States?</td>
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<td>When did the Commission last review Hungary’s institutional system for monitoring the use of EU funds? Did it find that the system was operating as it should?</td>
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In its answer to Question E-011712/2015, the Commission stated that the ‘Most Likely Error’ factor relating to the EU budget concerns improper implementation of funds by the Member States and ignorance on the part of beneficiaries of the administrative framework. That being said, the report of the Court of Auditors referred to by the Commission cites as one of the main causes of error ‘payments for beneficiaries or projects that were ineligible’.

In view of the sizeable amount (EUR 7.4 billion) being directed at undeserving projects, can the Commission clarify how it plans to ensure that the most deserving and worthy areas can benefit from EU funds, given current austerity measures and massive spending cuts?

A report by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) stated that in 2012 some 4.8% of the EU budget was spent on projects which should never have received the money — a total of about EUR 7.4 billion. This represented an increase in the ‘error rate’ from 3.9% the previous year, and it was the third consecutive year that the figure had risen. Moreover, because of the way that the EU’s spending schemes are set up, bizarre or wasteful projects can receive funding which they would never have received if subject only to national spending priorities.

While it is appreciated that the Commission conducts audits, has checks and balances in place and can demand refunds, what measures does it intend to pursue to ensure that EU funding is targeted and spent in the most appropriate areas, especially given that austerity policies are still ravaging Ireland, Greece and many other EU countries?

Financial impact of irregularities

It has been reported that while the overall financial impact of non-fraudulent irregularities in the EU reported in 2013 decreased to about EUR 1.84 billion, or 38% less than in 2012, the number of such irregularities was up 16% on the previous year. It has also been noted that the number of fraudulent irregularities reported in 2013 increased by 30% compared to 2012, while the financial impact of such fraudulent irregularities, involving EUR 309 million in EU funding, was down by 21%.

Is the Commission in a position to state in which major areas these irregularities were recorded?

How will it mitigate the overall financial impact, in particular as regards the EU budget and EU funding?

Does it intend to issue simpler and less bureaucratic rules and guidelines in relation to EU funding?

Estimates from the annual report of the European Court of Auditors on how well the EU’s money is being managed

The report published by the European Court of Auditors in November 2014 revealed that 5% of the EU’s overall budget is not being used in accordance with EU rules. Across areas under shared management, the estimated error rate was 5.2% compared to 3.7% for the spending programmes most directly managed by the Commission. The estimated error rate for the EU’s own administrative expenditure was 1%. In light of the above, and given the sums of money involved:

How does the Commission believe that this error rate can be reduced?

What initiatives does it intend to implement in the immediate future?
In its 2013 annual report on the EU budget, the European Court of Auditors indicated that around EUR 7 billion of EU funds was wrongly spent last year.

Last year, the EU spent EUR 148 billion, which means that the error rate was 4.7%. The Court observed that the entire EU budget system was excessively oriented towards the maximum spending of available funds, placing compliance with rules and achievement of results in second and third place only. Most of the errors traditionally occur in areas of expenditure jointly administered by the Commission with the national and local authorities, accounting for 80% of expenditure, with an error rate of 5.2%, rising to 6.9% in the regional policy, energy and transport sectors and 6.7% in the rural development, environment, fisheries and health sectors.

1. Can the Commission give a clear indication of which Member States are at fault, clearly exercising little or no control over the spending of EU funds?
2. What are the consequences for Member States that spend EU funds wrongly?
3. What action will the Commission take to prevent EU funds being spent wrongly in future?

In the light of recent judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) on 4 September 2014 (cases C-192/13 P and C-197/13 P) and 22 October 2014 (Case C-429/13 P), which overturn various decisions taken by the Commission and impose financial corrections to projects co-financed with Cohesion Fund aid:

1. Could the Commission list the cases of Cohesion Fund aid provided since 2000 in relation to which the Commission has not taken a decision regarding financial correction within the timescale provided for in law, as referred to in the CJEU judgments following the respective hearings?
2. Could the Commission list the cases co-financed with Cohesion Fund aid since 2000 to which a financial correction has been made and indicate the percentage of the aid that this correction represents?
3. Could the Commission list the projects carried out in Spain which have been co-financed with Cohesion Fund aid since 2000 in relation to which the Commission has decided to impose financial corrections based on a breach of Community law on procurement, particularly with regard to contract amendments?
## Questions asked:

Through this audit, the Court assessed whether the Youth Guarantee was delivering results in the Member States and whether the Youth Employment Initiative was contributing towards it. In particular, the Court examined whether Member States:

1. had made progress in implementing the Youth Guarantee. The aspects examined, based on the data reported by Member States, included the evolution of the number of NEETs, the identification and registration of NEETs, the provision of offers within four months and the subsequent sustainability of these offers;
2. had appropriately addressed related factors which might impact the progress of implementation of the Youth Guarantee based on the provisions of the Council Recommendation. This included appropriate strategies to ensure the registration of all NEETs, the assessment of implementation costs and the available funding, the Member States’ approach towards the sustainable integration of NEETs, and the adequacy of monitoring and reporting by the Member States;
3. had implemented the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in such a way as to contribute to the achievement of Youth Guarantee objectives.

## Findings:

The Court concluded that

1. The seven MS had made progress in implementing the Youth Guarantee and some results had been achieved. However, after more than three years after the adoption of the Council Recommendation, the Court concluded that the situation falls short of the initial expectations raised at the launch of the YG, which aims to provide a good quality offer to all NEETs within four months. In addition, the contribution of the Youth employment initiative to the achievement of the YG objectives in the five MS visited was very limited at the time of the audit.
2. None of the MS had yet ensured that all NEETs had the opportunity to take up an offer within four months, which would help them to integrate into the labour market in a sustainable way. As the Youth Guarantee is based on a Council recommendation, i.e. “soft law”, its implementation depends on the goodwill of MS.
3. With regard to identification and registration of NEETs, the share of them registered by the end of 2015 had not shown a marked increase and it was difficult to assess the Youth Guarantee's contribution.
4. In relation to the sustainability of positive exits, the Court concluded that the level of sustainability deteriorated progressively from 6 to 12 to 18 months. Noting, that in some cases this was difficult to assess due to lack of information available from Member States.

5. When analysing the factors that impact on the results of the Youth Guarantee, the Court concluded that MS did not create adequate strategies with clear milestones and objectives to reach all NEETs. More effort is needed to support those young people who are most detached from the labour market, a conclusion also shared by the Commission in its 2016 communication.

6. While employment policy is primarily the competence of MS, none of the seven visited were able to provide an estimate of the addition expected cost of providing an offer to all NEETs within four months. In addition, the Court concluded that it is not possible to address all young people becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, which was the expectation raised by the Council Recommendation, with the resources available from the EU budget alone.

7. According to the Court’s assessment, no comprehensive analysis of the NEET population has been carried out. An adequate skills assessment and proper profiling in view of labour market demand are crucial for better sustainability.

8. The poor quality of data provided by the MS affected its comparability and reporting.

9. When assessing the contribution of the Youth Employment Initiative to the overall implementation of the YG, the Court concluded that the contribution of the YEI in the five MS visited has so far been very limited due to shortcomings in the design of OPs in terms of the YEI, issues regarding the measurement of the YEI results and the fact that additional prefinancing made available was only partially used.

10. The Court concluded, when assessing YEI/ESF OPs/axes, that the majority of the measures which were to receive YEI funding already existed previously, increasing the risk that YEI/ESF substitutes national funding.

11. The Court also found that the quality of data, particularly the baseline scenarios and the results indicators, and the Commission guidance on data collection affect the measurement of the YEI results.

12. The additional pre-financing set in May 2015 for YEI/ESF OPs was only partially used, with the reported results being below expectations for YEI/ESF supported measures. People who benefited most from YEI co-financed measures were the ones that were easiest to reach, whereas the most disadvantaged groups were under-represented.

Recommendations:

1. For future initiatives in the area of employment, the Member States and the Commission should:
   a) manage expectations by setting realistic and achievable objectives and targets;
   b) perform gap assessments and market analyses prior to setting up the schemes.

2. MS should establish appropriate outreach strategies to identify the entire NEET population with the objective of registering them. These strategies should set out concrete and measurable annual objectives and identify the main challenges and appropriate action plans to overcome them. The Commission should support MS in this respect.

3. MS should establish a complete overview of the costs of implementing the Youth Guarantee for the entire NEET population. Based on this estimate, they should prioritise the related measures to be implemented according to the available financing. Where requested by MS, the Commission should support them in this process.

4. The Commission should, together with EMCO, develop and propose standards for quality criteria for offers to be made under the Youth Guarantee. MS should ensure that offers are only considered to be of good quality if they match the participant’s profile and labour market demand and lead to sustainable integration in the labour market.

5. The Commission should identify and diffuse good practice in monitoring and reporting based on its overview of the existing systems across MS. The MS should improve their monitoring and reporting systems in order to regularly provide quality data to facilitate the development of more evidence-based youth policies. In particular, they should improve the capacity to follow up the participants that exit the YG in order to reduce the number of unknown
6. The Commission should ensure through its approval process for OP amendments, in particular in view of the impending significant increase in YEI funding, that MS perform a global assessment of the characteristics of the NEET population in order to ensure that the YEI measures included in the OPs will adequately address the needs of the young persons.
7. The Commission should revise its guidance on data collection to minimise the risk of overstatement of results. In particular:
   a) the YEI result indicators should only report the situation of YEI participants that completed the measure, assessing their situation at four weeks and six months after completion.
   b) in the case of training measures aiming at certification, their accomplishment should not be counted again as an achievement at four weeks and six months after completion.
   c) MS should revise their baselines and targets accordingly.

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<td>Recommendations by the rapporteur,</td>
<td>Welcomes the Court’s report and is pleased that the Commission accepts some of these recommendations and will consider them;</td>
<td>1. Notes that youth unemployment rate in the EU is decreasing in the past few years; regrets though that in mid-2016, it still affected 18.8% of young people; strongly encourages EU Member States to utilise available EU support to tackle this long standing situation;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Notes that youth unemployment rate in the EU is decreasing in the past few years; regrets though that in mid-2016, it still affected 18.8% of young people; strongly encourages EU Member States to utilise available EU support to tackle this long standing situation;</td>
<td>3. Is strongly concerned that the NEET population (not in employment, education or training) is disconnected from the education and the labour market; understands that this population is the hardest to reach through the existing operational programmes implementing youth unemployment financial schemes; considers that for the 2017-2020 period the focus should be put on this population to ensure the achievement of the Youth Guarantee (YG) main objectives;</td>
<td>4. Stresses that the NEET population integration requires significantly more EU financing and Member States should also mobilise additional resources from their national budgets;</td>
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<td>3. Is strongly concerned that the NEET population (not in employment, education or training) is disconnected from the education and the labour market; understands that this population is the hardest to reach through the existing operational programmes implementing youth unemployment financial schemes; considers that for the 2017-2020 period the focus should be put on this population to ensure the achievement of the Youth Guarantee (YG) main objectives;</td>
<td>5. Emphasises that the YG has made a positive contribution to tackling youth unemployment since 2012 but that the youth unemployment rate remains unacceptably high, and therefore calls for the Youth Employment Initiative to be extended until 2020;</td>
<td>6. Regrets that none of the visited Member States was able to provide all the NEETs with an opportunity to take up an offer within four months of entering the YG scheme;</td>
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<td>4. Stresses that the NEET population integration requires significantly more EU financing and Member States should also mobilise additional resources from their national budgets;</td>
<td>7. Welcomes in particular the Court’s recommendation that more attention needs to be paid to improving the quality of offers;</td>
<td>8. Notes that the Commission in its communication published in October 2016 concludes on the need to improve its effectiveness;</td>
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<td>5. Emphasises that the YG has made a positive contribution to tackling youth unemployment since 2012 but that the youth unemployment rate remains unacceptably high, and therefore calls for the Youth Employment Initiative to be extended until 2020;</td>
<td>9. Notes the persisting challenge of skills mismatches to meet labour-market demands; asks the Commission, within the framework of the EMCO, to promote the exchange of best practices between the Member States in order to raise this issue in the employment agenda;</td>
<td>10. Welcomes the Commission’s cooperation with Member States in identifying and diffusing good practice in monitoring and reporting based on the existing systems across Member States; reminds the Commission that the comparability of data remains fundamental for these purposes;</td>
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<td>6. Regrets that none of the visited Member States was able to provide all the NEETs with an opportunity to take up an offer within four months of entering the YG scheme;</td>
<td>11. Notes that in order to achieve the goal of a quality, continuing employment offer for all young people under 24 in identified regions, considerably more resources would be required.</td>
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5. Notes with concern that ECA Special Report No 5/2017 states that there is a risk that EU funding is simply replacing national funding rather than creating added value; recalls that in line with the principle of additionality, the YEI aims to complement national funding and not to replace Member States’ own policies and funding to fight youth unemployment; stresses that the YEI budget cannot and was never meant to single-handedly shoulder the ambition of providing all young people with a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

7. Recalls that in line with the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee, six guidelines were defined on which YG schemes were to be based: building up partnership-based approaches, early intervention and activation, supportive measures enabling labour market integration, use of Union funds, assessment and continuous improvement of the scheme, and its swift implementation; points out that according to the assessment reports, very few Member States have provided data on and full assessments of these aspects.

10. Takes the view that the monitoring of the YEI needs to be backed up by reliable data; considers the monitoring data and results available at present insufficient to carry out an overall assessment of the implementation and results of the YEI as the main EU financing vehicle for YG schemes, in particular as a result of the initial delays in the setting up of operational programmes by Member States and the fact that they are still in the relatively early stages of implementation; insists on the need to maintain youth employment as one of the priorities of EU action; is concerned, however, at the findings of the recent ECA report on the impact of the YEI and YG as Union policies aimed at tackling youth unemployment, while bearing in mind its limited territorial and temporal scope.

15. Believes that the YG and the YEI are no substitute for using macroeconomic instruments and other policies to promote youth employment; adds that when assessing the implementation and impact of the YG, it is important to bear in mind the differing macro-economic climates and budgetary situations in the Member States; considers that a long-term structural reform programme needs to be mapped out for the YG if its duration is to be extended; stresses the clear need for more effective coordination between the different Member States.

17. Is concerned about initial observations which show that improvements need to be made in the registration of and outreach to all NEETs, in particular inactive NEETs and those who are proving difficult to re-integrate; calls on the Member States to establish appropriate and tailored outreach strategies to reach all NEETs and to take an integrated approach towards making more individualised assistance and services available to support young people facing multiple barriers; urges the Member States to pay special attention to the needs of vulnerable NEETs and to eliminate prejudiced and negative attitudes towards them.

25. Stresses that establishing whether the YEI budget is well spent, and whether the ultimate YEI goal of helping young unemployed people into sustainable employment is attained, can only be achieved if operations are closely and transparently monitored on the basis of reliable and comparable data, and if Member States that have made no progress are addressed in a more ambitious manner; calls on the Member States to improve monitoring, reporting and the quality of data as a matter of urgency and to guarantee that reliable and comparable data and figures on current YEI implementation are gathered and made available in a timely manner and more frequently than is required under their annual reporting obligation, as defined in Article 19(2) of the ESF Regulation; calls on the Commission to revise its guidelines on data collection in line with the recommendation of the ECA in order to minimise the risk of overstatement of results.

41. Notes that pending the release by the Commission of the final figures provided by Member States, the number of young people having completed a YEI programme at the end of 2015 was estimated at 203 000, which represents 4% of the participants; expresses concern at the high number of YEI participants.
who have failed to complete the programme in some Member States; believes that it is important to strengthen incentives so as to ensure that young people consider the YEI useful;

54. Draws attention to the lack of regulation of traineeship offers on the open market as regards transparency of hiring, duration and recognition and points out that only a few Member States have established minimum quality criteria, including for the purposes of monitoring the YG and YEI;

57. Underlines that in the context of the mid-term revision of the MFF, an additional allocation of EUR 1,2 billion for the YEI was politically endorsed for the period 2017-2020, to be matched by the same amount from the ESF; stresses, however, that the final allocation for this programme will be determined in the upcoming annual budgetary procedures;

59. Considers that the overall YEI budget is not sufficient to cover actual demand and the resources required to ensure that the programme reaches its targets; recalls that on average only 42 % of NEETs have been reached, with the figure dropping below 20 % in a number of Member States; calls, therefore, for a significant increase in the YEI allocation under the next MFF and for the Member States to make provisions for youth employment schemes in their national budgets;

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Draft amending budget No 3/2017: budgetary resources of the Youth Employment Initiative; establishing plans of ACER and SESAR2

[The European Parliament, ]

1. Stresses as a matter of priority the urgent need to further increase Union’s financial commitment in the fight against the youth unemployment through additional funding for the YEI;

2. Regrets the delay, due to the blockage and late approval by the Council of the mid-term MFF revision, in the modification of the Union budget for 2017 to increase the YEI as agreed during the 2017 annual budgetary procedure;

4. Calls on the Commission and Member States to ensure swift reprogramming of the relevant operational programmes in order to ensure that the whole additional YEI envelope of EUR 500 million is fully and efficiently committed by the end of 2017; furthermore, calls on Member States to perform gap assessments and market analyses prior to setting up the schemes in order to optimise the benefits of the YEI;

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European Parliament resolution of 26 October 2017 on the economic policies of the euro area (2017/2114(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

36. Calls on the Commission to secure adequate funding for fighting youth unemployment, which remains unacceptably high in the EU, and to continue the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) beyond the end of the current multiannual financial framework (MFF), while at the same time improving its functioning and implementation and taking into account the latest findings of the European Court of Auditors’ special report on youth employment and the use of the YEI;
calls on the Member States to implement the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors and to ensure that the Youth Guarantee is fully accessible; regrets budget shifts out of the European Social Fund (ESF), including the YEI, towards the European Solidarity Corps, which should instead be financed by all financial means available under the existing MFF Regulation; stresses the need for a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the jobs created; stresses that EU funding should not be used to replace national social welfare payments;

37. Underlines the fact that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee should be strengthened at national, regional and local level, and stresses its importance for school-to-work transitions; points out that special attention has to be paid to young women and girls, who could face gender-related barriers to obtaining a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship; emphasises the need to ensure that the Youth Guarantee reaches young people facing multiple exclusions and extreme poverty;

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European Parliament resolution of 24 October 2017 on control of spending and monitoring of EU Youth Guarantee schemes’ cost-effectiveness (2016/2242(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

30. Welcomes the ECA’s Special report No 5/2017 and urges the Commission and the Member States to fully implement its recommendations in order to increase the coverage and effectiveness of YG schemes;

31. Stresses that the development of one-stop-shops should be supported in order to boost the positive impact of the YG by ensuring that all services and guidance are available for young people at one location;

74. Underlines the necessity of guaranteeing a long-term commitment through ambitious programming and stable financing from both the EU budget and the national budgets in order to offer full access to all young people who are NEETs in the EU;

77. Notes that in its communication of October 2016, the Commission draws conclusions on the need to improve the effectiveness of the YEI; believes that this should be achieved by ensuring that NEETs are integrated into the labour market in a sustainable fashion and by setting objectives that reflect the diverse composition of NEETs, with specific, logical interventions for each of the sub-target groups; notes that additional use of other ESF programmes to ensure sustainability of the NEETs integration could improve efficiency;

78. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to manage expectations by setting realistic and achievable goals and targets, to assess disparities, to analyse the market before implementing schemes, to improve supervision and notification systems, and to improve the quality of data so that the results can be measured effectively;

81. Calls on the Member States to ensure the provision of follow-up data to assess the longterm sustainability of outcomes from a quality and quantity perspective, and to facilitate the development of more evidence-based youth policies; calls for more transparency and consistency in data collection, including gender-disaggregated data collection, in all the Member States; notes with concern that the sustainability of ‘positive exits’ in the YG has been deteriorating1;

82. Calls on the Commission to carry out a detailed analysis of the effects of measures implemented in the Member States, to single out the most efficient
solutions and, based on these, to provide recommendations to the Member States as to how to attain better results with a higher degree of efficiency;

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European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2017 on the mandate for the trilogue on the 2018 draft budget (2017/2043(BUD))

[The European Parliament, ]

9. Welcomes the fact that the draft budget 2018 includes an additional allocation for the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), thus responding to Parliament’s previous calls for the continuation of this programme; notes, in parallel, the proposal for draft amending budget 3/2017 that integrates the provision of EUR 500 million in commitments for the YEI, as agreed by Parliament and the Council in the 2017 budgetary conciliation; is convinced that the proposed amounts are clearly insufficient for the YEI to reach its goals, and believes that in order to effectively tackle youth unemployment the YEI must continue to contribute to the Union’s priority objective of growth and jobs; insists on the need to provide an effective response to youth unemployment across the Union, and underlines that the YEI can be further improved and be made more efficient, notably by ensuring that it brings real European added value to youth employment policies in the Member States and does not replace the financing of former national policies;

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[The European Parliament, ]

1. Underlines that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee should be strengthened at national, regional and local level and prolonged until at least 2020 with the active participation of the social partners and strengthened public services, and stresses its importance for school-to-work transitions; urges the Commission to carry out impact studies with a view to determining precisely what results have been achieved so far and to take additional measures, and to take into account the awaited audit by the Court of Auditors and the sharing of best practices and the organisation of workshops which bring together all the actors concerned and are designed to make this instrument more effective; highlights that Member States should ensure that the Youth Guarantee is fully accessible, including to vulnerable persons and persons with disabilities; stresses that this is not the case in all Member States, and calls on Member States to remedy this situation as soon as possible, as it runs counter to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); emphasises the need to ensure that the Youth Guarantee reaches young people facing multiple exclusions and extreme poverty; points out that special attention should be paid to young women and girls, who could face gender-related barriers; calls on the Commission and the Member States to provide adequate funding for the Youth Guarantee in order to ensure that it is implemented properly in all Member States and to help even more young people;

12. Notes the adoption of EUR 500 million in commitment appropriations for the YEI for 2017; stresses that this amount is not sufficient and needs to be increased and secured in the current MFF; notes also, however, that an agreement on appropriate additional financing for the YEI to cover the remainder of the current MFF period must be reached in the context of the mid-term revision;

13. Highlights the potential of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) regarding youth employment; stresses that further promotion of, and investment in, the cultural and creative sector may contribute substantially to investment, growth, innovation and employment; calls on the Commission to therefore consider
the special opportunities offered by all cultural and creative sectors (CCSs), including NGOs and small associations, for example in the framework of the YEI; social and active labour market policies at national level;

55. Welcomes the allocation in 2017 of an additional EUR 500 million on top of the draft budget for the YEI and of EUR 200 million to boost key initiatives for growth and job creation; recalls the need to make better use of the available funds and initiatives related to education and training, culture, sport and youth, and to enhance their investment in these sectors where necessary, especially with regard to thematic areas with direct relevance to the Europe 2020 strategy, such as early school leaving (ESL), higher education, youth employment, vocational education and training (VET), lifelong learning and mobility, in order to build resilience and reduce unemployment, especially amongst the young and the most vulnerable groups, prevent radicalisation and ensure long-term social inclusion;

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[The European Parliament, ]

7. Finds that while unemployment is, on average, gradually decreasing, and that activity rates are growing, structural challenges persist in many Member States; notes that the rates of long-term and youth unemployment remain high; underlines that inclusive labour market reforms, with full respect for the social dialogue, are necessary in the Member States concerned if these structural deficiencies are to be addressed;

31. Welcomes the fact that, on average, youth unemployment is declining, although it is still too high; notes that stark differences remain across the Member States that call for continued reforms to facilitate the entry of young people into the labour market, thereby ensuring intergenerational fairness; emphasises, in this regard, the importance of the Youth Guarantee, and calls for continued EU funding for this crucial programme; agrees with the Commission that more action is needed from the Member States to fight youth unemployment, particularly in enhancing the effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee;

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Other:

2016/2101(INI) - European semester for economic policy coordination: implementation of 2016 priorities
2016/2095(INI) - European pillar of social rights
2015/2351(INI) - Assessment of the EU youth strategy 2013-2015
2015/2330(INI) - European semester for economic policy coordination: employment and social aspects in the annual growth survey 2016
2015/2088(INI) - Skills policies for fighting youth unemployment
2015/2820(RSP) - Resolution on a Council recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market
2015/2353(INI) - Preparation of the post-electoral revision of the MFF 2014-2020: Parliament's input ahead of the Commission's proposal
2014/2245(INI) - Investment for jobs and growth: promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Union
2014/2059(INI) - European Semester for economic policy coordination: implementation of 2014 priorities
2014/2235(INI) - Creating a competitive EU labour market for the 21st century: matching skills and qualifications with demand and job opportunities
2014/2713(RSP) - Resolution on youth employment
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<th>Oral / Written Questions</th>
<th>Tackling youth unemployment, E-006250/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Tibor Szanyi (S&amp;D), 04-10-2017</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parliament has continually stressed the importance of tackling youth unemployment, which requires long-term and effective measures for the future. For example, the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) aims at improving education and training systems across the Member States. In spite of all the funding provided to help tackle youth unemployment, such as the additional EUR 500 million to support new job placements, traineeships and further education for those most in need, the number of unemployed young people remains shockingly high. With this in mind, could the Commission reply to the following:</td>
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<td>1. Since the inception of the funding, have Member States seen a steady decrease in unemployment rates as a result of the schemes implemented through it, and have these schemes been encouraged to make the best use of the limited funds?</td>
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<td>2. Is it possible to factor out the loopholes used by Member States, such as including young people working abroad and those not working full time in their calculations?</td>
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<td>3. Would the Commission consider suggesting implementing measures involving tax and business incentives to support young entrepreneurs and encouraging youth job creation as a means of complementing the financial aid provided by the YEI?</td>
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<td>The NEET rate for young people, E-006211/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Viorica Dăncilă (S&amp;D), 04-10-2017</td>
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<td>By 2016, 14 million young people had entered Youth Guarantee Schemes and around nine million had taken up an offer of employment, education, a traineeship or an apprenticeship. However, the phenomenon of young people, especially young women, who are neither in employment, nor in education and training (NEET) still remains challenging. According to Eurostat (2016), the NEET rate for young women aged 20-24 and 25-29 is 2% and 9.8% higher than for their male counterparts respectively. Meanwhile, in rural areas, the NEET rate for young people aged 18-24 is 17.1%, while it is 13.6% in cities. The situation of young women in rural areas is even worse, with 18.2% neither in employment, nor in education and training.</td>
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<td>1. What measures are being taken, or does the Commission intend to implement, to reduce the NEET rate for young women under Youth Guarantee Schemes, the Youth Employment Initiative or other programmes?</td>
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<td>2. What actions will the Commission take to address the high NEET rate for young people in rural areas, especially for young women?</td>
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<td>Implementation of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative, E-005749/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Siôn Simon (S&amp;D), 14-09-2017</td>
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<td>1. Can the Commission provide information on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative?</td>
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<td>2. Have these initiatives been implemented and has the Commission already assessed the results?</td>
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<td>Relevance of the Youth Guarantee, E-005269/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Dominique Martin (ENF), 24-08-2017</td>
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<td>In its report published in April 2017, the EU Court of Auditors criticised the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and its weak effect on efforts to combat youth unemployment. According to the report, the reduced unemployment rates among young people were not linked to the effectiveness of the guarantee but to the reduction of the number of young people in Europe. Moreover, the Court of Auditors noted that even if the total number of young people not in employment, education or training ('NEETs') had decreased in all Member States (with the exception of France), this reduction had not resulted in an increase in the number of young people in employment.</td>
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<td>1. How does the Commission justify this lack of results?</td>
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2. Does the Commission accept that the Youth Guarantee is therefore a failure and ought to be discontinued?

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Ineffectiveness of the Youth Employment Initiative, E-005270/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Dominique Martin (ENF), 24-08-2017

In April 2017, the EU Court of Auditors published a report assessing the impact of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) on efforts to combat youth unemployment in Europe. The YEI’s budget for 2014-2020 is EUR 6.4 billion. Its aim is to help young people, particularly those not in education, employment or training (‘NEET’) and long-term unemployed young people, to find jobs. However, the Court of Auditors found that the YEI had made only a very limited contribution to the attainment of this aim, and that it had failed to yield significant results. In France, youth unemployment has not declined since this instrument was first deployed. Worse still, in 2016, it was actually higher (24.6%) than in 2014 (24.2%).

1. Does the Commission accept that the YEI is therefore a failure and ought to be discontinued?
2. Does not the Commission therefore agree that there is no justification for its proposal to increase the budget for the YEI by one billion euros for the period 2017-2020?

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Information on the success of the Youth Guarantee, E-005070/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Pascal Arimont (EPP), 25-07-2017

Under the Youth Guarantee Scheme, young people under 25 will be offered high-quality employment, further training, a traineeship or an apprenticeship within four months of their becoming unemployed or completing their training.

1. What is the Commission’s assessment of the situation so far, particularly for the Member States in the south, where youth unemployment is especially high?
2. Is there any information on the awareness level of this scheme among young people, particularly those in badly-affected countries?
3. Are there plans to increase the awareness level?

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The EU Youth Guarantee Programme, O-000051/2017, Question for oral answer to the Commission, Rule 128, Nicola Caputo(S&D) ++, 09-06-2017

Reference:
The European Court of Auditors (ECA) has recently highlighted the fact that the EU Youth Guarantee Programme, which was intended to slash youth unemployment, has fallen short of expectations. A total of EUR 6.4 billion in EU funding was set aside for the programme for the period 2014-2020, but a report by the ECA points to an estimate that calls for a budget of EUR 21 billion in order to help every unemployed person in Europe under the age of 25. The Commission stresses that there has been a slight decrease in youth unemployment, but the harsh reality is that long-term youth unemployment is on the rise. Traineeships that lead nowhere and temporary contracts have produced youth unemployment figures that mask the true scale of the problem.

In view of the above, does the Commission intend to:

1. boost the funding of the EU Youth Guarantee Programme with additional financial assistance from the EU budget and the European Social Fund (ESF)?
2. clarify the definition of a ‘high quality’ job offer in order to ensure that companies do not take advantage of the scheme to use young people as a source of cheap labour?
3. improve data collection and the monitoring and reporting system for the programme, by carrying out an impact assessment that specifies its expected costs and benefits?
Youth unemployment, E-003493/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Evelyn Regner (S&D), 24-05-2017

Nine years after the crisis, youth unemployment in the EU stands at 19%, an extremely alarming figure. A study conducted by Eurofound put the annual cost of youth unemployment at EUR 153 billion, or 1.2% of the EU’s GDP. The Youth Guarantee, the EU’s flagship initiative to combat youth unemployment, is endowed with a budget of only EUR 6.4 million. The European Court of Auditors has stated that it is not possible to address the whole NEET population with the resources available from the EU budget alone.

1. Does the Commission consider the proposal in the new multiannual financial framework to increase the Youth Guarantee’s budget from EUR 6.4 to 8.4 billion to be sufficient to solve youth unemployment once and for all, given that organisations such as the ILO estimate that some EUR 21 billion would be needed each year to address the NEET population?
2. Can the Commission guarantee that sufficient resources will be available to finance the Youth Guarantee until 2020?
3. According to a European Parliament study, 43.4% of the young workforce is employed on temporary contracts, which tend to offer worse conditions than for full-time employees. Will the Commission develop, together with the Employment Committee, quality criteria for job offers provided as part of Youth Guarantee?

Measures to curb youth unemployment, E-003417/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Igor Šoltes (Verts/ALE), 19-05-2017

In several Member States, youth unemployment has been at an extremely high level for a number of years. In mid-2016, over 4.2 million people under 25 in the EU were unemployed. In a recent report, the European Court of Auditors found that the EU Youth Guarantee, which aims to help young people without jobs, training or education, had made limited progress and that its results fell short of initial expectations. Under the scheme, Member States should ensure that all young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed. In addition, the European Council has established the Youth Employment Initiative to increase support for those regions and individuals struggling the most, with a budget of EUR 6.4 billion. The Commission itself acknowledged in its recent White Paper on the Future of Europe that there is a mismatch between expectations and the EU’s capacity to meet them.

1. How does the Commission intend to ensure that programmes designed to help young people will not create expectations that cannot be met?
2. What measures does it intend to take to ensure that the funds invested achieve their purpose, i.e. that they prevent young people suffering long periods of unemployment, which adversely affect their future employability, increase the risk of poverty and social inclusion and have a negative impact on the role of young people in society?

Disappointing results of the EU Youth Guarantee, E-002915/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Joëlle Mélin (ENF), 26-04-2017

In a report published on 4 April 2017, the European Court of Auditors states that the results of the EU Youth Guarantee have fallen short of initial expectations. Under this programme, Member States are to offer unskilled and unqualified young people employment, training, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed. A study of seven countries has revealed that none of them was in a position to meet this deadline. The Court also points out that the project is impracticable, stating that it raises expectations which ‘cannot be fulfilled.’

1. What does the Commission therefore intend to do to ensure better use is made of the funds allocated to the Youth Guarantee?
The 2008 economic crisis has made it even more difficult for young people to enter the labour market. While there have been signs of improvement in recent years, at the end of June 2016, more than 4.2 million young people under the age of 25 (18.8%) were still unemployed in the EU. In 2013, the Commission launched the ‘Youth Guarantee’ programme, which is designed to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

Unfortunately, it seems that the effects of the implementation of the ‘Youth Guarantee’ are not living up to original expectations, as the unemployment figures in Europe are still high and the percentage of young people who have found a job through the programme remains small. It is worth noting that unemployment does not only have financial consequences for young people; it also affects their future employability, increases the risk of their facing poverty and social exclusion, and lowers their social status.

1. What actions is the Commission taking to make the ‘Youth Guarantee’ more efficient and its objectives more feasible?
2. What form has the implementation process taken in individual Member States and what are the effects of the programme in each Member State?

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**Report from the European Court of Auditors on the implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee**, E-002648/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130 Sergio Gutiérrez Prieto ++ (S&D), 11-04-2017

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) recently published an audit report on the EU Youth Guarantee. According to the ECA, the programme has not met expectations and has had little success in reducing youth unemployment. The report points out that there was insufficient reporting data on NEETs (those ‘not in education, employment, or training’) in Spain, in addition to a lack of good-quality and sustainable offers of employment. The ECA therefore believes that the Commission should propose standards for quality criteria for offers to be made under the Youth Guarantee.

1. What is the Commission’s view on the conclusions from the ECA’s report, and in particular on the results in Spain?
2. Against the background of this report, the Commission’s own report on the Youth Guarantee from last year, and the repeated requests from the European Parliament on the Youth Guarantee, such as the Gutiérrez report on the European Semester for economic policy coordination: Employment and Social Aspects in the Annual Growth Survey 2015 (2014/2222(INI)): Does the Commission plan to propose a legal framework of minimum standards for implementing and evaluating the Youth Guarantee?

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**Youth Guarantee Traineeships**, E-002265/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Isabella Adinolfi (EFDD), 30-03-2017

A number of issues are emerging in the press and in reports from young people who have undertaken traineeships offered as part of the Youth Guarantee programme. The problem often relates specifically to training courses, especially in the South of Italy, where rather than receiving training, young people are performing duties similar to those of employees. An instrument which, based on a recommendation from the Council (2013/C 120/01), is supposed to ‘[...] guarantee that all young people under the age of 25 years shall receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education’ has in many cases turned into a ploy used by companies to obtain cheap labour, exploiting the designated funds and many young people in need.

1. In light of the above, can the Commission indicate whether it is aware of these deviations in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee?
2. Does the Commission not think it necessary to introduce more stringent rules and stricter checks to ensure the programme is implemented correctly?
The Commission’s future steps to enhance the Youth Employment Initiative, E-000613/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Andrejs Mamikins (S&D), 31-01-2017
The Joint Declaration on the EU’s legislative priorities for 2017 referred to the enhancement of the Youth Employment Initiative.

1. What concrete steps will the Commission take to enhance the Youth Employment Initiative?

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Youth Guarantee, E-008900/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz (EPP), 29-11-2016
According to the recent Commission communication on the main achievements of the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), only 35.5% of young people that left the Youth Guarantee in 2015 had entered employment or returned to education six months later. Taking into consideration that a ‘good-quality’ offer of employment, education, traineeship or apprenticeship under the Youth Guarantee is measured by its outcome and its ability to support young people in integrating into the labour market, figures show that a better mechanism should be put into practice to ensure that more young people could benefit from the initiative.

1. What measures does the Commission plan to take to further support young people who have taken up an offer under the Youth Guarantee but have not found employment?
2. What specific action does the Commission plan to take in order to increase employability among young people?
3. What other interventions does the Commission plan to propose in order to broaden Youth Guarantee offers to make them more tailored?

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Reduction of funding for the Youth Guarantee programme, E-008141/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Andrejs Mamikins (S&D), 28-10-2016
The purpose of the Youth Guarantee programme is to help young people to study and find their niche in the labour market. The programme has helped many young people in Latvia to change their occupation and find traineeships. The programme has also significantly reduced the number of young people who have been unemployed in Latvia in recent years. I am therefore alarmed by the Commission’s decision to allocate considerably less funding to the programme in the period up to 2020 than in previous years.

1. What are the grounds for this Commission decision?

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Effectiveness of the EU’s ‘Youth Guarantee’ initiative, E-007774/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Adam Szejnfeld (EPP), 14-10-2016
The ‘Youth Guarantee’ is an EU initiative under which the Member States have committed to ensuring that all EU young citizens are given an offer of employment, apprenticeship, traineeship or further education within four months of leaving school or losing a job. The aim of this initiative is to tackle the extremely high levels of unemployment, which currently affects approximately 19% of young Europeans under the age of 25. Since the programme was launched in 2013, more than 9 million young EU residents have taken advantage of it. The Guarantee is funded under the ‘Youth Employment Initiative’, with a budget of EUR 6.5 billion. The Commission has already announced the continuation of the programme beyond 2020 and a EUR 2 billion increase in its budget.
Unfortunately, the programme’s impact on actual employment levels among young people cannot be assessed from the Commission’s analysis of the effects of the Youth Guarantee. Moreover, the Court of Auditors has criticised the programme, saying that it is unknown how many jobs have been created and at what cost.
1. What action is the Commission taking both to increase the effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee and to comprehensively measure its effectiveness at EU level and in the individual Member States?

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Youth guarantee, E-007717/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Deirdre Clune (EPP), 13-10-2016
The Commission recently announced an additional EUR 2 billion in funding for the youth guarantee.
1. Could the Commission please outline how it intends to monitor the implementation of this funding in the Member States, giving specific details?

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Youth Guarantee, E-007554/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miriam Dalli (S&D), 04-10-2016
It was reported that the Commission will allocate an additional EUR 1 billion for the period 2017-2020 with a view to tackling the 19% youth unemployment rate across the EU. In the State of the Union speech, the Commission President stated that more than 9 million young people have benefited from this programme and that a continuation will be rolled out with the objective of reaching the regions and the young people that need it the most.
1. How does the Commission intend to finance the proposal?
2. According to Bulletin Quotidien’s EUROPE, on 13 September 2016 the College of Commissioners agreed on a proposal for a mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework which seeks to raise EUR 1 billion for the Youth Guarantee from the margins not allocated to administrative spending. How will these funds be allocated?
3. The Commission was supposed to submit a balance sheet for the Youth Guarantee budget; when does it plan on presenting this balance sheet?
Special report 06/2017 of 25 April 2017

EU response to the refugee crisis: the ‘hotspot’ approach

Migration

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Summary

Questions asked:
The Court assessed the implementation of the hotspot approach in Italy and Greece, covering the period from when it was first announced in the Agenda on Migration in May 2015 to the end of the summer of 2016.

The auditors specifically focussed on two main questions:
1. were the necessary hotspots well located, established in a timely manner and with sufficient capacity to address the needs, with the provision of adequate support services, necessary coordination mechanisms and adequate monitoring procedures?
2. was the hotspot approach effective in managing the flow of incoming migrants, by enabling the full identification, registration and fingerprinting of migrants, and the timely channelling of migrants into the relevant follow-up processes (asylum, relocation, return)?

Findings:
1. Overall, the Court found that the hotspot approach has helped improve migration management in the two frontline Member States, under very challenging and constantly changing circumstances, by increasing their reception capacities, improving registration procedures, and by strengthening the coordination of support efforts.

2. However, the Court stated that the creation of hotspots was slower than planned: at the end of 2016 the reception facilities in both countries were not yet adequate to properly receive (Italy) or accommodate (Greece) the number of migrants arriving. There was still a shortage of adequate facilities to accommodate and process unaccompanied minors in line with international standards, both in the hotspots and at the next level of reception.

3. In Greece, four of the five planned hotspots (Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos) became gradually operational during the period up to March 2016, with the last one coming into operation by June 2016, the consequence being that the identification and registration of all migrants arriving was not fully guaranteed. In June 2016, Greek hotspots were operational with a reception capacity of 7450 people but remained insufficient and overcrowded for the the ones located in...
Greek islands (Lesbos, Chios and Samos) as there are more migrants arriving in 2016 than migrants leaving the hotspots, resulting in critical living conditions in the camps especially for many unaccompanied minors (estimated at about 2,500 people in September 2016) as well as safety and security issues.

4. In Italy, four out of six planned hotspots (Lampedusa, Pozzalo, Trapani and Taranto) were operational in March 2016 with a total capacity of 1600 places\(^1\), and two additional hotspots were still in the process of being set up but not yet operational at the end of February 2017 (Augusta and Porto Empedocle).

5. The Court stated that the support from the Commission and the relevant EU Agencies was substantial by providing experts, financial and technical resources, advice and coordination. However, the Agencies’ capacity to provide such support was and remains very dependent on the resources offered by Member States namely experts deployed via Frontex and EASO. It was reported that the Frontex requests for direct support in the hotspots were covered at 65% by offers received from Member States and for EASO at 57% in average. The Court noted that the Commission’s progress reports continued to call on Member States to increase their support for EASO in providing experts (only 41% asylum case workers have been deployed for by EASO in Greece compared to an estimated need of 100 experts and 33 asylum experts in Italy compared to the 74 estimated for 2016).

6. In addition, the Court observed that the duration of expert deployments was often very short, (six weeks or sometimes less) thereby reducing the efficiency of the deployed experts. These shortcomings are currently being addressed through the new (or envisaged) mandates for the relevant Agencies.

7. In both countries, the Court found that the coordination of the hotspot approach was facilitated by the presence of dedicated Commission and Agency staff and, at the operational level, through regional task forces respectively based in Athens port of Piraeus and in Catania and, although the latter’s role in the hotspot approach remains to be fully defined.

8. Standard operating procedures are a key element for clarifying responsibilities and harmonising procedures in hotspots, in particular where numerous different players are involved, as is the case for the current hotspot approach. The Court observed that the situations were different in both countries. Italy has established hotspot standard operating procedures and applies them both in the hotspots and in other disembarkation ports functioning as hotspots. In Greece, standard operating procedures remain a point of concern and their adoption is still pending.

9. The Court observed that the coordination at the individual hotspot level is still fragmented and although it has been established that the central authorities in the Member States are responsible for the overall management of the hotspots, at least in Greece, they have yet to take on this responsibility in full.

10. With regard to the monitoring and reporting by the Commission on the progress and problems at the hotspots, the Court noted that it has been regular and extensive through monthly reports since March 2016 including information on the implementation of the hotspot approach and respective roadmaps as well as recommendations for the stakeholders involved. However, the Court found that in the reporting framework certain information were lacking such as the absence of cost-benefit analysis, the establishment of a performance monitoring framework at the individual hotspot level to monitor the efficiency of operations, the use of resources and to identify best practices. The audit work also revealed that some information were not shared between different stakeholders like the length of time migrants spent in hotspots waiting to register and complete their asylum applications (for Greece) and some key data were not covered such as the total number of migrants identified and registered in hotspots or receiving a return order and numbers actually returned (Italy).

11. In both Greece and Italy, the hotspot approach has ensured that, in 2016, most of the incoming migrants were properly identified, registered and that their data were checked against relevant security databases. The Court reported that for Greece, these initial processes were achieved within three days, with a registration rate of 78% in 2016 compared to 8% in 2015. As regards Italy, the registration and fingerprinting phases significantly improved from 60% in 2015 to an average of 97% for 2016. In this respect, the hotspot approach contributed towards an improved management of the migration flows, notably by setting-up standard
Recommendations:
In the light of its findings, the Court made a number of recommendations for the Commission to assist the Member States in improving the hotspot approach:

1. Hotspot capacity
The Commission, together with the relevant Agencies, should provide further support to Greece in addressing the lack of capacity at the hotspots through:
   a) upgrading the accommodation facilities on the islands where hotspots are located;
   b) further speeding up the processing of asylum applications (with support from EASO), while providing clear information to migrants as to how and when their applications will be processed;
   c) enforcing existing return procedures, where appropriate (with support from Frontex).

The Commission, together with the relevant Agencies, should further support Italy’s efforts to increase the number of hotspots, as originally planned, and to take further measures to extend the hotspot approach in order to cover also disembarkations outside the fixed hotspot locations.

2. The treatment of unaccompanied minors
The Commission, together with the relevant Agencies and international organisations, should help the authorities in both Greece and Italy take all possible measures to ensure that unaccompanied minors arriving as migrants are treated in accordance with international standards, including adequate shelter, protection, access to and prioritisation of asylum procedures and possible consideration for relocation.

The Commission should insist on the appointment of a child protection officer for every hotspot/site.

The Commission and the relevant Agencies should further assist the responsible authorities through the provision of training and legal advice and continue to monitor the situation and report on action taken and progress achieved.

3. Expert deployments
The Commission and the Agencies should continue to ask all Member States to provide more experts to cover current needs better.

Expert deployments by Member States should be long enough and in line with profiles requested to make the support provided by Frontex, EASO and Europol to Greece and Italy sufficiently efficient and effective.

4. Roles and responsibilities in the hotspot approach
The Commission, together with the Agencies and the national authorities, should set out more clearly the role, structure and responsibilities of the EU Regional Task Force in the hotspot approach.

The Commission and the Agencies should continue to insist on the appointment, by Italy and Greece, of a single person to be in charge of the overall management and functioning of each individual hotspot area on a more permanent basis and on the establishment of hotspot standard operating procedures in Greece.

5. Evaluation of hotspot approach
The Commission and the agencies should evaluate, by the end of 2017, the set-up and implementation of the hotspot approach to date and put forward suggestions for further development. These should include a standard model of support to be applied to future largescale migratory movements, the definition of different roles and responsibilities, minimum infrastructure and human resource requirements, types of support to be provided, and standard operating procedures.

This analysis should also assess the need for further clarifications of the legal framework for the hotspot approach as part of the EU’s external border management.
1. Welcomes the special report on the EU response to the refugee crisis: the "hotspot" approach endorses its recommendations and sets out its observations and recommendations below;

2. Notes the Commission reply and its commitment in supporting the Italian and Greek Authorities; welcomes that the Commission accepts all recommendations made by the European Court of Auditors in order to further develop specific aspects of the Hotspots approach;

3. Regrets that the Court in its special report could not deal with the broader picture, including the relocation to other Member States, but emphasises that the bottlenecks in the follow-up procedures caused a constant challenge for the well-functioning of the hotspots;

4. Acknowledges the importance of implementing the European Agenda on migration and stresses the need to continue developing the short-term measures, as well as the long term ones to better manage borders and address the root causes of illegal migration;

5. Calls the European Commission, EASO, Europol, FRONTEX (in lights of its new mandate as European Border and Coast Guards), National Authorities and other International Organizations to continue and increase their support to the Hotspots; notes that only a more intensified co-operation between the Commission, the Agencies and Member States can in the long run ensure a more successful development of the concept of hotspots;

6. Stresses in this regard that especially in the case of Italy the continued arrival of migrants continues to pose enormous challenges, for which support from the EU and its Member States is vital;

7. Stresses the importance of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF); calls for the possibility to apply the financial rules of the emergency assistance to the AMIF and ISF; insists that the only way to increase the 'hotspots' efficiency in supporting frontline Member States, is to increase financial resources to improve and create reception and accommodation infrastructures, which are essential to the enormous numbers of migrants arriving;

8. Welcomes the results of the ECA audit on the situation of migrant minors in the hotspots and stresses the importance of developing an integrated approach for their reception taking always in consideration their best interest; calls for a better use of financial resources for the reception of minors and for the training of staff who will closely work with the most vulnerable subjects; recalls that after the publication of this Special Report, the European Commission published a Communication completely focused on migrant minors; underlines the importance of this Communication and calls Member States to fully implement the provisions included in the document;

9. Calls therefore on the Commission and the Council to step up their efforts for supporting the hotspots through more effective relocation and, if there are no grounds for admission, return procedures;

10. Is alarmed by the continued reports on trafficking of children and calls for additional measures to protect these, especially the unaccompanied minors, from their arrival onward, since it is unacceptable that traffickers can continue to pose a direct threat to the children;

11. Calls Europol to continue its efforts in fighting illegal migration, trafficking in human beings and the fight against criminal organizations involved and to support National Authorities in dealing with possible criminal investigations on the management of the hotspots;

12. Welcomes the Italian and Greek National Authorities efforts to register the highest possible number of migrants arriving on their shores, with a registration rate in Greece of 78% in 2016 compared to 8% in 2015 and of 60% in 2015 compared to an average of 97% for 2016 in Italy; underlines that the only way to have an efficient reception system is to have a precise picture of the situation in the Countries;

13. Calls upon the Commission and the Council to ensure the quality of the examination of asylum applications in the hotspots; recognises the difficult circumstances under which the applications have to be processed but emphasises that it should be avoided that by accelerated procedures mistakes are made; further stresses that the frontline Member States should be responsible only for the registration and taking the fingerprints of all migrants, but the follow-up procedures should be a common responsibility of all member States in a spirit of solidarity; calls for asylum seekers to be adequately informed about the relocation procedure as
such, about their rights and about possible countries of destination;

14. Calls upon the Council to ensure that the persisting lack of experts is remedied by support from EASO as well as from Member States without further delay; is convinced that, especially in the case of Italy, additional support will prove to be necessary also in the future and calls upon the Commission and Council to agree on a plan to make such additional capacity readily available upon request from Italy and Greece;

15. Underlines that hotspots are places dedicated to the registration of incoming migrants and should not therefore become overcrowded, nor detention centres; calls Member States to continue their efforts in putting in practice all necessary measures to fully comply with the European Charter of Fundamental rights;

16. Is concerned with the many different stakeholders currently being involved in the establishment and functioning of the hotspots and requests the Commission and the Member States to submit proposals which will make the structure more transparent and accountable;

17. Recommends that the Court consider a quick follow-up report on the functioning of the hotspots, adopting a broader scope by including also an analysis of the follow-up procedures, i.e. the asylum, relocation and return procedures.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

Discharge 2015: European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex)

[The European Parliament, ]

30. Welcomes the support provided to national authorities in hotspot areas in relation to the identification and registration of migrants, return-related activities and Union internal security; welcomes the signature of an operational cooperation agreement with Europol to deter cross-border crime and migrant smuggling; calls for further and more effective cooperation with Europol and other agencies in the area of justice and home affairs.

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Discharge 2015: European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

[The European Parliament, ]

16. Recalls the fact that in 2015 a record number of almost 1 400 000 applications for international protection were made; recognises that the Office invested significant efforts in implementing the activities assigned to it under the European Agenda on Migration, in particular as part of the development of the ‘hotspots’ approach; notes the efforts made by the Office in managing the migrant crisis;

17. Encourages, in particular, the support and practical cooperation offered on issues relating to asylum-seeking children, including unaccompanied minors; welcomes the launch of the EASO Network on the Activities on Children;

18. Recognises that the growth of the Office’s budget in 2016 was significant in order to cope with additional tasks relating to the European Agenda on Migration, the hotspots approach, decisions of the EU Leaders Summit on Western Balkans and the EU-Turkey statement; notes with satisfaction that a range of steps were taken by the Office to deal with such an unprecedented increase in tasks, including the decentralisation of financial initiation accompanied by appropriate training and coaching; notes also that this led to a need for enhanced staff and corresponding office space;

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Discharge 2015: European Police Office (Europol)
17. Notes with satisfaction that the Office has extensive arrangements and agreements on the sharing of services of capabilities, including joint tender procedures with its Host State, several operational and strategic agreements with various other agencies, a grant agreement with European Union Intellectual Property Office, and close cooperation with Frontex on the hotspots approach;

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**Draft amending budget No 7/2015:** Managing the refugee crisis: immediate budgetary measures under the European Agenda on Migration

The European Parliament,]

C. whereas Draft amending budget No 7/2015 furthermore provides for an increase in the number of posts for Frontex, European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and Europol of 120 in total as well as the related appropriations for salaries until year-end of EUR 1,3 million in commitment and payment appropriations;

11. Welcomes the additional 120 establishment plan posts for agencies and expects this decision to also impact the 2016 budget as well as the budgets for the following years; urges the Commission to provide updated and consolidated information about the agencies' needs before budgetary Conciliation; calls on the Commission to propose a medium-term and long-term strategy for the justice and home affairs agencies' actions: objectives, missions, coordination, development of hot spots and financial resources;

12. Believes that EASO should get more staff than is now proposed by the Commission, as it is tasked with assuming a key role in the implementation of the Common European Asylum System, such as assisting in the processing of asylum applications and in the relocation efforts;

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**Draft amending budget No 5/2015 - Responding to migratory pressures**

The European Parliament,

G. whereas Draft amending budget No 5/2015 also increases the staffing level of 3 agencies, namely 16 additional posts for FRONTEX, 4 posts for the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and 3 posts for the European Police Office (Europol);

3. Recalls that in its reading of the 2015 budget in October 2014, Parliament had already called for substantially higher appropriations on these budget lines and additional staff for the agencies concerned;

4. Regrets however the limited amount of the increases proposed in Draft amending budget No 5/2015, which do not correspond to the actual needs given the ongoing and probably worsening crisis in the Mediterranean, the growing risk of an increase in refugees from Ukraine and the necessity to address migratory challenges in general; underlines however the need for a strict control on the destination of those funds and consequently more transparency when it comes to contract and subcontract procedures, taking into account the various investigations concerning several abuses discovered in Member States;
5. Regrets the divisions which have emerged between Member States in the Council on the Commission proposal contained in the "European Agenda on Migration"; recalls that, due to the nature of the migration phenomenon, the emergency can be more effectively handled at Union level;

6. Considers that the relevant agencies should not be subject to reduction or redeployment of staff; considers that those agencies must allocate their staff appropriately with the aim of meeting their increasing responsibilities;

7. Stresses that, given the large number of arrivals on the Union’s southern shores, the increasing role EASO has to play in the management of asylum, and the clear call for support in frontloading reception conditions, the proposal to increase EASO staff by only 4 is clearly insufficient; therefore requests appropriate EASO staffing and budget for 2016 in order to allow EASO to effectively fulfil its tasks and operations;

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European Parliament resolution of 12 April 2016 on the situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration (2015/2095(INI))

[The European Parliament; ]

38. Points out that one option for a fundamental overhaul of the Dublin system would be to establish a central collection of applications at Union level – viewing each asylum seeker as someone seeking asylum in the Union as a whole and not in an individual Member State – and to establish a central system for the allocation of responsibility for any persons seeking asylum in the Union; suggests that such a system could provide for certain thresholds per Member State relative to the number of arrivals, which could conceivably help in deterring secondary movements, as all Member States would be fully involved in the centralised system and no longer have individual responsibility for allocation of applicants to other Member States; believes that such a system could function on the basis of a number of Union ‘hotspots’ from where Union distribution should take place; underlines that any new system for allocation of responsibility must incorporate the key concepts of family unity and the best interests of the child;

81. Recalls that, in the ‘hotspot approach’ set out by the Commission in its European Agenda on Migration, the Borders Agency, EASO, Europol and Eurojust are to provide operational assistance to Member States in accordance with their respective mandates;

82. Points out, in that regard, that the Union agencies require the resources necessary to allow them to fulfil their assigned tasks; insists that the Union agencies and the Member States keep the Parliament fully informed of work undertaken at the hotspots;

83. Notes that both of the Relocation Decisions provide for operational support at the hotspots to be provided to Italy and Greece for the screening of migrants when they first arrive, registration of their application for international protection, provision of information to applicants on relocation, organisation of return operations for those who did not apply for international protection and are not otherwise entitled to remain or those who applied unsuccessfully, and the facilitation of all steps involved in the relocation procedure itself;

84. Calls for the hotspots to be set up as soon as possible in order to give concrete operational assistance to those Member States; calls for the allocation of technical and financial resources and support to Member States of first arrival, such as Italy and Greece, to enable the swift and effective registration and referral to the competent authorities of all migrants arriving in the Union with full respect for their fundamental rights; considers that quick and effective support by the Union to Member States and the acceptance of such support is important for mutual trust;
85. Recognises that one of the main purposes of hotspots is to allow the Union to grant protection and humanitarian assistance in a swift manner to those in need; emphasises that great care needs to be taken to ensure that the categorising of migrants at hotspots is carried out in full respect for the rights of all migrants; acknowledges, however, that proper identification of applicants for international protection at the point of first arrival in the Union should help facilitate the overall functioning of a reformed CEAS.

Oral / Written Questions

**Report of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) of the Council of Europe on the state of hotspots in the Aegean islands and the state of unaccompanied minors**, E-006015/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nikos Androulakis (S&D), 27-09-2017

A few days ago, a report of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) of the Council of Europe came to light, regarding the state of hotspots in the Aegean islands and the state of unaccompanied minors in Greece. More specifically, the report lists many violent incidents among detainees, inadequate provision of basic healthcare, inadequate assistance to vulnerable groups and inadequate legal safeguards, which create an extremely explosive situation. Moreover, the report is particularly critical of prolonged detention in poor living conditions and with inadequate care, and expresses complete disappointment on account of the inappropriate infrastructure in the detention facilities and most of the visited police stations.

1. Has the Commission been informed of the CPT report?
2. What action does it intend to take in order to draw the attention of the Greek Government to the need to improve living conditions?

**Eurojust support in Italian 'hotspots'**, E-004305/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Salvatore Domenico Pogliese (EPP), 28-06-2017

In its 2016 annual report, Eurojust reaffirmed its role in supporting those Member States facing significant migratory pressure. Eurojust’s work focuses mainly on identifying and registering migrants. Eurojust is not physically present in the hotspots, but it has set up judicial contact points in Greece and Italy with the aim of sending important information for judicial follow-up and coordination at EU level. In light of the above:

1. On combating international criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling, what results have been achieved on the back of cooperation between European public prosecutors and Eurojust’s coordination efforts?
2. Does Eurojust have information on potentially illegal behaviour by some NGOs that operate in the Mediterranean?

**Construction of new hotspots in Greece and Italy**, E-003496/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Rachida Dati (EPP), 24-05-2017

On 25 April 2017, the European Union Court of Auditors published a special report entitled ‘EU response to the refugee crisis: the “hotspot” approach’. In this report the Court noted that, in the wake of the EU-Turkey declaration, the length of stay of migrants in the hotspots had passed from a few days in transit to a much longer period, which raised issues of overcrowding. In its report, the Court pointed out that the hotspots in Greece were overcrowded and that more such hotspots needed to be created.

As regards Italy, the Court recalled that in November 2016 the Commission had asked Italy to open two additional hotspots and specified that 70% of migrants had disembarked on the Italian coasts outside these hotspots during the first seven months of 2016.

1. In view of the above, can the Commission state what progress has been made in the construction and opening of new hotspots in Greece and Italy?
2. What human and financial resources does the Commission intend to deploy in order to help Italy and Greece develop the hotspot approach so as to increase their reception capacity and also to cover arrivals outside such hotspots?

**Improving European migration hotspots**, E-003012/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Alain Cadec (EPP), 28-04-2017
On 25 April 2017, the European Court of Auditors published a report which notes that migrant reception centres in Greece and Italy do not always offer appropriate reception conditions. Experts assigned by the European Union do not offer sufficient assistance, as they do not stay there long enough.

Since 2015, the refugee and migrant crisis has seriously challenged the capacity of the Union and the Member States to handle the reception of migrants across Europe. Hotspots are one of the responses to this crisis and can be a very good tool for distinguishing asylum-seekers, who have to be taken in, from illegal immigrants.

1. What action will the Commission take with regard to the hotspot shortcomings reported by the European Court of Auditors?

European Asylum Support Office (EASO), E-001274/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Alain Cadec (EPP), 27-02-2017

Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 established the European Asylum Support Office, whose mission is to strengthen cooperation between Member States on asylum-related matters and help them cope with crisis situations.

1. Can the Commission specify the tasks of this Office and submit an assessment of its activities?

Refugees with disabilities in Greece, E-000361/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ana Gomes (S&D), 24-01-2017

Recent research by Human Rights Watch has found that refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants with disabilities are not properly identified and do not receive equal access to services in reception centres in Greece, even though the Commission has provided significant funding to the Greek Government and to UN and non-governmental agencies for operation of the centres on the Greek Eastern Aegean Islands, known as ‘hotspots’, and of camps on the mainland. The research also shows that next to no targeted efforts have been made to respond to the rights and needs of asylum-seekers, refugees and other migrants with disabilities. As a result, people with disabilities face considerable difficulties, aggravated by the worsening weather conditions, in accessing basic services such as shelter, sanitation and medical care, including mental healthcare.

1. What is the Commission doing to ensure that the Greek Reception and Identification Service properly identifies vulnerable asylum-seekers and migrants, including those with disabilities?
2. How is the Commission monitoring the funding it provides to ensure that it is benefiting refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants with disabilities on an equal basis with others in need?
3. How can the Commission support equal access to assistance for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants with disabilities at refugee and migrant sites in Greece?

Wretched living conditions of refugees under the snow, P-000091/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Sotiris Zarianopoulos (NI), 11-01-2017

This unacceptable situation of refugees, who are living in snow-covered tents, battling for days on end and risking their lives in the squalid conditions of the hotspots of Moria (Lesbos), Samos, Chios, the former Ellinikon airport, the Malakasa camp and elsewhere, is the direct consequence of the EU’s decisions, in particular the EU—Turkey agreement which means that over 16 000 refugees are doubly trapped. The facts on the ground show that the EU and the Greek Government took it for granted that a significant part of refugees would spend the winter in tents or even in containers and other sheltered areas without heating. Leaving aside the heavy responsibility borne by the SYRIZA-ANEL government, will the Commission say:

What is the EU’s position and what measures will it take, given that, while the refugees are living in unacceptable conditions during the harsh winter weather?
The security situation in EU 'hotspots', E-009406/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Rachida Dati (EPP), 14-12-2016

On 13 May 2015, the EU published the European Agenda on Migration in response to uncontrolled influxes of migrants, one of its key measures being the setting up of 'hotspots', i.e. registration centres for migrants entering the EU. While this is a task carried out by European staff, responsibility for managing the centres and ensuring their security rests with the authorities of the Member States in which they are situated. Recent clashes between the police and migrants in the centres themselves indicate that the 'hotspots' can be dangerous places, so much so that the Belgian Government has already recalled some of its staff.

1. In light of the above events, will the Commission re-examine the organisation and management of the registration centres?
2. Furthermore, can it confirm whether Europol has increased its presence in the 'hotspots' in accordance with the recommendations set out in the first report on progress towards an effective and sustainable Security Union?

Setting up 'hotspots' in the EU's neighbourhood, E-008952/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Rachida Dati (EPP), 30-11-2016

Tragically, 2016 has set a new record for the number of deaths in the Mediterranean. This, combined with the low numbers of irregular migrants who have been returned to their countries of origin, shows that there is a need for close cooperation between the European Union and third countries. In response to the migration crisis that has exploded in Europe, a number of 'hotspots' have been set up in Italy and Greece in order to swiftly identify and register migrants arriving in Europe, and to take their fingerprints. Thanks to these 'hotspots', it should be possible to distinguish refugees and asylum-seekers from economic migrants who are not entitled to remain in the EU.

However, if this action were to be taken in neighbouring non-EU countries as a first step, it could prevent people from setting out on extremely dangerous sea crossings organised by people-trafficking networks, and ease the pressure on Europe’s asylum systems.

1. With the foregoing in mind, is the Commission planning to work with third countries to establish 'hotspots' in the EU’s neighbourhood along the lines of those that have been set up in Europe?

Worsening conditions for refugees in camps on Greek islands, E-009035/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, João Pimenta Lopes (GUE/NGL), 30-11-2016

On 27 November, the Greek island of Chios was hit by heavy rainfall, leaving hundreds of refugees at the Souda camp literally stuck in the mire as a result of flooding and the destruction of the already very makeshift accommodation. Many of the flimsy tents were washed away or seriously damaged. Faced with similar conditions nearby are 300 refugees who fled from the camp after the recent attacks by right-wing extremists. Conditions at the VIAL camp are similarly dire because of the permanent overcrowding. Worsening conditions and overcrowding in refugee camps occur repeatedly on the Greek islands, where the facilities installed are being filled to twice their capacity. The conditions are in many cases inhuman, one such case being the Moria detention centre, where a 66-year-old woman and her 6-year-old grandson were recently burnt to death in an explosion.

1. Given this manifest violation of the right to dignity, and bearing in mind that winter is coming, with all the harshness which that will entail, will the Commission arrange for the Greek island hotspots to be closed down immediately and for the refugees concerned to be moved to the mainland?
2. Furthermore, given the existing conditions, does it accept that migration policies should be revised in order to facilitate and speed up asylum application procedures?

Easing the pressure on the Greek islands caused by the large number of refugees, E-008366/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi (EPP), 04-11-2016

One of the major problems faced by registration centres for refugees and migrants on the Aegean islands is excessive congestion, due to delays in the completion of
asylum procedures and the slow rate at which they are being returned to Turkey. According to the latest statistics, some 15,500 refugees are trapped on the Greek islands. This is almost double the objective total capacity of the accommodation facilities, which is 8,000. Given that, since the beginning of the refugee crisis, the islands of the North Aegean and the Dodecanese having been bearing a disproportionate share of the burden and Greek police officers are now expressing their concern about a possible domino effect in the Greek hotspots as there have been an increasing number of incidents of rioting recently, will the Commission say:

1. Have the competent Greek authorities to date submitted a concrete plan to relieve pressure on the Aegean islands so as to defuse the tension in the local communities caused by the length of time spent there by refugees and migrants?
2. How does it plan to provide assistance to Greece in order to speed up the procedures for processing asylum applications and returning refugees and migrants from the Greek islands to Turkey?

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Immediate drastic reduction of refugee hosting space on the Aegean Islands and measures for decongesting the islands, E-007812/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Notis Marias (ECR), 18-10-2016

According to official data, on 29 September 2016, 14,003 refugees and illegal immigrants were in the hotspots of the Aegean Islands, despite the fact that these sites only have space for up to 7,450 people. As has been pointed out in our Questions E-007329/2016 and E-006374/2016 and acknowledged by the UN High Commissioner, the growing congestion in the above hotspots has led to tensions that threaten the safety of both inhabitants and guests. However, the agreement resulting from the EU-Turkey meeting on 18 March 2016 provides, among other measures, for an increase in the short-term hosting space on the Aegean Islands from 6,000 to the excessive number of 20,000. In view of this, and since Decision 2015/1601 of the EU Council concerning the relocation has not been implemented at the desired pace, resulting in Greece facing huge congestion problem in the hosting structures:

1. Does the Commission insist on the creation of the above space for hosting 20,000 people on the Aegean Islands?
2. What initiatives will it take, in cooperation with the Greek authorities, to immediately relieve the pressure in the hotspots on the Aegean Islands and thus restore the security of their inhabitants?

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Increase in migration pressure on Evros, E-007708/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi (EPP), 12-10-2016

According to reports by the European police authorities, recently, particularly following the decision to close the Balkan route and the creation of hotspots on the Greek islands, traffickers of refugees and migrants have been looking for new routes to Europe. International and European bodies are monitoring the phenomenon and have recorded specific changes to the routes used by networks that transport refugees from a number of regions. With regard to Greece, apart from refugee flows to the usual island destinations in the Aegean (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos), in recent days increased pressure is being observed, and refugees and immigrants have been arriving in the Evros region from the European part of Turkey, either across the border river or by sea, onto the shores of the prefecture of Evros.

Given that the joint statement on refugees by the European Union and Turkey on 18 March 2016 only refers to the return of illegal migrants and Syrians arriving on the Greek islands:

1. Does the Commission agree that the abovementioned joint statement ought also to cover the return of illegal migrants and Syrians arriving in the Evros region?
2. Does it consider that the European Union-Turkey agreement on refugees needs to be added too in light of the new events that have taken place? If so, how is it looking into this eventuality in practice?

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Presence of permanent coordinators in Greek hotspots, E-007978/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi (EPP), 24-10-2016
In the conclusions of the recent European Council Meeting (20-21 October), special mention is made of Greece, on the migration issue, with regard to tightening control of the Eastern Mediterranean route. In particular, the European Council, inter alia, calls for further efforts to accelerate returns from the Greek islands to Turkey, and the rapid appointment of permanent coordinators to the Greek hotspots. It also calls for Member States to respond in full, to the calls for resources identified by the relevant EU agencies as being necessary to assist Greece. In view of the above, and considering that the asylum procedures take months, which at times creates unstable conditions and widespread incidents in the hotspots on Greek islands, could the Commission state:

1. What the responsibilities of permanent coordinators in Greek hotspots would be; the criteria for their appointment and the framework of their cooperation with the EU and Greek authorities?

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**Measures to relieve pressure in the hotspots on the Aegean Islands**, E-007329/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Notis Marias (ECR), 30-09-2016

On 19 September 2016, fresh incidents took place in the Moria hotspot in Lesvos, between refugees and illegal immigrants of different nationalities, resulting in fires on land to the north and south and within the camp itself, requiring the intervention of the Fire Department. More than 4,000 refugees and illegal immigrants have left the hotspot site, whilst the Fire Department speaks of the complete destruction of shelters and the tents.

According to official data, on 29 September 2016, 14,003 guests were in the hotspots of the Aegean Islands, although these sites only have space for up to 7,450 people. In addition, as at 28 September 2016, only 4,455 refugees had been relocated from Greece to other Member States of the total of 66,400 agreed upon.

Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos, in answer to our Question P-002541/2016, admits that ‘overall progress falls far short of the rate of relocation the Commission would consider achievable including that of the target of 20,000 by 16 May 2016 which has not been reached’.

1. What initiatives will the Commission take, in cooperation with the Greek authorities, to relieve the pressure in the hotspots on the Aegean Islands and thus restore the security of its inhabitants?

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**Moria refugee settlement on the island of Lesbos**, E-007363/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Neoklis Sylikiotis (GUE/NGL), 30-09-2016

Following the destruction by fire of part the Moria refugee settlement on the island of Lesbos, racist attacks on inmates have increased. On 20 September, Members of the Golden Dawn party, currently under investigation in connection with terrorist acts and a number of murderous attacks, targeted a group of young female activists, injuring a leading volunteer worker so badly that she needed hospital treatment. On 22 September 2016, an 84-year-old threatened refugees outside the Moria refugee settlement with a rifle. In view of this:

1. What action will the Commission take in response to such racist and xenophobic attacks that are taking place near refugee settlements in particular?
2. What measures does it recommend to ensure that the human rights of refugees and asylum-seekers are fully guaranteed in and around ‘hotspots’?

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**Food in migration hotspots**, E-006163/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Antonio López-Istúriz White (EPP), 01-08-2016

There are reports which confirm that food quantity and quality in hotspots (places where refugees are fed) is insufficient and very poor. According to the French organisation Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières — MSF), many of the almost 200 refugees (including a large number of children) who fled from the Boko Haram group to Bama, a city in the north of Nigeria, have unfortunately died of starvation and dehydration. This is only one of many examples. Even though many private organisations, like MSF, are performing very helpful humanitarian work to solve this problem, it is still not enough. We must ensure that these children get the care they deserve, given that children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. It is our job to ensure that human and children’s rights are respected.

1. In the light of the above, what is the Commission doing to address the problems of food provision?
Unprecedented numbers of migrants and asylum-seekers travelled by sea to European shores in 2015. By mid-November 2015, over 800 000 had reached Italy and Greece. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN refugee agency, 84% originate from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia and Iraq, all of which are countries experiencing conflict, widespread violence and insecurity. The EU, its institutions and its Member States have specific legal obligations to individuals on EU territory. Together, EU governments must ensure access to effective protection and guarantee respect for the rights of asylum-seekers and migrants at EU borders and on EU territory. The hotspot approach involves the establishment of centres in frontline Member States such as Italy and Greece in order to identify and register migrants and refugees.

1. With regard to these centres, is the Commission aware of how the safety of children is assured and who is responsible for their protection?

Access to asylum and legal representation in connection with inadmissibility recommendations issued by the European Asylum Support Office, E-005528/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Josep-Maria Terricabras ++ (Verts/ALE), 06-07-2016
On 9 June 2016, the Lawyers’ Association of Mytilini (Lesvos) sued the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) for obstructing access to asylum proceedings by preventing legal representatives from accessing hotspots in order to meet asylum applicants. Lawyers working in Greece also report EASO’s failure to inform legal representatives and asylum-seekers in a timely fashion about interviews of asylum applicants to be carried out as part of inadmissibility procedures, with notifications commonly reaching legal representatives a few hours in advance or only after the interview has taken place.

1. What is the role of, and what are the exact tasks being carried out on behalf of EASO by, the private company G4S, which has been awarded a direct employment contract by EASO to offer services within a public institution?
2. As part of inadmissibility assessments, how does EASO systematically carry out vulnerability assessments? Do these include, for example, due consideration of vulnerability cards issued by Médecins du Monde?
3. Does the Commission consider current procedures for issuing inadmissibility recommendations, coupled with reported failures to duly notify legal representatives in a timely fashion about interviews of asylum-seekers, to be in line with EC law and in particular with Article 47 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights?

Education in hotspots, E-005506/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Antonio López-Istúriz White (EPP), 05-07-2016
Hotspots were intended as a temporary place where refugees could stay for a limited time while their paperwork was being processed. The idea was that once refugees arrived at these entry points, they would be transferred to designated reception centres. These temporary entry points are in fact becoming permanent fixtures. If refugees are indeed staying indefinitely at these hotspots, we must ensure that their basic needs are met and that children are guaranteed the right to education.

1. How is the Commission currently guaranteeing children in hotspots in Greece and Italy the right to education?
2. What has it done to ensure that the children who arrived in these countries in March 2016 have access to education and can start the new school year this September?
Detention of asylum seekers and migrants on the Greek Aegean Islands, E-004865/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Judith Sargentini (Verts/ALE), 15-06-2016

Several reports indicate that, following the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016, all asylum-seekers and migrants arriving at Greek islands are automatically being detained, in severely overcrowded closed facilities characterised by significant shortages of basic shelter, unhygienic conditions and frequent violent incidents, and where Frontex and EASO are undertaking direct operations.

1. Does the Commission consider this blanket automatic detention of asylum-seekers and migrants on arrival at the Greek islands by the Greek authorities to be in line with EC law and international human rights and refugee law?
2. If the Commission considers this practice to be in line with the law, what is its view on the need for automatic detention of newly arrived asylum-seekers and migrants at the Greek islands’ ‘hotspots’?
3. Is the Commission aware of any alternatives to detention which have been explored by the Greek authorities, and if so what are these alternatives?

Safety of staff and migrants in Greek refugee centres, E-004164/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, David Casa (EPP), 24-05-2016

The events which occurred on 26 April 2016 in the Moria refugee centre on the Greek island of Lesbos are a matter of grave concern. According to reports, a number of people were injured in rioting which broke out after a Greek police officer allegedly beat a minor. As a result of the riot, EASO workers at the centre were also evacuated for their safety.

1. What is the Commission doing to guarantee the safety of EU agency workers in refugee centres?
2. How will safety be improved to ensure that such events do not take place again?

Floating hotspots, P-004213/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&D), 26-05-2016

A few days ago Italy proposed to the Commission that floating hotspots be set up to process migrants. Hotspots of this kind would enable identification procedures to be carried out directly on board, streamlining the return system and stopping people from running away. This is a type of arrangement in which humanitarian agencies and Frontex could assist. The hotspots now in operation, in Italy in particular, do not have the capacity to cope with the summer months. Mobile hotspots might thus offer an innovative solution for the immediate future. Floating hotspots, however, pose problems, not only from the legal point of view and as regards respect for human rights, but also when it comes to identification, a process that can sometimes take weeks, if not months. The medical care needed in the meantime for people who arrive critically ill is difficult enough to organise on dry land. Doctors without Borders has repeatedly drawn attention to that point and reluctantly decided to withdraw from a number of reception centres in Italy and Greece because the conditions are such that it cannot do its job.

1. In the light of the foregoing, and of the fact that it is considering what technical and legal means could be employed to implement the floating hotspot proposal, what action, if any, will the Commission take on the Italian proposal?

Compatibility of the establishment and management of hotspots with EU law, E-015297/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Barbara Spinelli ++ (GUE/NGL), 01-12-2015

Since September, within the activated ‘hotspot’ in Lampedusa, public authorities have adopted new illegal practices in violation of the rights of migrants and asylum-seekers. Migrants are hastily ‘interviewed’ and provided with an inadequate form as regards asylum procedures. Many migrants are therefore subjected to return decisions without having a real opportunity to apply for asylum under Directives 2011/95/EU and 2013/32/EU. After return decisions have been adopted, migrants are driven out of the centres and supplied only with an expulsion order to leave the country within seven days, via Fiumicino airport. Directive 2013/32/EU states that migrants held in detention facilities must receive appropriate information concerning asylum (Article 8). People who have expressed their wish to apply for asylum are applicants for international protection and should enjoy the rights provided for in Directives 2013/32/EU and 2013/33/EU (§27).
Considering that those practices have shown a lack of sufficient guarantees of human rights protection, by not genuinely taking into account the individual circumstances of each case, they contravene Article 19 of the EU Charter and the well-established jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights.

1. Will the Commission investigate the management of the hotspots in Italy and the compatibility of the hotspot approach with EC law?
Special report 07/2017 of 4 May 2017

The certification bodies’ new role on CAP expenditure: a positive step towards a single audit model but with significant weaknesses to be addressed

Policy Area | Budgetary Control | Agriculture and Rural Development
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Report No / Date / Title | Special report No 07/2017 of 4 May 2017: The certification bodies’ new role on CAP expenditure: a positive step towards a single audit model but with significant weaknesses to be addressed
Summary | Questions asked: The audit aimed at assessing whether the new role of the certification bodies (CBs) was a step towards a single audit approach and if the Commission took due account of it in its assurance model. The audit also aimed at assessing whether the framework set up by the Commission enables the CBs to draw an opinion on the legality and regularity of CAP expenditure in accordance with the applicable EU regulations and internationally accepted audit standards.

In particular, the Court examined whether the Commission’s guidelines to CBs ensured:
1. an appropriate risk assessment by the CBs and a representative sampling;
2. an appropriate level of substantive testing; and
3. a correct estimate of the level of error and audit opinion.

Findings
1. The Court concludes that the framework designed by the Commission for the first year of implementation of the new work of the CBs has significant weaknesses. As a result, the CBs’ opinions do not fully comply with the applicable standards and rules in important areas.
2. The CBs’ new role is a positive step towards a single audit model because the CBs’ outputs have the potential to help MSs to strengthen their control systems, reduce audit and control costs and enable the Commission to obtain independent additional assurance as to the legality and regularity of expenditure.
3. The Court noted that the Commission’s assurance model remains based on the Member States’ control results. For the 2015 financial year, the CBs’ opinion on legality and regularity were merely one factor taken into account when the Commission calculated its adjustments of the errors reported in the Member States control statistics. As those opinions are the only source that provides independent assurance on legality and regularity on an annual basis, the CBs’ work, once done in a reliable manner, should become the key element for the Commission’s assurance.
4. The Court’s examination of the Commission’s guidelines compliance with the applicable regulations and internationally accepted audit standards identified the following weaknesses:
a) For the risk assessment procedure, the Court observed that the Commission required CBs to use the accreditation matrix which creates the risk of inflating the level of assurance that the CBs can derive from PAs’ internal control systems;
b) The CBs’ sampling method for transactions based on the PAs’ lists of randomly selected on-the-spot checks entailed a series of additional risks that
were not overcome: in particular, the CBs’ work can only be representative if the samples initially selected by the PAs are themselves representative. A portion of the sampling for non-IACS transactions is not representative of expenditure and is thus not representative of the financial year audited;

c) As regards substantive testing, the Commission required CBs, for part of the sampling, to carry out only a re-performance of the PAs’ administrative checks;

d) The Commission required CBs for their substantive testing, only to re-perform the PAs’ initial checks. While re-performance is a valid audit collection method, internationally accepted audit standards also state that auditors should choose and perform all audit steps and procedures that they themselves consider appropriate in order to obtain sufficient audit evidence to form a reasonable assurance opinion;

e) As regards the drawing of the auditor’s conclusion, the Court found that the guidelines required the CBs to calculate two different error rates in relation to legality and regularity, and that the use made of these rates not only by the CBs, but also by DG AGRI, was not appropriate;

f) Finally, the Court concluded that the CBs’ opinion on the legality and regularity of expenditure was based on an understated total error. Indeed, the errors detected and reported by the PAs in their control statistics were not taken into account by the CBs in calculating their estimated level of error.

Recommendations:

1. The Commission should use the CBs’ results, when the work is defined and performed in accordance with the applicable regulations and internationally accepted audit standards, as the key element of its assurance model regarding the legality and regularity of expenditure;

2. The Commission should revise its guidelines as follows:

a) focus the CBs’ risk assessment as regards legality and regularity on the key and ancillary controls already used by the Commission;

b) require CBs, for the selection by the CBs of IACS transactions from the list of claims randomly selected by the PAs for on-the-spot checks, to put in place appropriate safeguards concerning the representativeness of the CBs’ samples; the timely CBs on-the-spot visits; the non-disclosure of the CBs’ sample to the PAs;

c) for the sampling of non-IACS expenditure, require the CBs to draw their samples directly from the lists of payments;

d) allow the CBs to carry out: on-the-spot testing for any transaction audited, and to carry out all audit steps and procedures that they themselves consider appropriate, without being limited to re-performing the PAs initial checks;

e) require the CBs to calculate only a single error rate regarding legality and regularity;

f) for IACS transactions which are sampled from the list of PAs’ random on-the-spot checks, the overall error calculated by the CBs, to be able to issue an opinion on legality and regularity of expenditure, should also include the level of error reported by the PAs in the control statistics, extrapolated to the remaining transactions not subject to PA on-the-spot checks. The CBs have to ensure that the control statistics compiled by the PAs are complete and accurate.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

CONT Working Document of 29/05/2017 on the European Court of Auditors’ Special Report 07/2017 (2016 discharge) on the certification bodies’ new role on CAP expenditure: a positive step towards a single audit model but with significant weaknesses to be addressed

Rapporteur: Petri Sarvamaa (EPP)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur,]

1. Welcomes the Court’s report, and endorses its remarks and recommendations; notes with satisfaction that the Commission accepts most of the recommendations and will consider, or has already begun to implement them;

2. Acknowledges the positive progress made in the CAP expenditure audit model; regrets however that the single audit scheme is still not functioning up to its full potential;

3. Reminds the Commission of its ultimate responsibility over the efficient use of CAP expenditure; encourages the Commission furthermore to assure
that the application of the control methods is sufficiently similar throughout the Union, and all the CBs apply the same criteria in their work;

4. Notes that the CBs have been independently auditing their respective country’s PAs since 1996; welcomes in this regard the fact that in 2015, for the first time, the CBs were required to ascertain the legality and regularity of the related expenditure; considers this to be very positive development as it could help Member States strengthen their controls and reduce audit costs, and enable the Commission to obtain independent additional assurance on the legality and regularity of CAP expenditure;

5. Regrets however that the Commission can use the work of the CBs only to a limited extent, since according to the Court’s report, there are significant design weaknesses in the current framework, due to which the CBs’ opinions do not fully comply with audit standards and rules in some important areas;

6. Notes with concern from the Court’s report that there were weaknesses in both methodology and implementation, inter alia audit strategies are often inappropriate, inadequate sets of samples are being drawn, and the CBs auditors often lack sufficient level of skills and legal expertise; acknowledges, however, that year 2015 may have been challenging for the Member States, as the relevant EU rules and guidelines were on a kick-off period at the time, and the CBs may not have been provided with enough information and training on their practical implementation, or given enough guidance on the required amount of samples;

7. Calls on the Commission to make further efforts in order to tackle the weaknesses pointed out in the Court’s report, and to achieve a truly efficient single audit model in CAP expenditure; encourages the Commission to monitor and actively support the CBs in improving their work and methodology on the legality and regularity of expenditure;

8. Points out in particular the need to develop more reliable work methods in the guidelines relating to the risk of inflating the assurance deriving from internal controls, the inappropriate representativeness of samples and the type of testing allowed, the unnecessary calculation of two different error rates and how the rates are used, and the unreliable opinions that are being based on an understated error;

9. Notes also from the Court’s report that despite the often unreliable nature of the control statistics of the Member States, the Commission continues to base its assurance model on this data, and that in 2015 the CBs’ opinion was merely one factor taken into account;

10. Regrets that the consequences resulting from this unreliability are clear, e.g. in direct payments DG AGRI made top ups for 12 out of 69 PAs with an error rate above 2 %, while only one PA had initially qualified its declaration, and in 2015 DG AGRI also issued reservations for 10 PAs. In rural area DG AGRI made top ups for 36 out of 72 PAs and in 14 cases the adjusted error rate was above 5%, and in 2015 DG AGRI also issued reservations for 24 PAs comprising from 18 Member States;

11. Calls on the Commission to put emphasis on this unreliability and develop measures in order to achieve a reliable basis for its assurance model; believes that the Commission should in this regard actively guide the CBs to carry out adequate opinions, and take advantage of the information and data provided as a result;

12. Encourages the Commission also to require the CBs to put in place appropriate safeguards to ensure the representativeness of their samples, to allow the CBs to carry out sufficient on-the-spot testing, to require the CBs to calculate only one single error rate for legality and regularity, and to ensure that the level of error reported by the PAs in their control statistics is properly included in the CBs’ error rate;

13. Recommends, in particular, that the Commission puts emphasis in opinions on the legality and regularity of the CAP expenditure of a quality and scope which enable the Commission to ascertain the reliability of the PAs’ control data, or where appropriate, estimate the necessary adjustment of the PAs’ error rates on the basis of the opinions provided by the CBs;

14. Notes that, regarding the ECA recommendation number 7, the Commission has to make sure that the PAs error rate does not inappropriately cumulate in the CBs overall error rate; believes that the guidelines in this regard should be as clear as possible in order to avoid misunderstandings in financial corrections;

15. Notes also from the Court’s report that the safeguard of the PAs’ unawareness of the transactions that will be subject to re-performance, was compromised in the case of Italy, where the CB had given the PA an advance notice of which beneficiaries would be scrutinised before the PA carried out the majority of its initial on-the-spot checks; stresses strongly that the adequate application of the claim-based selection method has to be secured in all cases, and advance notices cannot be applied without consequences;

16. Points out that for non-IACS transactions (both EAGF and EAFRD), there is a significant disparity between the period for which the on-the-spot checks are reported (the calendar year) and the period for which expenditure is paid (from 16 October 2014 to 15 October 2015 for the 2015 financial year); notes that
as a result, some of the beneficiaries subject to on-the-spot checks performed during the 2014 calendar year were not reimbursed in the 2015 financial year, and the CBs cannot include the results of such transactions in their calculation of the error rate for the financial year concerned; calls on the Commission to come up with an appropriate solution for the synchronization of these calendars;

17. Points out that the control schedules for the PAs can be very tight, especially in Member States with short growing season, and providing the relevant information to the CBs efficiently on time may often prove to be very challenging; notes that this may result in the use of multiple different control methods and duplicated error rates, as the CB cannot fully follow the PAs control procedure; believes that this issue could be resolved for example by means of satellite based monitoring measures;

18. Considers that new technology could be in general better taken advantage of in the control of CAP expenditure: where sufficient level of reliability can be achieved e.g. by satellite control, the beneficiaries and the auditors should not be burdened with excessive on-the-spot audits; stresses that while securing the financial interest of the EU funding in CAP expenditure, the ultimate aim of the single audit scheme should be to provide efficient controls, functioning administrative systems and lessening of bureaucratic burden;

19. Stresses furthermore that the single audit model should be able to provide less layers in the control system and less expenses for the EU, the Member States and the beneficiaries. More emphasis should be put on the reliability of the overall control system of the Member State, instead of focusing merely on supplementary checks for the beneficiaries; considers the control system to be still too burdensome for the beneficiaries, in particular in those Member States where irregularities and frauds are more uncommon, the overall audit system is proven sufficient, and reliability can be secured by other methods than excessive on-the-spot checks;

20. Calls on the Commission to take careful note of the Court’s report and the European Parliament’s recommendations, and further develop the control system of CAP expenditure towards a truly single audit approach;

2016/2151(DEC), 2015 discharge, : EU general budget, European Commission and executive agencies

[The European Parliament,]

Reliability of the data communicated by the Member States

200. Notes that in 2015, for the first time, the certification bodies were required to ascertain the legality and regularity of the expenditure; regrets that the Commission could use the work of those bodies only to a limited extent due to significant weaknesses in methodology and implementation such as:

− inadequate audit strategies;
− samples being drawn that were too small;
− insufficient skills and legal expertise of Certification Bodies’ auditors;

Conformity clearance inquiry

214. Considers that the simplification of the CAP and the reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries and paying agencies should be priorities for the Commission in the years to come; considers also that whilst the Commission should strive to keep the positive trend in the efficiency of its management of CAP and the CAP error rates by concentrating its attention on maintaining its corrective capacity and on the corrective actions to be taken by Member States, it should consider refraining from starting or pursuing conformity clearance inquiries of minor scope;

215. Calls on the Commission to:

e) monitor and actively support the certification bodies in improving their work and methodology on the legality and regularity of expenditure and in particular in delivering opinions on the legality and regularity of the CAP expenditure of a quality and scope which enable the Commission to ascertain the reliability of paying agencies’ control data or, where appropriate, estimate the necessary adjustment of paying agencies’ error rates on the basis of those
opinions, with a view to implementing the single audit approach in the area of agricultural spending;

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2015/2154(DEC), 2014 discharge, : EU general budget, European Commission and executive agencies

[The European Parliament,]

Protection of financial interests

116. Invites the Commission to develop a system of strict indicators and uniform criteria; is concerned about the reliability and quality of data coming from the Member States; calls on the Commission, therefore, to work closely with Member States to guarantee comprehensive, exact and reliable data keeping in mind the goal of full implementation of the Single Audit Scheme;

Data reliability issues

306. Stresses that while in 2014 the certification bodies gave a positive assessment on all EAGF-IACS control statistics reported by the Member States, the Commission had to correct upwards the error rates communicated by 17 out of 69 paying agencies with a residual error rate above 2 %, of which five were above 5 % (19), notably in Spain (Andalucía, Cantabria, Extremadura and La Rioja) and Hungary; points out that overall, the reported error rate for CAP direct payments increased from 0,55 % to 2,54 % as a result of adjustments made by DG AGRI;

307. Stresses that while in 2014 the certification bodies gave a positive assessment on 88 % of the EAFRD control statistics reported by the Member States, the Commission had to correct upwards the error rates communicated by 43 out of 72 paying agencies with an adjusted error rate above 2 % (of which 14 were above 5 %), in Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain (Andalucía and Valencia), France (ODARC and ASP), United Kingdom (England), Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal and Romania; points out that overall, the reported error rate for rural development payments increased from 1,52 % to 5,09 % as a result of adjustments made by DG AGRI;

Measures to be taken

330. Requests that:
(c) the Commission draft proposals with a view to sanctioning false or incorrect reporting by paying agencies including the three following dimensions, namely inspection statistics, statements by the paying agencies and the work of certification bodies;
(f) the Commission ensure that the new assurance procedure on legality and regularity of transactions, which will become mandatory as of the financial year 2015, is correctly applied by the certification bodies and produces reliable information about the level of error;

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2014/2234(INI), Protecting the European Union’s financial interests: towards performance-based controls of the common agricultural policy

[The European Parliament,]

13. Recalls that the objective of the single audit scheme is to put in place a single chain of audits from the final beneficiaries to the European Union institutions;
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Finds regrettable that the single audit scheme is not yet effective and that control systems set up by the Member States do not function to their full potential; reminds the Member States of their responsibility to provide the effective first level of controls while minimising the burden on farmers, and of the existing options for introducing flexibility when organising controls;</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Deplores the fact that the Commission had to correct upwards the error rates communicated by 42 out of 68 paying agencies with a residual error rate above 2%, despite the fact that almost all the paying agencies for the direct payments were accredited and certified by the certifying authorities and despite the fact that 79 of the 82 statements of assurance made by the paying agencies received an unqualified opinion from the certification bodies in 2013;</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Expects that the new mission assigned to the certification bodies by Regulations (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 and (EU) No 1306/2013 will improve the reliability of the data communicated by the Member States as regards their management of the EU agricultural funds;</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Calls on the Commission to amend the guidelines for certification bodies in order to verify more closely the compilation of statistical reports;</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Reiterates its demand to the Commission to draft proposals with a view to sanctioning false or incorrect reporting by paying agencies, including the three following dimensions, namely inspection statistics, statements by the paying agencies, and the work carried out by the certification bodies; asks that the Commission be empowered to withdraw the accreditation of the paying agencies in cases of grave misrepresentations;</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Advocates the reinforcement and stronger implementation of the single audit through the coordination of the control activities carried out by the various institutions, and calls for the administrative burden arising from audits to be lightened so that farmers are not subjected to different visits on separate occasions by the bodies responsible or to excessive or multiple controls by the Commission and the Court of Auditors in the same year, under any and all regulations, which would thus reduce the burden on farmers by decreasing the number of inspections; calls for the bundling of the audit tasks and controls carried out by certifying bodies and other Member State bodies; notes that the advice given by both national authorities and the Commission in guidelines to farmers for implementing the CAP is often contradicted by the assessment criteria used by the Court of Auditors, resulting in fines that are both disproportionate and unexpected;</td>
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Oral / Written Questions
Special report 08/2017 of 30 May 2017
EU fisheries controls: more efforts needed
Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)

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<th>Policy Area</th>
<th>Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)</th>
<th>Agriculture and Rural Development</th>
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<td>Report No / Date / Title</td>
<td>Special Report No 08/2017: EU fisheries controls: more efforts needed</td>
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<td>Summary</td>
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<td>Questions asked:</td>
<td>Has the EU an effective fisheries control system in place?</td>
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<td>The main audit question was further broken down into the following sub-questions:</td>
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<td>1. Do Member States have reliable information on their fleet characteristics? In order to answer this question, the Court examined how Member States checked their fleet capacity (in terms of gross tonnage and engine power), and whether they kept the fleet register up to date.</td>
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<td>2. Are fisheries management measures well implemented? Under this sub-question, the Court reviewed how Member States used vessel monitoring systems and how they managed fishing quotas and controlled fishing effort regimes and technical measures. The Court examined overall issues rather than focusing on specific fisheries.</td>
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<td>3. Are the data needed for fisheries management complete and reliable? In order to answer this sub-question, the Court examined how the Member States ensured that catch data and landing declarations were comprehensive, consistent and validated. It reviewed how the Member States shared management information, particularly when vessels from one flag Member State fished in the waters of another. The Court also examined how the Commission consolidated Member States’ data.</td>
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<td>4. Are inspections and sanctions appropriately planned, performed and applied? The Court also examined whether or not Member States followed up inspections with effective sanctions. To do this, it considered in particular whether or not sanctions were dissuasive, and how the penalty points system was implemented in practice.</td>
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<td>Findings:</td>
<td>1. Information on fleet characteristics available in the register was not always accurate and verified</td>
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<td>a) Checks on fishing capacity were incomplete</td>
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<td>b) The national fleet registers information was not always accurate</td>
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The Court carried out the audit between April and October 2016. It conducted visits to the European Commission and to four Member States (Spain, France, Italy and the UK (focusing on Scotland)). These Member States were selected as they represented more than half of EU fleet capacity and almost half of EU fish catches and as their fleets were active in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, which had significant differences as regards fisheries and fleet management measures.
2. Fisheries management measures were correctly implemented, but there were significant gaps in control requirements for small vessels
   a) Vessel monitoring systems provide powerful monitoring information, but exclude a large part of the fishing fleet
   b) Total Allowable Catches, quotas and fishing effort regimes were generally well managed, but it was sometimes difficult to monitor technical conservation measures

3. Fisheries data collected under the Control Regulation was incomplete and unreliable
   a) Member States’ catch data for smaller vessels without electronic declarations was incomplete and sometimes incorrect
   b) Sales data was not sufficiently comprehensive or consistent with landing declarations
   c) The information-sharing system between Member States was ineffective
   d) There were weaknesses in the data validation systems and processes
   e) The Commission did not receive comprehensive sets of validated data from the Member States

4. The inspection system was functional, but weaknesses in applying sanctions made enforcement less effective
   a) Member States generally planned inspections well, but inspection reports needed to be further standardised and better recorded
   b) Not all inspection activities were reported in the national database
   c) Sanctions applied were not always dissuasive, proportionate and effective

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Improving the reliability of information on fishing fleets
In order to improve the accuracy of information of fishing capacity, the Member States should, by 2018
   a) establish procedures to verify the accuracy of the information recorded in their national fleet registers;

In the context of any future amendment to the Control Regulation, and in order to improve the accuracy of information of fishing capacity, the Court recommends the Commission to include in its legislative proposal
   b) detailed rules for the regular documentary and on-the-spot verifications of both gross tonnage (GT) and engine power (kW) indicators used to calculate fishing capacity.

Recommendation 2 – Improving the monitoring of fisheries management measures
In the context of any future amendment to the Control Regulation, and in order to improve the monitoring of activities of small fishing vessels, the Court recommends the Commission to include in its legislative proposal
   a) the removal of the VMS exemptions for vessels between 12 and 15 metres long;
   b) the requirement for the installation of smaller and cheaper localisation systems for vessels under 12 metres long.

In order to ensure the transparency of the distribution of fishing quotas, the Member States should, by 2019
   c) inform the Commission of their quota allocation system in line with Article 16 of the CFP regulation, including how the transparent and objective criteria have been incorporated in the distribution of fishing quotas among stakeholders.

Recommendation 3 – Improving the reliability of fisheries data
1. In order to improve the completeness and reliability of fisheries data, the Member States should, by 2019
   a) review and improve the process for recording and verification of paper based data of fishing activities;
   b) ensure that they have reliable data on the activity of vessels under 10 metres long, and that they apply the rules established by the fisheries Control Regulation to collect them;
   c) complete the validation and cross checking of fisheries activities data.

   The Commission should, by 2020
   d) establish an information exchange platform to be used by the Member States to send validated data in standard formats and contents, so that the information available to the different Commission services matches with the Member States data;
   e) promote the development of a cheaper, simpler and user friendly system to facilitate the electronic communication of fishing activities for vessels less than 12 metres long;
   f) analyse the remaining problems in data completeness and reliability at Member State level and decide appropriate actions with Member States where necessary.

2. In the context of any future amendment to the Control Regulation, and in order to improve the completeness and reliability of fisheries data, we recommend the Commission to include in its legislative proposal
   g) the removal of the Electronic Reporting System and electronic declaration exemptions for vessels between 12 and 15 metres long or the consideration of alternative solutions;
   h) review the catch data reporting obligations of the Member States under Control Regulation, in order to include the details of fishing area, size of vessels and fishing gear.

Recommendation 4 – Improving inspections and sanctions
1. In order to improve the inspections
   The Member States should, by 2019
   a) when the new Regulation on technical measures will enter into force, develop, in consultation with the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), and use standard inspection protocols and reports more adapted to the specific regional and technical conditions of the fisheries than those provided under Annex XXVII of the Regulation 404/2011;

   In the context of any future amendment to the Control Regulation, we recommend the Commission to include in its legislative proposal
   b) the mandatory use of the Electronic Inspection report System by the Member States in order to ensure the exhaustiveness and updating of their national inspection results and to share the results of inspections with other Member States concerned.

2. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the system of sanctions, the Member States should, by 2019
   c) take due account of recurrent infringements or persistent offenders when setting sanctions;
   d) in order to ensure a level playing field for operators, fully implement the point systems and ensure its consistent application in their respective territories.

   In the context of any future amendment to the Control Regulation, we recommend the Commission to include in its legislative proposal
   e) a provision foreseeing a system to exchange data on infringements and sanctions in cooperation with EFCA and the Member States.

Rapporteur: Joachim Zeller (EPP)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

Parliament supports all of the recommendations proposed by the Court

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**Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees**

**European Parliament decision of 27 April 2017** on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Fisheries Control Agency for the financial year 2015 (2016/2181(DEC))

[The European Parliament, ]

24. Points out that 2016 was a key year for the implementation of the new Common Fisheries Policy concerning the landing obligation rules, and that the operational coordination of the activities of fisheries control inspections with the Member States entails appropriate human and financial resources; expresses its concern about the practical difficulties involved in implementation of the landing obligation for demersal fisheries, and considers that monitoring should take those difficulties into account;  

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**European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2017** on the status of fish stocks and the socio-economic situation of the fishing sector in the Mediterranean (2016/2079(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

22. Welcomes the increase in the number of inspections carried out by the European Fisheries Control Agency and stresses the need to strengthen efforts to tackle the two major compliance problems in 2016, namely: the false declaration of documents (logbooks, landing and transfer declarations, sales notes, etc.) and the use of prohibited or non-compliant fishing gear;

40. Calls for the establishment of a regional plan under the aegis of the GFCM, with a view to ensuring equal conditions for all vessels fishing in the Mediterranean area and ensuring that a fair balance is struck between fishing resources and the fleet capacity of all countries on the Mediterranean shore; calls, furthermore, for the establishment of a regional centre for the vessel monitoring system (VMS) and joint inspection operations;  

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**European Parliament decision of 28 April 2016** on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Fisheries Control Agency for the financial year 2014 (2015/2183(DEC))

[The European Parliament, ]
21. Notes the efforts made by the Agency in order to train Union inspectors, Member States and third countries officials, which has led to a considerable rise in the number of trained officials participating in inspections coordinated by the Agency within the framework of joint development plans; notes moreover that there was an increase in such inspections to around 12 700, with more than 700 suspected infringements detected during 2014;

22. Acknowledges the important contribution to implementation of the objectives of the reformed CFP made by the Agency; welcomes the Agency's close engagement with the Member States to organise the monitoring of the landing obligation by improving the control and surveillance of fisheries activities, brokering cooperation, promoting interoperability and building common capacities;

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[The European Parliament, ]

1. Stresses the importance of ensuring effective control of fisheries activities in order to guarantee sustainable exploitation of living marine resources and maintain a level playing field among EU fleets; calls on the Member States to ensure effective implementation of the Control Regulation;

2. Stresses that the ambitious EU fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) all over the world should be matched by an effective application of the Control Regulation in our own waters;

3. Underlines the diverse fields of application of the controls and the disparity between different inspection sites, and the resultant discriminatory nature of fisheries controls, with some Member States organising control from gear to plate and others controlling only certain links in the chain and excluding aspects relating to transportation of catches or to catering, for example;

4. Recognises the significant improvement in the control regime brought about by the current Control Regulation, in combination with the IUU fishing regulation, in terms of consolidation of many previously separate regulations, the introduction of the possibility of using new technologies, preliminary steps towards harmonisation of sanctions, clarification of the roles of the Commission and the Member States, improvements in traceability and other advances;

7. Notes the diversity in the organisation of controls, with some Member States splitting them up between different administrations and others carrying them out under the auspices of a single body, and also notes the diversity of instruments, tools, and human, logistic and financial resources used to conduct such controls; also notes that these circumstances make it difficult to ensure transparency in management and access to information;

12. Recalls that most random checks are performed at the time of landing, while inspections at sea reveal an apparently higher rate of infraction than those conducted on land, since they are based on risk assessment;

13. Recalls that, because the landing obligation for fisheries constitutes a fundamental change, the Omnibus Regulation ((EU) 2015/812) provides for a two-year adaptation period before infringements of the landing obligation are regarded as serious infringements; calls for that period to be extended if necessary;

14. Notes that Member States, and sometimes regions as well, transpose the rules into national and regional law in different ways because of the large number of optional provisions in Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009; stresses the difficulties in enforcing some of its provisions in practice, either owing to the
poor adaptability of the regulations to reality, for instance because of the defining characteristics of the fisheries sector (fleet, fishing gear, fishing grounds and target species), which vary significantly from one sea basin, Member State and fishery to another, or because of contradictions which may lead to several different interpretations by inspectors;

59. Encourages the Commission and the Member States to consider the development of a harmonised minimum-level penalty, applicable to serious infringements and/or repeated illegal behaviour;

60. Advocates imposing harsher sanctions for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing;

61. Calls for the creation of mechanisms to highlight good examples in order to increase compliance;

62. Considers that the interpretation of some provisions, which lead to a penalty for exceeding the limit for incidental catches without even taking into account the absence of negligence or intent when engaging in lawful conduct, clearly conflicts with the fundamental principles of the European Union, which are enshrined in Article 6 TEU as primary law;

66. Stresses the importance of electronic technologies (electronic reporting and electronic monitoring systems) which represent a potentially cost-effective means to widen observation of activities at sea;

67. States its opposition to any mandatory video surveillance system on board;

68. Calls the attention of the Commission to the fact that the use of new earth-observation technologies, such as Sentinel satellites, would be of benefit in fisheries con

69. Recommends that equivalent controls be applied to imported fishery products, to shore fishing and to recreational fishing, as well as to the EU fleet fishing in non-EU waters and to non-EU countries’ fleets fishing in EU waters so as to ensure that the entire European market has an equivalent level of access; proposes that data exchange be made mandatory in connection with illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries (IUU);

73. Requests the development of a monitoring, information-transfer and data-analysis system which is compatible throughout the Union; further requests that it fall to the Commission to set the framework for the exchange of data and information, in accordance with the data protection provisions in force; stresses that a transparent framework for the exchange of data and information is key to ascertaining whether a level playing field exists;

74. Stresses that implementation of the landing obligation must be accompanied by appropriate flexibility with regard to its control, as the fundamental changes imposed on fisheries by this obligation should be taken into account, particularly as regards multi-species fisheries; reiterates the importance of progressively applying sanctions and the points system in the event of serious infringements linked to non-compliance with the landing obligation, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2015/812 on implementation of the landing obligation;

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European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2015 on a new CFP: structure for technical measures and multiannual plans (2015/2092(INI))
8. Considers that innovation and research will need to be promoted to ensure that the CFP is properly implemented, in particular as regards the landing of discards, in order to increase selectivity and modernise fishing and monitoring techniques;

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European Parliament resolution of 17 April 2013 on the Court of Auditors’ special reports in the context of the 2011 Commission discharge (2013/2015 (DEC))

9. Notes that the CFP measures vessel capacity in terms of power (kilowatt) and size (gross tonnage) and that, however, these measures do not take into account technological progress in fishing methods, which complicates the task of setting appropriate targets for its reduction; notes that the Commission wants to maintain these static parameters until the end of 2015;

10. Calls on the Commission to enforce the Member States’ obligation to correctly update their fleet register, and to establish the obligation to report on their efforts to balance fishing capacity with fishing opportunities;

17. Considers that a reform of the CFP is needed to regionalise its implementation and the management of its programmes and measures;

18. Endorses the Court of Auditors’ recommendations (Special Report No 12/2011 of the Court of Auditors entitled ‘Have EU measures contributed to adapting the capacity of the fishing fleets to available fishing opportunities?’) that:
   - actions should be developed to effectively reduce overcapacity of the fishing fleet and to better define and measure fishing capacity and fishing overcapacity, while at the same time not disregarding that the remaining jobs in the fishing sector should be maintained;
   - the aid scheme for modernising vessels should be reconsidered and the role of fishing right transfer schemes clarified;
   - clear selection rules should be established for fishing vessel decommissioning schemes;
   - Member States should implement the EFF on time and any publicly funded investments on board should not have an increased fishing ability as a result;
   - the fleet register should be correctly updated, and Member State reports should contain the required information and be of suitable quality;

Oral / Written Questions

Action plan, E-002664/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, Guido Milana (S&D), 06-03-2014
In view of the Commission’s decision of 6 December 2013, notified under document C(2013) 8635, which sets out an action plan for solving the deficiencies in the Italian fisheries control system; In view of the fact that Article 2(3) of the above-cited decision stipulates that Italy shall submit to the Commission, every six months, an assessment report on how well the measures have been implemented, and that the services of the Commission shall submit their observations on this report within one month of receiving it; In view of the fact that Article 2(3) also stipulates that Italy shall submit its first report by 1 February 2014,

1. Can the Commission please give its observations on the first report submitted by Italy on the effectiveness of the actions that have been taken in order to ensure that fishing activities are properly controlled?

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Advisory Council recommendations, E-005196/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, José Blanco López (S&D), 11-08-2017
On 22 June, the EU’s advisory councils for the long-distance fleet (LDAC), the Market (MAC) and the Mediterranean (MEDAC) published a number of recommendations to improve the implementation of the EU Regulation to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. One of these recommendations is for the development of an IT tool allowing data exchange between the control authorities of different Member States; another calls for enhanced cooperation between the Commission and the European Fisheries Control Agency to develop guidelines for the verification of catch certificates; and another calls for greater transparency by publishing the EU action plans with regard to third countries, and setting up a database of vessels licensed to fish in third countries (and making this information publicly available).

1. Is the Commission developing or will it develop the guidelines proposed by the recommendations?

Checklists for fisheries inspections, E-004948/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Clara Eugenia Aguilera García (S&D), 18-07-2017
According to a report by the Court of Auditors on EU fisheries controls, the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) is responsible for organising operational coordination of control activities between Member States. It provides assistance to the Member States and the Commission, mainly through regional joint deployment plans (JDPs). The Court noted that in the context of the Mediterranean JDP for bluefin tuna and swordfish, very comprehensive checklists were available for landing inspections. They are, however, not mandatory and represent only pedagogical support, and in practice they were not used for national inspections in Italy and France despite being a good tool for standardising inspection approaches.

1. Is the Commission considering introducing any form of mechanism for regulating and extending the use of these checklists?

Compliance by national authorities with the Common Fisheries Policy, E-003005/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Alain Cadec (EPP), 28-04-2017
On 25 April 2017, the Commission published its assessment report on the common fisheries policy (CFP) control regulation. The Commission concluded that the main problem in the application of the regulation was the lack of cooperation between Member States and the lack or absence by some national authorities of penalties against illegal fishermen. The fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is a key challenge for the sustainable management of fish stocks in all European waters. The Member States are key when it comes to implementing the control policy and penalties.

1. What measures can the Commission propose with a view to improving cooperation between Member States?
2. What action will the Commission take to contribute to aligning Member States’ penalty systems?

Consultation on the setting of TACs and report on implementation of the landing obligation, E-006461/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Alain Cadec (EPP), Date: 31-08-2016
Regulation (EU) No 2015/812 requires the Commission to submit an annual report on implementation of the landing obligation. The report must set out:
- Steps taken by Member States regarding control of compliance with the landing obligation;
- Information on the socioeconomic impact of the landing obligation;
- Information on the effect of the landing obligation on safety on board fishing vessels;
- Information on the use and outlets of catches below the minimum conservation reference size of a species subject to the landing obligation;
- Information on port infrastructures and of vessels’ fitting with regard to the landing obligation;
- For each fishery concerned, information on the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the landing obligation and recommendations to address them.

The Commission consultation report does not include any statistics, which makes it difficult for the co-legislator to assess its findings.
1. Can the Commission please specify what the outlets are for unintended catches of marine organisms in the various fisheries?
2. What currently happens to these catches on local markets?

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**Fisheries control**, E-004057/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ruža Tomasić (ECR), 18-05-2016
At present the Committee on Fisheries is working on an own-initiative report entitled ‘How to make fisheries controls in Europe uniform’. One of the main problems as regards fisheries control is the inadequate cooperation among Member States.
   1. How will the Commission bring about better cooperation among Member States, especially when they exchange fisheries control data?
   2. In addition, bearing in mind that in some regions (the Mediterranean, for instance) basins are managed jointly with countries outside the EU, what action is it taking to improve fisheries control cooperation between Member States and non-member countries?

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**Fisheries Control Agency**, P-013581/2015, Question for written answer P-013581-15, to the Commission, Rule 130, Isabelle Thomas (S&D), 07-10-2015
Under Article 95 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 of 20 November 2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy, the Commission and the Member States may determine which fisheries are to be subject to specific control and inspection programmes.
In other words, Article 95 makes it possible to determine the fisheries for which the European Fisheries Control Agency coordinates Member State action, and therefore also the scope of the agency’s powers and responsibilities.
   1. Could the Commission state which fisheries are currently subject to a specific programme, and what the grounds were for choosing those fisheries over others?
   2. Why are some fisheries not subject to such programmes, even when those fisheries are known be problematic?

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**Control under the landing obligation**, E-000088/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ole Christensen (S&D), 06-01-2015
Article 33(5) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 provides that ‘all catches of a stock or a group of stocks subject to quota made by Community fishing vessels shall be charged against the quotas applicable to the flag Member State’. In light of the above, can the Commission answer the following:
   1. How is this provision applied with respect to the landing obligation?
   2. How are Member States supposed to document that all catches are accurately charged against their quota allocation?
   3. How will the Commission calculate quota deductions for Member States that are unable to provide the necessary ‘accurate documentation’ for catches taken, thus obliging it to account for the uncertainty associated with reporting?

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**Data on European fleets that fish below 600 metres**, E-014111/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Clara Eugenia Aguilera García (S&D), 23-10-2015
It is important to have the best available information for future discussions on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council (COM(2012) 0371) establishing specific conditions to fishing for deep-sea stocks in the North-East Atlantic and provisions for fishing in international waters of the North-East Atlantic. Based on the latest available VMS data on European boats operating in the area and bathymetric charts of the zone:
1. How many bottom trawlers that fish for species listed in Annex I of the proposal do so below 600 metres?
2. What percentage of their time do they spend fishing below 600 metres?
3. What percentage of catches of species listed in Annex I, compared to total catches, are made below 600 metres?

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**Landing obligation**, E-014593/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Daciana Octavia Sârbu (S&D), 10-11-2015

The new CFP prohibits the discarding of live or dead by-catch at sea and introduces a landing obligation. In order to help fishermen adapt to this change, the landing obligation will be introduced stepwise, between 2015 and 2019, for all commercial fishing activities (for species governed by TACs and fish under the minimum catch size) in European waters. Can the Commission therefore state:

1. How it will consolidate and monitor the landing obligation in real terms, when fishermen who comply with that obligation register huge losses?
2. Whether it considers that an on-board video monitoring system should be introduced to ensure that the landing obligation is correctly implemented?

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**Fleet capacity of Member States**, E-001550/2013, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, Lucas Hartong (NI), 13-02-2013

In its special report No 12/2011, the European Court of Auditors indicates that it is frequently unclear to what extent Member States are complying with the rules concerning the decommissioning of fishing vessels. The Committee on Budgetary Control comes to the same conclusion (2013/2015(DEC)), calling for European fisheries policy to be conducted at regional level. In view of this:

1. Since the publication of the special report by the Court of Auditors, has the Commission drawn up a list indicating effective fishing fleet capacity limits for each Member State? If so, can it attach it to its answer? If not, why not?
2. Which specific Member States have excess fishing fleet capacity? Have they already submitted proposals for the decommissioning thereof?
3. Which specific Member States are failing to submit prompt and adequate reports regarding their fleet registers? What penalties has the Commission imposed and/or can it (still) impose if appropriate?
4. Does the Commission concur with the recommendation from the Committee on Budgetary Control that European fisheries policy be conducted at regional level? If not, why not?
5. Does the Commission agree with the Committee on Budgetary Control regarding the ineffectiveness of certain types of European fisheries subsidies? If not, why not?
### Special report 09/2017 of 20 June 2017

**EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia**

Migration | Human Rights | Foreign Affairs

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<td>Special report no 09/2017 of 20/06/2017: EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia.</td>
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<td>Summary</td>
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<td>Questions asked:</td>
<td>Has EU support for the fight against human trafficking in South/South-East Asia been effective?</td>
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<td>For this purpose, the audit assessed the comprehensiveness of the EU’s approach to fighting human trafficking in relation to these regions and whether EU human trafficking projects in South/South-East Asia during the 2009-2015 period contributed effectively to the fight against human trafficking.</td>
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<td>The Court identified and examined all 35 human trafficking-related projects implemented in South/South-East Asia over the 2009-2015 period with total funding of 31 million euro. The audit work consisted of a desk review of Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS) documentation, interviews of staff from the Commission and the EEAS, and a visit to Thailand, which is the main centre of UN activity in Asia and the Pacific.</td>
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<td>Findings:</td>
<td>1. The EU human trafficking policy framework largely provides for a comprehensive approach to address human trafficking, although some aspects are not yet fully developed.</td>
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<td>2. Despite identified weaknesses, most human trafficking projects produced positive results, although sustainability was a concern.</td>
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<td>Recommendations:</td>
<td>In the light of its findings and in order to improve the effectiveness of the EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia, the Court recommends that:</td>
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<td>1. The Commission, in coordination with the EEAS and considering the implications of the mid-term review on the external financing instruments, should develop the human trafficking strategic framework further, in particular by:</td>
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<td>• proposing to the Council an updated list of priorities, which is based on the results achieved so far, the pervasiveness of human trafficking in individual countries/regions and thematic policy priorities;</td>
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<td>• ensuring that sufficient and comparable data on supported anti-trafficking activities is available to decision-makers and practitioners;</td>
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<td>• developing clear objectives and targets for the fight against human trafficking, thus facilitating the design of relevant, coherent and comprehensive</td>
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actions in the agreed priority countries/regions. Objectives should be translated into more detailed operational guidance which is sufficiently clear to steer activities on the ground, e.g. by using relevant country frameworks, country strategies, programming exercises and existing management reports; 
• identifying and subsequently evaluating and reporting on which objectives are best pursued through projects, by using another tool (e.g. human rights dialogue, technical assistance instruments, dedicated human trafficking partnerships etc.), or by a combination of several tools (Target date - Mid 2018).

2. During the preparation of calls for proposals and the selection and award procedure, the Commission should aim to support projects most likely to contribute to the objectives of fighting human trafficking in the relevant priority region/country by:
• including selection criteria which support a comprehensive approach in the region/country, adequate coverage of all defined priorities and the possibility of achieving interaction and synergies between projects and other tools;
• assessing the type and size of grants which best match the strength and capacity of civil society in the country;
• ensuring that the design of selected projects includes SMART objectives and RACER indicators and that the expected results are realistic in terms of time, budget and partners’ capacity; • placing greater emphasis on the sustainability of expected project results, from an early stage and throughout the entire project life-cycle, e.g. by including for instance, developing exit strategies which consider alternative sources of funding and encourage national ownership after project completion (Target date - Start 2018).

Rapporteur: José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (EPP)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Welcomes the special report assessing the EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia, endorses its recommendations and sets out its observations and recommendations below;
2. Acknowledges that despite the challenging environment it had to operate in, the EU made a tangible contribution to the combat against human trafficking in South/South-East Asia;
3. Welcomes the progress made in the fight against human trafficking through measures such as the appointment of European Migration Liaison Officers to specific countries and asks to continue the work in this line;
4. Encourages the EU to intensify its cooperation with the national and regional governments, as well as other organisations present in the area (UN, ASEAN, relevant NGOs) and the civil society, in order to obtain a better overview of the lingering priorities and thus prepare a more targeted action plan;
5. Stresses the importance of eradicating extreme poverty and minority and gender discrimination in South/South-East Asia countries, as well as of consolidating their democratic and human rights’ foundations with the aid of EIDHR;
6. Calls on the Commission to develop a comprehensive, coherent and reliable database on anti-trafficking financial support so that the distribution of funds is more justified and reaches the recipients that actually have the most pressing needs; agrees with the Council in the necessity of elaborate an updated list of regions and countries affected by human trafficking and that list should be included in the database;
7. Welcomes the Communication reporting on the follow-up to the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of trafficking in human beings and identifying further concrete actions published by the European Commission in December 2017; calls on the Commission to propose specific measures that should be developed for each region;
8. Welcomes that trafficking in human beings will continue to being a priority in the upcoming EU Policy Cycle on Organised and Serious International
9. Considers it essential to strengthen the law enforcement agencies in South/South-East Asia states so that they are more effective in detecting and dismantling the human trafficking networks; demands that the punishments for the criminals involved in people trafficking be toughened;
10. Calls on the Commission and the Member states to continue the fight against human trafficking inside the European Union with political and judicial cooperation so as to tackle the mafias that use the European Union as final destination of the victims from human trafficking as it appears in the Communication of December 2017;
11. Believes that a better linkage between Timing of mitigating actions, resources allowed to the issue is required as well as an increased cooperation among the EEAS, the Commission, ASEAN and the United Nations for allowing a more efficient fight against human trafficking;
12. Invites the EEAS and the Commission to also address the issue of human trafficking by exploring other channels of action like bilateral and multilateral agreements.

### Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

| European Parliament resolution of 8 October 2015 on the situation in Thailand (2015/2875(RSP)) |
| [The European Parliament, ] |
| 12. Takes note of the measures taken by the Thai Government to comply with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and to put an end to endemic modern-day slavery in the supply chain of its fishing industry; encourages the government to implement these measures as a matter of urgency and to step up its efforts; |
| 18. Urges the international community, and the EU in particular, to put all their efforts into fighting human trafficking, slave work and forced migration by advocating international collaboration on the monitoring and prevention of human rights violations relating to labour issues; |
| ******* |
| European Parliament resolution of 21 May 2015 on the plight of Rohingya refugees, including the mass graves in Thailand (2015/2711(RSP)) |
| [The European Parliament, ] |
| 1. Expresses its deepest concern over the plight of Rohingya refugees and the humanitarian crisis taking place at the moment on the high seas and in the territorial waters between Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand and Indonesia, and is shocked by the findings following the recent exhumation of dozens of bodies from mass gravesites near human trafficking camps in southern Thailand; extends its condolences to the families of the victims; |
| 3. Welcomes the acknowledgement by the Government of Thailand of the problem of human trafficking in Thailand and the region, and of the complicity of certain corrupt authorities in smuggling humans; calls on the Government of Thailand and its officials to end any complicity with the criminal gangs trafficking Rohingya people and other migrants in Thailand; |
| 4. Calls on all countries in the region to strengthen cooperation on counter-smuggling and counter-trafficking measures while ensuring the protection of victims; underlines the important role ASEAN can play in this regard; encourages the governments of states in the region to participate in the upcoming regional meeting on the migrant situation, which will be hosted by Thailand on 29 May 2015 in Bangkok; welcomes the drafting of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP), which should be endorsed by ASEAN leaders in the course of 2015; |
9. Welcomes the aid provided by the European Union and international organisations such as the UNHCR to the Rohingya in Myanmar/Burma and Thailand, and the EU humanitarian assistance provided to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Arakan/Rakhine State, to undocumented Rohingya and vulnerable host populations in Bangladesh and to Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants currently being held in immigration detention centres (men) or social welfare centres (women and children) in Thailand;

10. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to address this issue at the highest possible political level in her contacts with Thailand and Burma/Myanmar and with other ASEAN member countries;

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European Parliament non-legislative resolution of 17 December 2015 on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the Union, of the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, of the other part (05432/2015 – C8-0062/2015 – 2013/0440(NLE) – 2015/2096(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

26. Expresses concern about Vietnam being one of the major source countries for victims of human trafficking, and about reports of large numbers of children, especially boys who are not protected by the law against sexual abuse, falling victim to child prostitution, trafficking or maltreatment; urges Vietnam to develop strong and effective child protection laws that protect all children regardless of their gender; calls on the Commission to support Vietnam in strengthening its capacities in the field of migration policies and the fight against human trafficking and organised crime, including in the context of its labour and migration policies; is equally concerned about reports on the exploitation of Vietnamese victims of human trafficking, including minors, in the Member States; calls on the Commission to urgently ensure that key protection provisions set out in the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings are fully implemented; encourages the Government of Vietnam and the Commission to consider the establishment of a subcommittee or specialised working group on human trafficking under the Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation Agreement;

43. Considers the Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Vietnam as an opportunity for the EU to reinforce its positioning in Asia and play a greater role in the region; stresses that this agreement is also a chance for the EU to foster its objectives of peace, the rule of law, democracy and human rights, maritime safety and resource sharing;

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European Parliament non-legislative resolution of 8 June 2016 on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the Union, of the Framework Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of the Philippines, of the other part (05431/2015 – C8-0061/2015 – 2013/0441(NLE) – 2015/2234(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

2. Considers that the EU should continue providing financial support and capacity-building assistance to the Philippines for poverty alleviation, social inclusion, respect for human rights and the rule of law, the promotion of peace, reconciliation, security and judicial reform, and assisting the country in disaster
9. Calls on the Philippine government to build capacity in the field of systematic data collection on human trafficking, and calls for the EU and its Member States to support the government, and notably the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking (IACAT), in the efforts being made to enhance assistance and support for victims, to put into place efficient law enforcement measures, improve the legal avenues of work labour migration, and ensure decent treatment ofFilipino migrants in third countries;

10. Calls for the EU and its Member States to engage with the Philippines in order to exchange intelligence, cooperate and provide support for the government’s capacity-building in the international fight against terrorism and extremism in relation to fundamental rights and the rule of law;

21. Calls for regular exchanges between the European External Action Service (EEAS) and Parliament, to allow Parliament to follow up on the implementation of the Framework Agreement and the achievement of its objectives;

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European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2014 on Pakistan’s regional role and political relations with the EU (2013/2168(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

A. whereas Pakistan’s strategic role in the region, its relationship to its neighbours and EU-Pakistan relations are of major and growing importance to the EU, given the country’s pivotal location at the heart of a volatile neighbourhood, its centrality to security and development in Central and South Asia, and its crucial role in combating terrorism, non-proliferation, drug trafficking, human trafficking and other transnational threats, all of which affect the security and well-being of European citizens;

I. whereas Pakistan is one of the largest recipients of EU development and humanitarian assistance, and whereas the EU is Pakistan’s largest export market;

J. whereas Pakistan is an increasingly important partner of the EU in combating terrorism, nuclear proliferation, human and drug trafficking, and organised crime, and in the pursuit of regional stability;

K. whereas the EU and Pakistan have recently chosen to deepen and broaden their bilateral ties, as exemplified by the five-year engagement plan, launched in February 2012, and the first EU-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, held in June 2012;

11. Sets its hope in Pakistan’s constructive role in promoting regional stability, including when it comes to the presence of NATO and EU Member States in post-2014 Afghanistan, by further advancing the triilogue format of engagement in Afghanistan with India, Turkey, China, Russia and the United Kingdom, and by fostering regional cooperation in the fight against trafficking in people, drugs, and goods;

19. Encourages both the EU and Pakistan to cooperate in the implementation process and to monitor progress on a regular basis by strengthening the dialogue between both parties in the long term;

23. Asks the EEAS, the Commission and the Council also to ensure that EU policy towards Pakistan is contextualised and embedded in a broader strategy for the
region, thereby reinforcing EU interests across South and Central Asia; considers it important that EU bilateral relations with Pakistan and neighbouring countries, in particular India, China and Iran, also serve to discuss and coordinate policies with respect to the situation in Afghanistan, in order to ensure a targeted approach; stresses, in this regard, the need for increased EU-US policy coordination and dialogue on regional issues;

25. Firmly reiterates that progress in bilateral relations is linked to improvement in Pakistan’s human rights record, in particular as regards eradicating bonded labour, child labour and human trafficking, curbing gender-based violence, enhancing women and girls’ rights, including that of access to education, ensuring freedom of speech and independent media, promoting tolerance and protection of vulnerable minorities by effectively fighting all forms of discrimination; recognises that this requires the end of the culture of impunity and the development of a reliable legal and judicial system at all levels, which is accessible to all;

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European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2016 on the fight against trafficking in human beings in the EU’s external relations (2015/2340(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

22. Calls for the EU and the Member States to increase cooperation with third countries in order to investigate all stages of trafficking in human beings, including at the recruitment stage, to improve the exchange of information, and to launch proactive operations, (financial) investigations and prosecutions; calls on all states to improve oversight and regulation of recruitment agencies;

77. Is concerned by the insufficient level of international co-operation on cases of trafficking in human beings, particularly where countries of origin and countries of transit are involved, and that such a situation poses a significant impediment to effectively combating trafficking in human beings; calls for enhanced coordination and cooperation and the systematic exchange of information to investigate and combat transnational trafficking in human beings, stepping up financial and technical assistance and strengthening cross-border communication, cooperation and capacity building at government and law enforcement level, including border guards, immigration and asylum officials, criminal investigators and victim support agencies, civil society and UN agencies, including on how to identify and protect victims and to discuss ways of dealing with countries of origin, transit and destination which have not ratified the UN Palermo Protocol; calls on the EU to develop a regional approach, concentrating on the ‘trafficking routes’ and offering responses which are adapted to the type of exploitation in the different regions; underlines in addition the usefulness of international exchange programmes for anti-trafficking professionals;

84. Urges the EU to strengthen its cooperation with NGOs and other relevant international organisations, including by ensuring adequate funding and coordinated assistance, in order to increase the exchange of best practices, the development of policies, implementation, and to increase research, including with local actors, notably focusing on access to justice for victims and prosecution of perpetrators;

92. Calls on EU representatives to pay particular attention to trafficking in human beings in the EU’s political dialogue with third countries, and also through its cooperation programmes and within multilateral and regional fora, including through public statements;

93. Calls on the EU to review its assistance programmes regarding trafficking in human beings, to make funding more targeted and to make trafficking in human beings an area of cooperation in its own right; in that context encourages the increase of resources for services dealing with trafficking in human beings within the EU institutions; urges the Commission to regularly re-evaluate its list of priority countries, including the selection criteria, to ensure that it reflects
the realities on the ground and to make them more flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and emerging trends;

97. Calls for EU policy against trafficking in human beings to be made more effective by being more deeply embedded within the wider EU strategies on security, equality between women and men, economic growth, cybersecurity, migration and external relations;

99. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that human rights, gender equality and the fight against trafficking in human beings remain at the heart of the EU's development policies and partnerships with third countries; calls on the Commission to introduce gender-sensitive measures when creating new development policies and when reviewing existing policies;

102. Calls on the EU to support third countries in their efforts to increase the identification, assistance and reintegration of victims and prosecutions for trafficking in human beings, putting in place and implementing adequate legislation, and harmonising legal definitions, procedures and cooperation in line with international standards;

105. Calls on the Member States to enhance cooperation with third countries in order to combat all forms of trafficking in human beings, paying particular attention to the gender dimension of trafficking in human beings to specifically combat child marriage, the sexual exploitation of women and girls and sex tourism; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to redouble efforts under the Khartoum Process by running more dedicated projects and ensuring the active participation of a greater number of countries;

112. Calls on the EU to promote programmes supporting the inclusion of migrants and refugees with the involvement of key actors from third countries, and also of cultural mediators, to be helpful in raising the level of awareness of communities on trafficking and making them more resilient to the penetration of organised crime;

118. Encourages the EU to develop a new post-2016 anti-trafficking strategy with a stronger and more targeted external dimension, which gives added priority to developing partnerships with local civil society in non-EU countries of origin, transit and destination, governments and the private sector and to addressing the financial and economic aspects of trafficking;

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[The European Parliament, ]

Y. whereas the fight against migrant smuggling, trafficking and labour exploitation necessitates both short-, medium- and long-term responses, including measures to disrupt criminal networks and to bring criminals to justice, the gathering and analysis of data, measures to protect victims and to return irregularly staying migrants, as well as cooperation with third countries, along with longer-term strategies, to address the demand for trafficked and smuggled persons and the root causes of migration that force people into the hands of criminal smugglers;

67. Calls on the EU to make the fight against trafficking in human beings a priority in its external policies, addressing both the demand and supply side of the phenomenon, to pay particular attention to the protection of victims and to increase communication and cooperation with relevant actors in the fight
against trafficking in human beings; reiterates the need for all Member States to implement Directive 2011/36/EU and the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings;

68. Recalls that criminal networks are taking advantage of the increasing migration pressures, the lack of safe migration channels and of the vulnerability of migrants and refugees, especially women, girls and children, in order to subject them to smuggling, trafficking in human beings, slavery and sexual exploitation;

69. Urges the EU and its Member States to pay attention to the identification of refugees and migrants as victims of trafficking in human beings or as victims of violations and abuse as part of smuggling; calls, in this context, for training of border guards to ensure accurate identification, which is fundamental to the realisation of the rights to which victims are legally entitled;

70. Welcomes the increase in resources for the Triton and Poseidon operations; notes the launch of the EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia against smugglers and traffickers in the Mediterranean and supports the reinforcement of the management of the Union’s external borders;

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[The European Parliament, ]

15. Draws attention to the physical and psychological violence suffered by migrants and to the need to recognise the specific types of violence and persecution to which migrant women and children are subjected, such as human trafficking, enforced disappearance, sexual abuse, genital mutilation, early or forced marriage, domestic violence, slavery, honour crimes and sexual discrimination; recalls the unprecedented and ever increasing number of victims of sexual violence and rape, including when used as a weapon of war;

19. Recommends that gender issues be incorporated into migration policies, including in the form of measures to prevent and punish trafficking and all other forms of violence targeting women and discrimination against them; urges that gender equality be fully realised, de jure and de facto, as a key element in preventing violence against women, with a view to empowering and emancipating them;

57. Recalls that the opening of safe and legal migration channels is the best way of combating human trafficking and smuggling and that development strategies should recognise migration and mobility as motors for development, through remittances and investments, in both the host country and the country of origin; calls on the EU and the most highly developed third countries to work together to open up legal channels for migration and establish cooperation protocols between countries of origin and countries of destination in order to create effective temporary migration schemes, drawing inspiration from the good practices employed in certain countries, in particular in order to foster the reunification of families and mobility, including for economic reasons, and to do so for all skill levels, including for less skilled migrants, in order to combat illegal work;

65. Emphasises the need to strengthen cooperation with these organisations in order to prevent smuggling of migrants and human trafficking by enhancing training, capacity-building actions and information-sharing mechanisms, including an evaluation of the impact of the Immigration Liaison Officers networks and ratification of the Palermo Protocols in this field in order to promote cooperation in criminal matters, identify suspects and assist judicial investigations in partnership with national authorities;
85. Calls for action to target smuggling networks and stop trafficking in human beings; calls for safe and legal routes, including through humanitarian corridors, to be established for people seeking international protection; calls for permanent and mandatory resettlement programmes to be established and humanitarian visas granted to people fleeing conflict zones, including to enable them to enter a third country to seek asylum; calls for legal migration routes to be established and for general rules to be drawn up governing entry and stay, to enable migrants to work and seek employment;

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[The European Parliament, ]

42. Reiterates the importance of cooperation with third countries in the fight against human trafficking and smugglers so that networks can be tackled as far upstream as possible; stresses in this regard the need to strengthen judicial and police cooperation with those countries in order to identify and dismantle the networks; recalls, furthermore, the need to build up the capacities of those countries so that they can pursue and sanction those responsible in an effective manner; calls, therefore, for cooperation between the European Union, the Member States, Europol, Eurojust and the third countries concerned to be encouraged; reaffirms that measures taken against human trafficking should not adversely affect the rights of victims of trafficking, migrants, refugees and persons in need of international protection; calls for an immediate end to the detention of victims of human trafficking and children;

43. Points out that human trafficking and smuggling networks make full use of the internet in carrying out their criminal activities, and that it is therefore vital for the European Union to step up its action, particularly within Europol and the Internet Referral Unit, as well as its cooperation with third countries in this regard;

44. Points out that traffickers may use legal migration routes to bring their victims to Europe; considers that the criteria that third countries are required to meet prior to any visa liberalisation agreement with the European Union ought specifically to include the cooperation of those third countries in combating human trafficking; calls on the Commission to pay special attention to both that issue and the issue of the fight against smugglers in all dialogue relating to negotiations on such agreements;

Oral / Written Questions

The problem of modern slavery, E-006929/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz (EPP), 10-11-2017

According to the Global Slavery Index, there are currently 40.3 million people living in slavery. In its modern form, slavery encompasses not only human trafficking but also grossly underpaid labour, exploitative working hours and threats of retribution for leaving an employer. The Global Slavery Index collects information from 167 countries across the world and shows that as many as two-thirds of all victims live in Asia; India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan all ranked in the top five. The countries with the lowest rates of slavery are Norway, Ireland, New Zealand, Barbados and Luxembourg. In each of these nations, less than a thousand people are affected by 21st-century slavery, yet it still exists. Consequently, no country on earth is immune to the problem of slavery.

1. Is the Commission aware of and monitoring this global issue?
2. What action is the Commission taking to protect workers from modern forms of slavery?
3. What tools does the Commission have at its disposal to limit the spread of this phenomenon?

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Supervision of EU funds to combat human trafficking, E-004992/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Hannu Takkula (ALDE), 19-07-2017

The European Court of Auditors’ Special Report on EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia reveals that of the nearly 46 million victims of human trafficking in 2016, nearly two thirds were in or from Asia. The total EU funding set aside to combat human trafficking in South and South-East Asia came to EUR 31 million between 2009 and 2015. Most of the projects funded produced positive results; however, the report focuses on the EU’s actions, rather than the results of the programme, and therefore does not evaluate the impact of the EUR 31 million spent. Another cause for concern is the fact that there is no intelligence sharing with these South and South-East Asian countries. The 2016 Commission report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings clearly recognises ‘the difficulty of measuring the results and impact of anti-trafficking actions’; given that we are investing a considerable amount of the EU’s money, we need more proof of positive results.

1. In the light of the Special Report, how will the Commission ensure that these funds have been used to help victims of human trafficking?
2. How is spending of the funds supervised in South and South-East Asia?

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Human trafficking, E-004825/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nuno Melo (EPP), 13-07-2017

The latest Court of Auditors’ report on ‘EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia’ notes that ‘The absence of a strong community of experts on the fight against human trafficking has affected the promotion of knowledge sharing’.

1. Given the high number of victims of human trafficking, can the Commission say why there is, globally, no strong community of experts capable of tackling this serious problem?
2. What steps has it taken and what does it intend to do?

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Human trafficking in South and South-East Asia, E-004702/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miriam Dalli (S&D), 12-07-2017

Asia is a well-known region for its victims of trans-regional trafficking. In fact, the EU sought to tackle human trafficking in South and South-East Asia with funding of EUR 31 million between 2009 and 2015. A report published by the European Court of Auditors shows that EU aid contributing to combating human trafficking in the region has been only partially effective. The report highlights many problems, such as the fact that the EU did not formulate a local pledge to help eradicate the problem in the area.

1. How does the Commission intend to better prioritise how and where it spends its available resources so that the level of activity will match its financial commitments?
2. Does the EU intend to enhance its dialogue with the countries in the region with a view to combating human trafficking collectively?
3. What was the Commission’s reasoning for not publishing a comprehensive evaluation of the results achieved under the EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings 2012-2016 and for not presenting a post-2016 anti-trafficking policy framework?

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VP/HR - Human trafficking in Southeast Asia, E-007931/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Barbara Matera (EPP), 21-10-2016

16-year-old Aman was abducted seven years ago, trafficked to India, and forced to work to survive. Fortunately, Aman, along with 15 other children, were rescued by the NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan at the Old Delhi railway station on 27 July 2016. Aman is not the only child involved in such injustices; activists claim that thousands of victims, mostly women and children, are trafficked across South Asia and exposed to sexual abuse, forced marriage, domestic service and
exploitation. Furthermore, a high number of young girls are being trafficked from Vietnam and Cambodia to China for marriage and prostitution. Southeast Asia ranks amongst the world’s worst regions for human trafficking, accounting for a third of all the women and children trafficked worldwide, according to the International Organisation for Migration’s office in Vietnam.

1. What is the EU doing to protect victims of human trafficking, especially women and children in South Asia, and what international gender-specific prevention and support measures are being taken?
2. Has the situation of trafficking in women across the Chinese border been raised as part of the EU-China human rights dialogue, and has addressing the issue been included as a conditionality in EU-China trade relations?

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VP/HR - Protection of indigenous stateless persons in Thailand, E-005298/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130
There are an estimated 2-3 million stateless persons living in Thailand. Many are ethnic minorities or indigenous people living in hill tribe communities, in isolation from state services. Because the Thai Government does not recognise them as citizens, they are denied the right to vote and are at risk of expulsion from their homes. They have only limited ability to own land, travel, seek employment, or receive an education. Stateless persons are also at greater risk of poverty, exploitation, and human trafficking.

1. Is the VP/HR aware of the plight of stateless indigenous people in Thailand?
2. What can the Commission do to encourage the protection and legitimisation of stateless persons, giving them their full rights and opportunities as citizens?
3. Will the Commission direct any Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) aid to improving the situation of indigenous stateless persons?

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Illegal fishing and human rights abuses in Thailand, E-001911/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), Barbara Lochbihler (Verts/ALE), 01-03-2016
Thailand is the world’s third-largest seafood exporter, and the EU imported Thai fishery products worth an estimated EUR 575 million in 2014. The EU’s Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU) Regulation is intended to ensure that no illegally caught fisheries products arrive on the EU market. Owing to overfishing and the consequent depletion of fish stocks in Thai territorial waters, fishing vessels are increasingly unprofitable, prompting an over-reliance on cheap, precarious labour. Human rights and labour abuses, including slavery and human trafficking, are closely linked to illegal and unregulated fishing in Thailand.
On 23 February 2016 a number of internationally prominent environmental, labour and human rights organisations sent a letter to Commissioner Karmenu Vella urging the Commission to maintain pressure on the Thai authorities until substantial reforms take place in the country’s fishing industry. Following a visit to Thailand by an EU delegation in mid-January 2016, the Commission is asked to answer the following:

1. Could it or the European External Action Service provide a briefing on the state of play, including reforms intended to combat IUU fishing, and the next steps with regard to the current ‘yellow card’ designation?
2. What measures are being taken to urge the Thai authorities to fight slave-like working conditions and human trafficking in the Thai fishing industry and to press for the effective implementation of reforms?

******

Human trafficking in south-east Asia, E-002785/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, Diane Dodds (NI), 10-03-2014
| It is estimated that 3.2 million women and girls are trafficked into the sex trade in south-east Asia.  
1. Could the Commission outline what steps have been taken at EU level to tackle this awful crime? |
## EU support to young farmers should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal

**Agriculture and Rural Development | Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**

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### Questions asked:

Is the EU support to young farmers well designed to contribute effectively towards improved generational renewal?

In order to answer this question, the Court focused on the measures supporting directly young farmers in the 2007-2020 period, namely the 2007-2013 Pillar 2 measure for setting-up of young farmers and its corresponding measure in 2014-2020, and the 2014-2020 Pillar 1 payment to young farmers. The Court assessed the intervention logic, the targeting in the implementation of the measures and their results.

The audit was carried out between April and October 2016 and covered four Member States that spent the highest amount on young farmers: France, Spain, Poland and Italy. These four Member States represent 56% of the total EU budget corresponding to the measures supporting directly young farmers in the 2007-2020 period.

### Findings:

For Pillar 1 payment to young farmers, the Court found that:

1. the aid is not based on a sound needs assessment and its objective does not reflect the general objective of encouraging generational renewal. The Member States did not coordinate Pillar 1 payment with the Pillar 2 setting-up measure or national measures;
2. in the absence of a needs assessment the aid is provided in a standardized form (annual payment per hectare), in an amount and in a timing where it is unclear which specific needs other than additional income are addressed;
3. the common monitoring and evaluation framework did not provide useful indicators for assessing the effectiveness of this payment, as there are no results indicators for this payment and data on the income and viability of the supported holdings are not collected.

For Pillar 2 measure for setting up of young farmers the Court found that:

4. although it is generally based on a vague needs assessment, its objectives are partially specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed and reflect the general objective of encouraging generational renewal. There is some effective coordination with the Pillar 2 investment measure;
5. the aid is provided in a form (lump sum subject to the accomplishment of a business plan and, in some cases, also an interest subsidy on a loan) addressing more directly the young farmers’ needs of access to land, capital and knowledge. The amount of aid is generally linked to the needs and modulated to prompt specific actions (e.g. introducing organic farming, water- or energy-saving initiatives);
6. the aid is directed to more qualified farmers, who commit to implement a business plan guiding them in developing viable holdings and who are often encouraged through the project selection process to set up in less favoured areas. However, the business plans were of variable quality and managing authorities in some cases did not apply selection procedures to prioritise best projects. Selection criteria were introduced late in the 2007-2013 period, minimum thresholds were either too low or non-existent and the seven-year budget for the measure was used up in some Member States to fund nearly all applications submitted at the start of the programming period, thus preventing young farmers who set up later from receiving funding;

7. we found little evidence about whether the EU measures facilitated the setting-up of young farmers and improved generational renewal and the viability of the supported

Recommendations:
The Court recommends that Commission and the Member States:
1. improve the intervention logic by reinforcing needs assessment and defining SMART objectives, which will reflect the overall objective of fostering the generational renewal;
2. improve the targeting of the measures through better project selection systems and use of business plans;
3. improve the monitoring and evaluation framework by drawing on best practices developed by Member States in their monitoring systems and evaluation reports.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

Cont Working Document of 25/09/2017 on the European Court of Auditors’ Special Report No 10/2017 (2016 Discharge): “EU support to young farmers should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal” Rapporteur: Karin Kadenbach (S&D)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. On the existing policies of the CAP:
   - a comprehensive evaluation is needed of all tools/measures which can be combined to help young farmers, to focus on comparability across the EU, consistency or inconsistency in result indicators, and obstacles to setting up for young farmers which can be addressed in the future revision of the CAP;
   - objectives should be better defined in terms of generational renewal, with possibly a quantified target, and information to be gathered on levels of success in generational renewal and the factors which contribute or hinder it.

2. For the post-2020 CAP, legislation should be framed such that the Commission indicate (or require Member States to indicate, in line with the shared management provisions) clear intervention logic for the policy instruments addressing generational renewal in agriculture. The intervention logic should include:
   - a sound assessment of young farmers’ needs which investigates the underlying reasons why young people willing to become farmers face barriers in their setting up process and the degree of diffusion of such barriers across geographical areas, agricultural sectors or other specific holdings’ characteristics; – an assessment of which needs could be addressed by EU policy instruments and which needs can be or are already better addressed by Member States’ policies as well as an analysis of which forms of support (e.g. direct payments, lump sum, financial instruments) are best suited to match the identified needs;
   - awareness-raising measures of possible types of assistance for earlier transfer of a farm to a successor with accompanying advisory services/measures like a satisfactory retirement scheme based on national/regional income/revenues in the agricultural, food and forestry sector;
   - notwithstanding the long period of planning transfers of agricultural holdings, ensure a definition of SMART objectives, making explicit and quantifiable the expected results of the policy instruments in terms of expected generational renewal rate and contribution to the viability of the supported holdings; in particular it should be clear if the policy instruments should aim at supporting as many young farmers as possible or target specific type of young farmers (e.g. the most educated, those setting up in less favoured areas, those introducing energy or water savings technologies in the holdings,
those increasing the profitability or productivity of the holdings, those employing more people).

3. When implementing the post-2020 CAP measures, the Member States improve the targeting of the measures by:
   - applying criteria to ensure the selection of the most cost-effective projects, such as projects delivering the highest increase in sustainable productivity or viability of the supported holdings, or the highest increase in employment in the areas with highest unemployment or in less favoured areas with lowest generational renewal;
   - applying clear criteria for assessing how young farmers can be supported in case of joint control of legal holdings (e.g. by defining what percentage of voting rights or shares the beneficiary should have or indicating a period during which a shift in balance of the shares takes place, what minimum percentage of her/his revenues should come from his activity in the supported holding) to direct the aid towards young farmers making farming in the supported holdings their main activity;
   - applying sufficiently high minimum thresholds of points that projects should reach and adequately split the budget of the measures to provide equal availability of funds to young farmers setting up during the entire duration of the programming period;
   - improve the use of business plans as a tool to assess both the need for public funding by assessing – at application stage – the likely viability of the holdings without the aid and – at the end of the projects – the impact of the aid on the viability of the holding or on other clearly specified objectives (e.g. employment, introduction of energy or water savings technologies).

4. Legislation for post-2020 CAP measures, should ensure that the Commission and the Member States (in line with the shared management provisions) improve the monitoring and evaluation system. In particular:
   - the Commission should define output, result and impact indicators allowing to assess the progress, effectiveness and efficiency of the policy tools against objectives, by drawing on best practices, such as useful indicators developed by Member States in their monitoring systems;
   - the Member States should regularly collect actual data on the structural and financial characteristics of the supported holdings (e.g. revenues, income, number of employees, innovations introduced, farmers’ educational levels) allowing assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the measures in achieving the desired policy objectives;
   - the Commission and the Member States should require evaluations to provide useful information on the achievements of the projects and measures based on actual data on the evolution of the structural and financial characteristics of the supported holdings, by drawing on best practices (e.g. benchmarking, counterfactual analyses, surveys) such as those identified in this audit (see box 5 of the ECA special report the case of Emilia Romagna paragraph 75);
   - ensuring that young farmers have ready access to advice and tools that help to react efficiently and effectively against threats of market disturbances or market saturations as well as price volatility. Thus competitiveness and market orientation could be enhanced, crisis-related fluctuations in producers’ income could be reduced.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

European Parliament resolution of 27 April 2017 on the state of play of farmland concentration in the EU: how to facilitate the access to land for farmers (2016/2141(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

12. Calls on the Member States, in order to attain the objectives of the CAP, to give small and medium-sized local producers, new entrants and young farmers – while ensuring equal gender access – priority in the purchase and rental of farmland, including pre-emptive rights where established, as the ownership of as much as possible of the land they farm is in the interest of a sustainable and reliable development of their farms, particularly at a time when non-farmers are increasingly interested in purchasing agricultural plots, very often for purely speculative purposes; encourages the Member States to promote small-scale family farms and sustainable production methods;
15. Recalls the encouragement for young farmers enshrined in the CAP, the purpose of which is to promote their access to farming; calls, moreover, for a comprehensive approach that helps enable skilled young farmers, women and others wishing to take up farming to take over or start farms; notes, however, that new entrants still face obstacles related to structural barriers such as high land prices or high taxation of extra-familial farm succession;

16. Stresses the relevance of European structural policy to promoting rural areas, for example with a view to ensuring, with regard to access to farmland, special assistance to small and medium-sized individual farms and cooperatives, young people and, in particular, women;

17. Stresses the difficulties of accessing credit in order to acquire land or tenure, especially for new entrants and young farmers; calls on the Commission to provide proper instruments, in the framework of the CAP and related policies, that facilitate their entry into farming by ensuring fair access to sustainable credit;

26. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to support all innovative land-sharing measures favourable to enabling young farmers to establish themselves, in particular by means of investment funds, based on the principle of solidarity, that enable savers to invest their funds in a socially useful manner by assisting young people without sufficient resources to acquire land and to embark on careers in farming;

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European Parliament resolution of 27 October 2016 on how the CAP can improve job creation in rural areas (2015/2226(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

AB. whereas in 2010 only 7.5% of farmers were under 35 years old and more than 4.5 million of those now running farms are aged over 65, and Articles 50 and 51 of Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 under the CAP include provisions to support new generational renewal in agriculture;

AE. whereas the rural environment needs to be made more attractive to rising generations by promoting training geared to innovation and modernisation in the profession and in technologies;

1. Calls on all the Member States to give young farmers long-term prospects in order to address rural depopulation, to implement a comprehensive generational renewal strategy and, in order to do this, to make full use of all the possibilities provided under the new CAP to support young farmers and new entrants to farming, including from outside the family, particularly the Pillar I and Pillar II measures for aid to young farmers, and also to facilitate new entrants to farming aged over 40 in setting up and entrepreneurship; notes too that such measures must be complemented by, and compatible with, provisions under national policies (on land-use, taxation and social security, etc.), including support under Articles 50 and 51 of Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013;

24. Stresses that small, owner-run holdings are increasingly coming under pressure from agricultural land purchases by investors; stresses that preserving the area under cultivation and access to land are essential for the setting up and extension of agricultural holdings and vital to preserving jobs in rural areas; points out that the Commission’s ‘Report on the Needs of Young Farmers’ in November 2015 showed that the availability of land to buy and to rent are the biggest problems facing young farmers and new entrants into farming; calls, therefore, on Member States to share best practices and develop instruments to make access to land possible in rural areas with high unemployment through, for example, participatory use and management of farmland in accordance with national practices, or the establishment of systems for managing and providing information on unused land or land that could be used for agriculture,
the services of which young farmers and women would have the preferential right to use

28. Emphasises that access to land is an essential prerequisite for the setting up and extension of an agricultural holding; points out that access to land is the biggest problem facing young farmers seeking to set up an agricultural holding;

75. Points out that the amount of farmland in the EU is becoming smaller by the year; emphasises that it is vital to preserve arable land in order to guarantee jobs in rural areas; calls on the Member States to promote improved access to land in areas with high levels of rural unemployment, calls, in this connection, for action to be taken to ensure that young women farmers have access to credit and are able to participate in land management;

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European Parliament resolution of 10 May 2016 on cohesion policy in mountainous regions of the EU (2015/2279(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

37. Welcomes initiatives to attract young people into the agricultural sector, and calls on the Commission to develop similar programmes for mountain areas; urges that measures be taken to encourage young entrepreneurs to branch out in areas relating to cultural heritage and not limited to seasonal activity alone; highlights the role of scientific institutes and other educational establishments dealing with mountain agriculture; encourages participation by young farmers in exchange schemes and e-learning platforms;

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European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on enhancing innovation and economic development in future European farm management (2015/2227(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

2. Is strongly convinced that economic development and sustainable production are not mutually exclusive and are achievable mainly through innovation, research and development, new governance and business models and improved agronomy; stresses the need to support innovation in technology and governance by providing coherent and clear regulation with room for entrepreneurship; urges the Commission to ensure that any future CAP reflects this and that innovation is explicitly taken into account in forthcoming reviews and reforms of relevant legislation which gives more recognition to new and young farmers with novel ideas and business models; highlights the fact that European agriculture is achieving its goal in producing high-quality and high-added-value products, through profitable and knowledge-based solutions as supported by Europe’s 2020 strategy; welcomes in this respect the incoming Commission assessment of the 2012 Bioeconomy Strategy’s contribution to the circular economy, as the shift from fossil fuels to renewables contributes to cutting energy costs for farmers and thus enabling more investments in innovation;

17. Emphasises the untapped potential of technology and innovation for the development of new goods and products (relating to food and feed, machinery, biochemistry, biocontrol etc.) which may have the potential to create employment along the whole agri-food value chain; draws attention, nevertheless, to the fact that innovation and technologisation leads to job losses in traditional agricultural occupations and calls on the Commission and the Member States to provide training and retraining courses for workers in the agricultural sectors affected; highlights the creation of new jobs in the agricultural sector, which is of pivotal importance for rural development, rural repopulation and economic growth, and considers that developing modern agricultural practices will
make agriculture more attractive to young farmers and entrepreneurs alike; calls on the Commission to look into the possibilities of incentivising farmers to raise public awareness about the workings of the agri-food chain and new production methods;

35. Welcomes the EC-EIB memorandum of understanding and its willingness to support agricultural projects and young farmers by providing new financing opportunities for Member States that establish forms of financial support such as guarantee funds, revolving funds or investment capital to facilitate access to credit for farmers and groupings of farmers such as cooperatives, producer organisations and groups and their partners, with a view to helping on-farm investment in modernisation while also offering financing opportunities to overcome barriers to credit, which affects women disproportionaly, and financing opportunities for young farmers to expand their businesses, as well as to ensure investment in public-sector research combined with public-private partnerships in order to test and launch innovative products; reiterates that Parliament wishes to see this financial support flowing and to remove any obstacles in accessing this funding;

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European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on technological solutions for sustainable agriculture in the EU (2015/2225(INI))

[The European parliament, ]

45. Regrets the increasing skill shortages in many of these professions, and calls on the Member States to work in partnership with industry, research institutions and other relevant stakeholders in the design of their next rural development programmes, including European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs), with a view to identifying opportunities to support skill development and knowledge transfer in these areas, including by means of training and apprenticeships for young farmers and new entrants;

47. Recognises the potential that precision farming and digital technology integration can have in making agriculture more attractive for young farmers and creating new opportunities for growth and employment in rural areas; believes that investing in the development of these technologies may foster generational change in farming;

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European Parliament resolution of 18 January 2011 on recognition of agriculture as a strategic sector in the context of food security (2010/2112(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

42. Stresses the role that must be played by young farmers in the future CAP; points out that only 7% of European farmers are younger than 35, and at the same time that no fewer than 4.5 million farmers will retire in the next 10 years; favours strengthening measures beneficial to young farmers such as installation premiums, subsidised interest rates on loans and other incentives which have been implemented by Member States through their rural development budgets; reaffirms the substance of its budget amendment on the exchange programme for young people and wishes to see this implemented as a pilot project; calls also for the removal of all administrative constraints preventing young people from taking up farming;
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<td>Special Report No 10/2017 on young farmers by the Court of Auditors shows that measures have not been effective.</td>
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<td>1. Has the Commission studied measures to reverse the situation?</td>
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<td>2. If so, will the Commission add these measures to the new CAP reform?</td>
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<td>Tax on farmers starting up, E-007813/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Maria Lidia Senra Rodríguez (GUE/NGL), 18-12-2017</td>
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<td>The Commission claims that supporting young farmers is a priority. In Spain, the number of farmers aged under 44 slumped by 58.190 between 2007 and 2013.</td>
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<td>What is more, the state levies a tax on start-up aid provided under the second pillar of the CAP and on transfers of single or basic payment entitlements from the parents to the children, which discourages young people from taking up farming. The Spanish tax agency considers aid under the second pillar to be a means of guaranteeing a minimum income rather than a form of investment. The tax is applied throughout the year in which the aid is received and is very high. When they transfer entitlements, the transferors have to pay personal tax on the transfer as if it were an increase in their own capital and the transferees as if it were a gift. The tax agency considers those transfers intangible assets rather than an annual subsidy payment or a credit claim.</td>
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<td>1. Will the Commission call on Spain to look into cases of this kind and levy a tax that encourages generational replacement and gives young people an incentive to take up farming?</td>
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<td>2. How is it possible that a percentage of the start-up aid ends up going to the state in the form of taxes?</td>
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<td>Ageing farming population, E-007187/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 22-11-2017</td>
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<td>According to a recent audit by the Court of Auditors, EU support to young farmers is too often poorly defined, and does not specify the desired results and impact.</td>
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<td>According to the report, support under the first pillar is not based on an appropriate assessment of needs and does not reflect the overall objective of promoting generational renewal. Often, support is provided to farms in which young farmers play only a limited role. There is no coordination between payments under the first pillar and support for young farmers under the second pillar. In short, the auditors maintain that support should be more targeted in order to foster effective generational renewal.</td>
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<td>1. How does the Commission intend to remove barriers recognised by young farmers’ associations, namely access to land and credit for young farmers?</td>
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<td>Young farmers, E-005917/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ilhan Kyuchyuk (ALDE), 25-09-2017</td>
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<td>The main factor preventing young farmers from setting up in agriculture is that they lack sufficient capital to start a business of their own or to invest in the development of an existing farm. The fact is that increasing the number of young farmers will help to improve the demographic balance in rural areas. It is, moreover, essential for sustainable development that there should be more and a higher proportion of young farmers. However, one of the main problems in attracting young people into farming in Europe, and particularly in Bulgaria, is the limited access to business start-up loans.</td>
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<td>1. Are there plans for new funding programmes beyond 2020 to support young people in agriculture?</td>
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<td>2. If so, will measures be taken to make it easier to access financing?</td>
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Support for young farmers, E-004962/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 19-07-2017

The total number of farmers in the EU fell sharply in the past decade, dropping from 14.5 million in 2005 to 10.7 million in 2013. The number of young farmers fell from 3.3 million to 2.3 million over the same period. The percentage of young farmers is now just over 20%. There are however significant differences between Member States. A recent audit report by the European Court of Auditors found that EU support for young farmers is too often poorly defined, with no results or impact specified. The auditors called for support to be better targeted in order to foster effective generational renewal. There is no specific strategy aimed at responding to the urgent needs of young farmers in either the first or second pillar, and the budget is often used up before young farmers have had a chance to apply for funding.

1. What is the Commission’s assessment of this report, and what practical steps will it take to respond to the need for greater generational renewal in the farming sector?

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Aid to young farmers - weaknesses in the management of the second pillar, E-004668/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso (EPP), 11-07-2017

The support which the EU provides to young farmers via the CAP is essential to ensure the sustainability of agriculture from one generation to another. However, the European Court of Auditors has found little evidence that these measures are actually having any effect. It made clear in its Special Report No 10/2017 that EU support for young farmers is often poorly defined, with no expected result and impact specified. With regard to the second pillar, although the aid does respond directly to young farmers' needs in terms of access to land, capital and knowledge, the auditors note that the business plans used for evaluating the proposals are useful instruments but, in general, have so far been of variable quality. They point out that the managing authorities do not always apply selection procedures to prioritise the best projects.

1. What specific measures does the Commission intend to take to ensure that EU support for young farmers actually reaches those submitting the best projects, based on the auditors’ technical recommendations?

******

Question regarding young farmers, E-004266/2017, WQ to the Commission, Jule 130, Eva Kaili (S&D), 27-06-2017

One of the greatest problems that EU Member States are facing is the older age structure of productive occupations. Eurostat data indicate that young farmers under 35 years old account for only 6% of total farm management. Greece is dealing with an even bigger problem, as only 5.2% are young farmers, while youth unemployment is nearly 50%. It is, therefore, imperative to renew the generations engaged in farming as a means of reducing unemployment, as well as to develop the sector with young entrepreneurs who will introduce innovation and re-shape production. Future young farmer programmes and improvement plans must include access to interest-free mortgage loans with support from the European Central Bank (European Investment Bank) for young people seeking to start a business in agriculture (for the purchase of physical capital and land). Additionally, transfer of knowledge and innovation should be supported through exchange schemes similar to Erasmus. In view of the ‘Memorandum of Understanding in respect of cooperation in agriculture and rural development’, the Commission is asked:

1. Why do young farmers in Greece lack access to interest-free loans and other good practices that young people in other EU Member States have?
2. What is the current stage of the exchange programme for farmers?

******
**EFSI and agriculture**, E-008599/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&D), 16-11-2016

The mid-term review of the Juncker Plan, published in June, hints at a possible danger that the EFSI is being focused solely on integration with the ERDF and the ESF, and the EAFRD is consequently being relegated into the background. EFSI-related procedures need to be simplified, and the EAFRD should be dovetailed more fully into financial engineering, starting with the percentage of EAFRD funding to be linked to revolving mechanisms in collaboration with the EIB.

1. Does the Commission not think, therefore, that special financial instruments should be devised for the agricultural sector, first and foremost for young farmers setting up new business ventures without collateral?
2. Does it not consider that the rules on state aid in the agricultural sector should be made more flexible when structural funds and financial instruments are to be used, one way to do that being to raise the de minimis thresholds for interest subsidies? Does it not believe that it should tackle bureaucratic and regulatory obstacles in order to enable CAP first- and second-pillar payments to be combined with the EFSI?

******

**Difficulties for young people wishing to go into farming in Spain**, E-004769/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Clara Eugenia Aguilera García (S&D), 10-06-2016

The Spanish Government has imposed tough requirements on young people seeking access to the national reserve and the additional payment under the first pillar. The requirements are tougher than those established by the EU, and have made it difficult for young farmers all over Spain to obtain the aid concerned. Given that handover to the next generation is one of the most significant problems that the EU farming sector is facing:

1. What is the Commission’s assessment of the fact that additional requirements are imposed under Spanish legislation?
2. Is the Commission intending to make any recommendations or take any action on this matter?

******

**CAP mid-term review**, P-000604/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&D), Clara Eugenia Aguilera Garcia (S&D), Ricardo Serrão Santos (S&D), 27-01-2016

2015 was a tough year for European farmers, with depressed market prices across key sectors. However, we must look positively to the future. The CAP mid-term review should be the opportunity for a true legislative act. In addition to new risk management instruments, further efforts are needed to reduce price volatility, invest more in rural development, improve the export strategy and support innovation in agriculture as well as young farmers who are hindered by difficulties related to access to land and credit. The CAP is far from being perfect. The most pertinent example is the ‘greening’ measure, which should be revised. Therefore, can the Commission explain:

1. how it intends to review the CAP in 2017, particularly the package of ‘greening’ measures;
2. whether it intends to listen to MEPs and Member States who wish to see more innovation in agriculture, more opportunities for young farmers, increased intervention prices, more investment in rural development, and a more dynamic export strategy;
3. whether it intends to improve instruments to manage agricultural risks and create an observatory tool, similar to the Milk Market Observatory, that can closely monitor the current market situation and new trends in key agricultural sectors.

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**Early retirement for farmers**, E-011861/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 23-07-2015

The agricultural sector has been undergoing structural changes in recent decades. One important aspect of such structural change is the general ageing of the
farming population. According to a recent Eurostat publication based on 2010 data, almost 30% of farm owners in the EU-28 are aged over 65. The majority (53.2%) are aged 55 or over. Farmers aged under 25, on the other hand, account for just 0.8% of all farm owners, with those aged under 35 accounting for 7.5% of the total. Moreover, the number of young farmers has been decreasing faster than the population of older farmers. One of the things that make it hard for young farmers to establish themselves is that older farmers are not in a position to retire, since their pensions are not worth enough. The multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2007-2013 included a specific early retirement programme aimed at farmers, which has disappeared from the MFF 2014-2020.

1. Can the Commission explain why this programme was scrapped?
2. What equivalent measures is it considering to facilitate retirement for farmers, which would enable some younger people to become farm owners?

Need to support young farmers, E-010159/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Lefteris Christoforou (EPP), 24-06-2015

Despite the many plans and specific policies launched by the EU to help attract young people to farming, an important activity in the EU, and to keep young farmers on the land, the contraction of the agricultural sector is causing huge problems for the EU’s economy and other problems of a social nature. A strong competitive rural economy in the EU will contribute significantly to growth in EU Member States and the prosperity of their peoples. In view of the above, will the Commission say:

1. Does it intend to further enhance plans to help young farmers stay in the countryside?
2. How will it boost the prospect of a competitive rural economy?

Suspension by the Commission of payment of the "young farmers' grant", E-006933/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Steeve Briois (NI) ++, 29-04-2015

It is essential for the vitality of our rural areas and for the sustainability of our agriculture to support young farmers. However, they are very worried because the Commission has refused to validate many rural development plans, particularly in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais. This refusal has resulted in the suspension of payment of the ‘young farmers’ grant’, in particular start-up aid for first-time farmers. As a result no new farm holding will be established in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais in the first quarter 2015.

1. Does the Commission fully appreciate the difficulties facing young and first-time farmers?
2. Will it take urgent decisions to ensure that the ‘young farmers’ grant’ (start-up aid) can be paid regularly?

Five-year subsidised loans for young farmers, E-006897/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Dominique Bilde (NI), Sophie Montel (NI), Philippe Loiseau (NI), 29-04-2015

Medium-term special loans for farmers (at preferential rates of 1% in upland areas and 2.5% in lowland areas) are now subsidised for a period of five years, rather than from seven to nine years as they were under the old CAP rules. Furthermore, since February 2015, the term of the subsidised loan cannot exceed that of the farmer’s business plan, meaning that anyone who takes out a loan three years after setting up in farming will enjoy the preferential rate for two years only, instead of the full five years. Lastly, if that person then takes out a second loan, it will be subsidised for the same period as the first loan.

1. Will the Commission review these rules in order to bring the period during which the preferential rate applies back up to at least seven years, even if that period exceeds the duration of the business plan?
2. If so, will that same term apply for all subsidised loans taken out during the first five years in farming?
Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in agriculture and rural development, E-006095/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Francesc Gambús (EPP), 17-04-2015
On 23 March the first financial instrument was presented under the memorandum of understanding between the Commission and the European Investment Bank on cooperation in agriculture and rural development in the EU. This instrument should facilitate access to credit for farmers and is accompanied by a programme for the Member States and regions explaining how to use the financial instruments available under the programme.
1. Can the Commission explain what role the regions will play in this work programme?
2. What financial impact does the Commission estimate this instrument will have in the agricultural sector?
3. What advantages will this programme bring for young farmers?

Young farmers, E-005791/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso (EPP), 13-04-2015
A number of issues were debated when the Commissioner attended the 24 March meeting of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. Alongside the debate on possible simplification measures, one vitally important issue that was raised in the exchange of views concerned the situation of young farmers. Offering financial integration incentives to young farmers to help them set up cooperatives and producer organisations is key to promoting employment and sustainability in rural areas, which is a vitally important topic in Spain.
1. Does the Commission intend promoting other measures to bolster efforts in this regard?
2. Are there any plans to hold a debate on these critically important subjects?
3. Will the Commission build these elements into any possible reforms of the CAP?

Young farmers, E-006620/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marijana Petir (EPP), 24-04-2015
Depopulation of rural areas is a significant problem in a large number of EU Member States, among them Croatia. It is crucial for young people to remain in the countryside and become involved in agricultural activities if we are to prevent these negative trends and maintain the quality of life and services at its existing level or indeed improve it. For this reason I ask:
1. Since Croatian ‘young farmers’ and ‘farmers commencing their agricultural activity’ prior to Croatia’s accession to the EU did not use dedicated financial resources from the EU budget within the basic payment or the single payment programme, would it be possible to exempt Croatia’s young farmers from the provision prescribing a period of five years from the establishment of a holding before the first aid application, as it discriminates against them?
2. Given that European legislation recognises the terms ‘young farmers’ and ‘farmers commencing their agricultural activity’, is there a possibility within the existing programme to make a greater distinction in the criteria for providing incentives to the two groups (young farmers on the basis of age, and farmers commencing based on how long they have had their holdings) so that incentives to both groups may bring desired results and improve life in rural areas?

Young farmers, E-006387/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ivan Jakovčić (ALDE), 21-04-2015
In the Istrian region there are many young people who are engaged in agriculture. Also, a large number would like to devote themselves to agriculture. Unfortunately, since there is no efficient incentive system those young people are at a disadvantage in relation to young European farmers.

1. I ask the Commission: In what way can young people in Croatia be helped to stay at home and continue the agricultural tradition of their ancestors?

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**Difficulties with CAP implementation**, E-004251/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Michel Dantin (EPP) ++, 13-03-2015

European farming is facing a major generational renewal challenge, which should lead us to pay particular attention to young farmers. Yet current implementation of the common agricultural policy (CAP) is causing problems, particularly for this category of working people. In particular, the compensatory allowance for permanent natural handicaps (CANH) no longer includes an age limit. The result, therefore, is that a retiring farmer will have access to both state benefits and the CANH, while a young farmer, who needs to be prioritised for our support, will receive more modest aid. Moreover, while it used to be possible for the subsidies on loans to run over five years regardless of which was the first year of investment, it seems like young farmers wishing to benefit fully from the subsidies now need to make all their investments in the first year of their business plan. Finally, access to some aid is now subject to a standard gross product (SGP) ceiling, which would prevent some young farmers from receiving set-up support.

2. As regards the age criteria for the CANH, could the Commission fill this legal void as part of the upcoming measures to simplify the CAP?

3. As regards the loan subsidies and the SGP ceiling, what measures is it considering to respond to the problems highlighted here?

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**Support for young farmers in Italy**, E-001897/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Fulvio Martusciello (EPP), 04-02-2015

Italy is one of the Member States with the lowest percentage of farms run by young people: only 5% of Italian farmers are under 35 years of age, whereas in France that figure stands at 8.7% and in many northern European countries it is higher than 10%. In Italy, the number of young farmers fell by 40% between 2000 and 2014; there are now only 50,000 farmers under the age of 35. And yet, on average, farms run by young people generate a gross marketable production that is higher than those run by older farmers (more than EUR 161,000 as opposed to EUR 140,000), according to figures provided by the Farm Accountancy Data Network.

Can the Commission say:

1. how it intends to facilitate exchanges of information and experience between farmers in Europe;
2. whether it believes that a plan should be drawn up to bring Italy into line with Member States with a stronger focus on innovation and technology?

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**Access to credit for young farmers**, P-001363/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Daciana Octavia Sârbu (S&D), 30-01-2015

Only 7% of farmers in the EU are under the age of 35, and there is a need for generational change. The new CAP reform already contains a scheme for young farmers, but they are still faced with problems such as access to farmland and access to credit. Young farmers will remain at a competitive disadvantage for as long as the loans to which they have access are disadvantageous.

1. How can the Commission encourage Member States to ensure that farmers covered by the young farmers scheme have access to credit?
2. Does it have information on the situation regarding young farmers’ access to farmland across the EU?

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Obstacles facing young farmers, E-009500/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&D), 19-11-2014

According to information dating from May 2014, around 5 million young people in the EU are unemployed. Furthermore, according to the latest relevant survey carried out in 2010, 7.5% of farmers are under 35, compared with 30% over 65. It would be possible to reverse this trend by launching projects for young farmers in Europe and facilitating exchanges of professional experience at European level regarding various agricultural activities. Another option would be to make it easier for young farmers to obtain loans for the purchase of land, relaxing the extremely restrictive provisions currently applicable that limit the purchase of farmland to 10% of total investment in a wider project. In view of this:

1. Will the Commission take measures to encourage exchanges of professional experience between young European farmers?
2. Will it try to make it easier for young farmers to obtain land?

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Support measures for young farmers, E-009354/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Paolo De Castro (S&D), Czesław Adam Siekierski (EPP), Albert Deß (EPP), Jens Rohde (ALDE), Matt Carthy (GUE/NGL), James Nicholson (ECR), Janusz Wojciechowski (ECR), 17-11-2014

Youth unemployment levels are unacceptably high across the EU, especially in rural areas. Moreover, the number of young farmers dropped by 34% between 2000 and 2010, with only 7.5% of the farming population under 35 years of age. The last CAP reform acknowledged the need to encourage job creation in the sector by including measures targeted at young farmers, particularly under Pillar I. In spite of this, young people still cannot afford the high initial investments required, and the lack of access to credit discourages many of them from entering the sector.

1. Could the Commissioner describe how he plans to maximise the CAP contribution to job creation for young people?
2. Could the Commissioner explain his plans to facilitate the entry of young people into the sector in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy?
3. At his Parliamentary hearing, the Commissioner underlined the fact that it is difficult for young people in rural areas to obtain the funds to start up new businesses. Does the Commissioner foresee working with the European Investment Bank in order to overcome this issue, along with the issue of access to land, and secure additional support to generate more youth employment in the sector?

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Young farmers, E-007592/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Viorica Dăncilă (S&D), 06-10-2014

The new common agricultural policy has addressed issues affecting young farmers, but insufficiently. According to statistics, only 7.3% of those working in agriculture in the EU and in Romania are under the age of 35.

1. How can the Commission encourage young people to embark on careers in farming?
2. What steps can it take to encourage young people to remain in rural areas, and to entice them to move from urban areas to rural ones? How will it approach relations with the European Council of Young Farmers?
3. Does it feel that the current agricultural policy provides sufficient support to small farmers such as these?

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Application of single farm payment top-up for young farmers, E-007469/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Martina Anderson (GUE/NGL), 02-10-2014

1. Can the Commission give an exact definition of a 'head of holding' for farmland?
2. Can the Commission clarify whether or not young farmers in a 50/50 partnership with someone who is not a young farmer are considered to be heads of holding, and consequently whether they are entitled to the single farm payment top-up?
3. Does the answer to the previous question apply to all cases or are there exceptions?
To ensure that farming has a future and that economic activity is maintained in our countryside it is essential for farming skills to be passed on to younger generations.

1. In view of this, what does the Commission intend to do to promote farming as a profession among young people?

In Portugal, support of up to EUR 40.000 is available for the setting up of young farmers under the Rural Development Programme (Proder). I believe that this is a clearly inadequate amount for those who wish to begin farming.

2. Does the Commission believe that Portugal could increase the budget for the setting up of young farmers and, if so, what procedures should it adopt?

3. Can it indicate the amount of funds Portugal used up to December 2012?
Special report 11/2017 of 31 August 2017

The Bêkou EU trust fund for the Central African Republic: a hopeful beginning despite some shortcomings

EU Development Aid | EDF Fund | Foreign Affairs

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<td>Questions asked: The Court assessed whether the establishment of the fund had been justified, how well it was being managed and whether it had achieved its objectives to date. The audit focused on the fund from its inception in 2014 to the end of 2016 and auditors examined all of its eleven projects and their 31 respective contracts financed</td>
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**Summary**

**Findings:**

**The establishment of the Bêkou trust fund**
- The Bêkou trust fund was created in a very short time frame. While the Financial Regulation imposes certain conditions on the creation of a trust fund, the Commission has not yet translated these into an analytical framework that would enable it to carry out a formally structured assessment of the comparative advantages of trust funds relative to other funding vehicles.

- The intervention scope of the Bêkou trust fund was not based on a comprehensive needs analysis. Such an analysis could have shown more clearly how and why the fund’s activities are relevant to its objective, and which specific gaps it fills.

**The management of the Bêkou trust fund**
- The Bêkou trust fund had limited influence on coordination amongst stakeholders, both internally amongst its donors and externally with the international community. Even without formal mechanisms, however, the Bêkou trust fund representative in Bangui did, by way of good practice, ensure some coordination on a project-by-project basis.

- The absence of details on the actual selection procedures applicable for the Bêkou trust fund means that it is not fully transparent how the implementing organisations were selected. Potential conflicts of interest arose in relation to delegated cooperation agreements. Additional time could have been saved in discussing project content.
- Overall, the 5% management fee charged by the Bêkou trust fund is in line with other development aid channels, but the full management costs have not yet been calculated. Furthermore, as is the case for all development aid, total cost of delivering aid is more than just the fund’s management fee.

- The Court believes that it is important that the full costs of using the trust fund vehicle are known, so that the Commission can in the future assess whether it is a cost-effective instrument, compared to other ways of channelling EU aid.

- At fund level, the Bêkou trust fund has no framework to measure its performance, since its specific objectives with corresponding indicators have not yet been developed. This makes it difficult to monitor the fund and evaluate its achievements. The Commission does not yet have a systematic process to identify lessons learnt through the Bêkou trust fund that could help it to improve its design and management of trust funds.

**The achievements of the Bêkou trust fund**
- The Bêkou trust fund has attracted aid, with total pledges amounting to 146 million euro to date. However, most of the funds originate from the EU budget and the European Development Fund. The other donors had all given aid to the CAR before the fund was established, but before 2014 these amounts were comparatively low.

- At project level, despite an often challenging security context, 14 contracts out of 20 delivered all or most of their expected outputs.

- The fund provides enhanced visibility to the EU. The project partners undertook visibility activities on the spot, and over 30 activities were successfully undertaken for the fund as a whole.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Develop further guidance for the choice of aid vehicle, and for needs analyses to define the intervention scopes of trust funds**
   - The Commission should refine its guidelines on EU trust funds by:
     - developing an analytical framework with guiding principles for carrying out a concise and structured assessment of the comparative advantages of trust funds relative to other aid vehicles;
     - introducing methods for carrying out needs analyses to demonstrate that the intervention scope of an intended trust fund is appropriate, and to show which specific gaps it fills.
   - This guidance should be devised so as to not unnecessarily lengthen the process of creating trust funds or to limit their flexibility.

2. **Improve donor coordination, selection procedures and performance measurement, and optimise administrative costs**
   - The Commission should:
     - coordinate aid provided through the Bêkou trust fund more systematically with other bilateral aid provided by its donors;
     - ensure that when applying the Commission’s rules and procedures to select implementing organisations, any exception made to those rules is clearly reported and that provisions on how to avoid conflicts of interest are introduced, and explore ways of increasing the speed of selection procedures, in particular at the project content discussion phase;
     - calculate the full management costs of the Bêkou trust fund and find ways to maximise the amount of aid that goes to the final beneficiaries;
     - set SMART objectives for the Bêkou trust fund with corresponding indicators, in order to be able to monitor and demonstrate the advantages it delivers, and introduce a lessons learnt process into its guidelines on EU trust funds.
Rapporteur: Benedek Jávor |
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Recommendations by the rapporteur, |
| 1. Welcomes the Court’s report, and endorses its remarks and recommendations; |
| 2. Welcomes the establishment of the Bêkou European Trust Fund and its contribution to the international response to the crisis in the Central African Republic; recognizes that this first trust fund can be considered as a major pilot project in a number of ways and that it is necessary to develop more precise guidance on the systemic issue of donor coordination, monitoring and evaluation according to a more systemic to obtain guarantees; |
| 3. Notes that trust funds were part of an ad hoc response in a context of lack of resources and flexibility needed for a rapid and comprehensive approach to major crises; believes that more time is needed to prove its effectiveness and to further learn from operational implementation; |
| 4. Considers also that particular attention should be paid to the effectiveness and political governance of trust funds as well as to a lack of guarantees and oversight of the final use of the allocated funds; |
| 5. Believes that Court’s observations referring to the Fund’s limited influence on coordination amongst stakeholders should be given special attention and the Commission should do everything in its power to use already gained experiences in the activities of the European Development Fund in areas such as implementation and coordination of the multi-parties investments and results-ownershp management; |
| 6. Stresses that any new financial instruments and blended financial instruments should remain in line with the overarching objectives of Union development policy and focus on areas where added value and strategic impact are the highest; |
| 7. Notes that Member States’ contributions to the trust fund have, to date, been relatively low; calls for Member States to become more involved in order to ensure that this fund delivers the expected policy objectives; |
| 8. Believes that due care should be devoted to the management and administrative costs against total contributions; is of the opinion that the coherence and complementarity of such new development tools with the EDFs strategy and policy goals; |
| 9. Calls on the Commission to implement comprehensive control mechanisms to ensure political scrutiny from Parliament, on the governance, management and implementation of these new instruments in the context of the discharge procedure; considers it to be important to develop specific supervision strategies for those instruments, with specific objectives, targets and reviews. |

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Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees |
| [The European Parliament, ] |
56. Supports the various initiatives adopted at European level to tackle the underlying causes of irregular migration: migration partnerships, trust funds for Africa and the European Fund for Sustainable Development; calls for their implementation to be ensured and continued in a flexible, efficient, coherent and transparent manner while enhancing possible synergies among different instruments, programmes and activities, both in internal and external action; highlights the need for increased cooperation in the field of border management; |
| 59. Urges Member States to step up their financial contribution to trust funds and other instruments aiming to foster inclusive and sustainable growth and stimulate job creation thus contributing to addressing the root causes of migration; also asks for a stronger scrutiny role of the European Parliament to ensure that migration partnerships and funding tools are compatible with EU legal basis, principles and commitments; |
European Parliament decision of 27 April 2017 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh European Development Funds for the financial year 2015 (2016/2202(DEC))

[The European Parliament, ]

38. Underlines the need to regularly adapt the control environment and risk management functions to take into account the emergence of new forms of assistance instruments and facilities like the blended finance, trust funds and financial partnerships with other international institutions, and also when beneficiary countries benefit from different types of aid delivery;

49. Claims that the simplification of the rules of funds allocation should not divert appropriations from the objectives and principles of the basic acts, and believes that any channelling through trust funds should not go at the expense of the EDF and long-term Union policies;

77. Recognises the rationale for developing dedicated trusts funds as pooling instruments for financial resources from various stakeholders, with a view to increasing flexibility and speeding up the Union response to global international issues, major crises or emergency situations; believes, nevertheless, that small-scale projects with clearly identified objectives, operators and beneficiaries, producing concrete results and responding to a long-term strategy can also effectively participate in the Union response to those challenges;

78. Believes that the coherence and complementarity of any new development tools with the EDFs should be duly taken into account, particularly as regards aid impact, management and administrative costs against total contributions; calls on the Commission to ensure that those new development tools are always in line with the Union’s overall strategy and development policy objectives;

79. Expresses concern at the multiplicity of trust funds and blending platforms, which are financed by Member States with substantial amounts but are not part of the Union budget; strongly underlines possible issues regarding governance, effectiveness, transparency and accountability; warns the Commission about the risk of outsourcing and dilution of the objectives of the development policy; calls on the Court to help in assessing the risks, improving the overall transparency and accountability and to compare the effectiveness of investments through the trust funds with those of direct or indirect EDF management;

80. Notes that trust funds were part of an ad hoc response which shows that the EDF, the Union budget and the Multiannual Financial Framework lack the resources and flexibility needed for a rapid and comprehensive approach to major crises; believes that more time is needed to prove its effectiveness;

81. Acknowledges the setting-up of the Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) but regrets that no prior consultation of Parliament took place, although Parliament enjoys reinforced oversight of EDF programming based on a political commitment made by the Commission; observes that 57 % of the initial amount pledged by Member States and other donors (Switzerland and Norway) were paid for the EUTF (i.e. EUR 47,142 million); notes that EUR 1,4 billion from the EDF reserve will be used for the EUTF and that the total financial pledges made by Member States represent only EUR 81,492 million (i.e. 4,3 % of the projected EUR 1,8 billion); notes the Bekou Trust Fund of the amount pledged and paid of EUR 34,925 million;

82. Calls on the Commission to implement comprehensive control mechanisms to ensure political scrutiny, especially from Parliament, on the governance, management and implementation of these new instruments in the context of the discharge procedure; considers it to be important to develop specific supervision strategies for those instruments, with specific objectives, targets and reviews;
83. Is strongly concerned by insufficiently specific objectives and a lack of binding indicators and measurable targets to assess performance of the trust funds; asks that performance monitoring arrangements (or results matrices or frameworks) relating to planned actions be further enhanced to include middle and long term goals fully in line with the Union policy objectives;

84. Is particularly interested in receiving information on the leverage ratios achieved by the existing blending facilities with a specific focus on the value added and additionality compared to classical Union support;

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[The European Parliament, ]

14. Welcomes the establishment of the Bekou Trust Fund, the Madad Trust Fund and the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa as effective tools for addressing the divide between humanitarian and development funding in complex and protracted emergencies where political, economic and humanitarian issues are interlinked; calls for the EU and the Member States to include education for children as a priority in allocating resources from EU Trust Funds;

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[The European Parliament, ]

R. whereas in September 2014 the EU launched the first three development projects from the EU multi-donor trust fund for the CAR in the areas of health, job creation, rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure in Bangui, and the empowerment of women and their economic inclusion;

T. whereas since May 2015 the EU has increased its assistance for the CAR with a total of EUR 72 million, including resources for humanitarian aid (with EUR 10 million of fresh funding), budget support (with an additional EUR 40 million) and a new contribution to the EU Trust Fund for the CAR (an additional EUR 22 million);

U. whereas on 15 July 2014 the EU launched its first ever multi-donor development trust fund in support of the Central African Republic, aiming at enabling the transition from emergency response towards long-term development assistance;

23. Calls on the Member States, as well as other donors, to scale up their contributions to the EU Fund for the CAR, the Békou Trust Fund, whose aim is to promote the stabilisation and reconstruction of the Central African Republic taking into consideration the need to better link the reconstruction/development programmes with the humanitarian response;

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Recognises that the problem is often not the lack of funding but, rather, how funds are spent and what other resources are utilised; notes that the Court of Auditors’ recommendations concerning EU funds have not been fully implemented; calls for regular reviews of how funding from national governments through the EU and the UN is spent; believes it is vital to utilise funds effectively, given their finite nature and the scale of the problems being faced; believes accountability is an essential part of this process, as well as helping to tackle endemic corruption in Africa; insists on a more thorough and transparent evaluation of PSOs supported by the EU; backs initiatives such as the Békou trust fund operating in the Central African Republic, which seeks to pool European development-related resources, expertise and capacities in order to overcome the fragmentation and ineffectiveness of international action in the context of reconstruction of a country; calls for more systematic joint programming among the various EU instruments;

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European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2016 on the EU Trust Fund for Africa: the implications for development and humanitarian aid (2015/2341(INI))

23. whereas two EUTFs were created in 2014, namely the Bekou Trust Fund focusing on the stabilisation and reconstruction of the Central African Republic, which has shown positive results, and the Madad Fund dealing with the response to the Syrian crisis;

whereas trust funds are part of an ad hoc response – thus laying bare the scarcity of resources and limited flexibility characterising the EU’s financial framework – but are vital for ensuring a rapid and comprehensive response to humanitarian crises, including long-term crises;

6. Notes that the EU’s financial allocation for the EUTF for Africa currently comes mainly from the 11th EDF; stresses that the EUTF was established because the EU budget and the MFF lack the resources and the flexibility needed to address the different dimensions of such crises promptly and comprehensively; calls for the EU to agree to find a more holistic solution for emergency funding in the framework of this year’s revision of the 2014-2020 MFF and the revision of the external financing instruments in 2016, with a view to increasing the effectiveness and reactivity of humanitarian and development assistance available under the EU budget;

7. calls, in particular, for an adequate revision of the ceiling to allow for the inclusion of the crisis mechanisms in the MFF in order to restore the unity of the budget; considers that revision of the MFF would provide greater budgetary, democratic and legal certainty; stresses, moreover, the need to review the financial rules with a view to facilitating the management of EU budget funds and to achieving, as part of an integrated approach, greater synergies between the Union budget, the EDF and bilateral cooperation so as to increase the impact of development funding and pave the way for the budgetisation of the EDF, while maintaining the level of resources as foreseen as of 2021; urges the Commission to take immediate steps to improve the involvement of the budgetary authority and to better align the trust funds and other mechanisms with the budgetary norm, notably by making them appear in the Union budget;

19. Reminds the Commission and the authorities directly entrusted with the managing of the Trust Fund that the resources coming from the EDF or other development funding must be used exclusively for actions directly devoted to development assistance; asks the Commission to provide express assurance as regards such use and to ensure regular and comprehensive reporting of the use of these funds;

21. Calls on the Commission, the Strategic Board and the Operational Committee to focus primarily on capacity-building, stability and peace, resilience, wellbeing and
empowerment of local populations, promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights, and creation of work opportunities and training, particularly for women and young people;

26. Calls on the Commission to systematically monitor how the EUTF funds are employed and how they are allocated, and to increase Parliament’s scrutiny powers over the EUTF; in particular, calls on the Council and the Commission to regularly communicate on the specific actions undertaken by both the EU and the African states when employing these funds and the results achieved;

27. Is concerned at the lack of coordination among all the actors involved in managing the EUTF (and in particular between the Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) and its Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO)), and at the lack of clear guidelines as to how funding can be secured; deplores the lack of clarity and transparency regarding the funding criteria and the volume of funds available for civil society under the EUTF; recalls the need for better communication between the Commission, the Member States and Parliament in programming and implementing actions of the EUTF in general, in the interests of the further planning of potential additional Trust Funds; recalls that the Commission must take particular care to ensure that its actions are consistent and coordinated with the Regional Development Programmes (RDPs), in order to avoid duplication of effort and ensure that the main focus is on development, and not on border control and security to the detriment of migrants; calls on the Commission, for the same reason as well as in order to maximise the impact and effectiveness of global aid, to maintain a strong dialogue with the UN in the context of the EUTF; also calls on the Commission to strengthen its efforts with a view to the more systematic impact assessment of its policies and funding, including the EUTF, especially with regard to their effects on sustainable development, human rights and gender equality, and to integrate the results of these assessments into its policies and programming;

28. Underlines the lack of involvement of Parliament thus far in the establishment of the EUTF, and insists on the need to guarantee, through detailed and regular reporting by the Commission, Parliament’s scrutiny as to how the Fund is being implemented;

29. Believes that, given the extraordinary flexibility and rapidity proper to a Trust Fund, periodical reporting to Parliament should be undertaken at least once every six months; strongly underlines the need for transparent performance monitoring, evaluation and accountability;

30. Believes that transparency, communication and visibility in relation to projects developed in the framework of the EUTF are of the utmost importance with a view to disseminating the results and involving and sensitising European private actors, local and regional authorities, NGOs and civil society, in order to create the conditions for broader involvement and facilitate participation by Member States;

31. Underlines the need for thorough monitoring of the implementation of the provisions on redistribution, replacement in countries of origin, and Member States’ financial commitments, paying particular attention to human rights

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[The European Parliament, ]

73. Underlines that the sum of EUR 3,35 billion earmarked for the new European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) as part of the EIP corresponds to over 5 % of the total funds available from the EDF, DCI and ENI under the multiannual financial framework (MFF); calls on the Commission to provide more details regarding this estimation and the expected impact, and to indicate on what basis it expects Member States, other donors and private partners to contribute up to EUR 44 billion to it,
when some Member States have yet to contribute to current Trust Funds;

80. Notes that the creation of trust funds and ad hoc financial instruments, while helping to pool resources and bringing speed and flexibility to EU action, can also put at risk development effectiveness principles and undermines the unity of the budget and Parliament’s budgetary authority; calls therefore for Parliament to be given a greater supervisory role in the use of these instruments, including – but not limited to – by being part of the steering committees; recalls that the effectiveness of trust funds depends heavily on Member States’ readiness to contribute and their full involvement; urges that such instruments be brought under Parliament’s oversight and calls for guidelines for their incorporation into the EU’s budget and the scope of its powers;

81. Points out that EUR 3,6 billion was supposed to be paid into the emergency trust fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa, launched at the Valletta Summit; calls on the Member States to match the EUR 1,8 billion released by the Commission;

82. Call for the trust funds to follow the same rules and regulations applying to EU traditional funding instruments in relation to transparency, equal treatment of partners and capacity to provide predictable and timely funding to partners;

85. Stresses that targeted support based on the local situation is a key element of an efficient and results-oriented policy, and that such support should be negotiated with third countries; calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop clear and measurable objectives to be implemented by the financial instruments, including Trust Funds, in a coherent and coordinated way.

Oral / Written Questions

Central African Republic and Bekou Trust Fund, P-009245/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Bogdan Brunon Wenta (EPP), 07-12-2016

Owing to a long political and security crisis, 2.5 million people are in need of humanitarian aid in the Central African Republic. The Bekou Trust Fund was created in 2014 by the EU and three Member States to provide a medium-term response to this crisis. Considering the specificities of trust funds, which do not fall under the scrutiny rules of Parliament, the Commission is asked to answer the following:

1. What is it doing to ensure that the Bekou fund, and in particular the calls for proposals issued in this framework, remain transparent, timely and accessible for humanitarian actors, including NGOs?
2. What is it doing to ensure that the simplification proposed in the mid-term review of the MFF will be included in the management of the Bekou fund?
3. Will it publicly evaluate the Bekou fund and will Parliament be involved in such an evaluation?

Extra EU aid for Central African Republic, E-008428/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Olaf Stuger (NI), 27-05-2015

The European Union is increasing the amount of aid it provides to the Central African Republic (CAR). The European Commission made an additional EUR 72 million available during a special conference on the CAR in Brussels(1) which was attended by Lilianne Ploumen, Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation. Together with the Netherlands, Germany and France, the EU set up the Bekou fund last year for the CAR. Over the past two years, the EU has mobilised EUR 377 million for the African country.

1. Does the Commission believe that distributing EUR 72 million of taxpayers’ money to one of the most corrupt countries in the world (at 2.4, the CAR’s score on Transparency International’s Corruption Index is seriously inadequate, and it is in the lamentable position of 150th out of the 175 countries measured) can be justified to the (Dutch) taxpayers who have to cut down on their spending more and more each year in order to pay levies to Brussels, among other expenses?
2. How will the spending of millions of euros of (Dutch) taxpayers’ money be supervised?
3. Can the Commission indicate the specific results which have actually been achieved with the EUR 377 million of taxpayers’ money which has been handed out to the CAR over the past two years? Please provide an overview.
Special report 12/2017 of 12 September 2017
Implementing the Drinking Water Directive: water quality and access to it improved in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, but investment needs remain substantial
Environment | Public Health and Food Safety

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**Questions asked:**
Have EU actions improved the safe access of citizens to quality drinking water in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania?

In particular, the Court examined whether:
1. the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive have been met;
2. the examined ERDF/CF-funded projects improved the quality of drinking water and the access to its supply;
3. the revenues generated and the additional national public funding are adequate to ensure the maintenance and sustainability of the EU-funded investments in drinking water supply infrastructure

**Findings:**
- The 1998 Drinking Water Directive had been implemented in most respects by the end of 2016
- National legislation in the Member States visited is in compliance with the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive
- Derogations from Drinking Water Directive granted in Hungary and Romania, but not in Bulgaria
- Shortcomings in the Drinking Water Directive monitoring arrangements
- Information to consumers on the quality of drinking water is not easily accessible
- A revision of the Drinking Water Directive has been included in the Commission Work programme for 2017
- All ERDF/CF projects examined improved drinking water in the areas concerned, but water losses remain a common problem
- Overall, the completed ERDF/CF projects examined achieved most of their objectives, but were sometimes delayed
- Losses in the drinking water supply system are still high
- The investment gap for the three visited Member States up to 2020 is estimated at 6 billion euro
- User fees are not sufficient to ensure the sustainability of the projects

**Recommendations:**
The ECA concluded that the Commission should:
1. Follow-up gaps in Member States’ monitoring based on existing reporting and enforce the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive in this respect;
2. In the context of the current revision of the Drinking Water Directive, should address the following issues in a proportionate manner:
   a) improving the provision of information from Member States to the Commission about derogations concerning Small Water Supply Zones;
   b) the extension of the reporting requirements to Small Water Supply Zones;
   c) regular reporting ensuring that up-to-date information on the compliance with the Drinking Water Directive is collected from Member States. The Commission should consider options such as alternative IT tools (e.g. data harvesting from national administrations) to facilitate the reporting exercise, make it swifter and to ensure availability of up-to-date information;
   d) improving the requirements for the provision of adequate and up-to-date information on the quality of water intended for human consumption available to consumers.
3. Support Member States in promoting actions aiming at the reduction of water losses. This could be achieved, for example, by including water loss reduction in the scope of EU funding in the field of drinking water infrastructure, or by enhancing transparency on water losses.

The ECA concluded that the Member States should:
4. Require that plans to reach a certain level of reduction of water losses are included as selection criteria for all water facility projects that allow the meeting of national targets.
   a) ensure that water tariffs provide for the sustainability of water infrastructure, including its maintenance and renewal;
   b) while ensuring the full cost-recovery in the water tariffs structure, consider, if necessary, granting financial or other forms of support to households for which the cost of water services is above the affordability rate.

**CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur**


Rapporteur: Tomáš Zdechovský

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. As access to good quality drinking water is one of the most basic needs of citizens, stresses that the Commission should do its utmost to better monitor the situation, especially in regards to Small Water Supply Zones, which are closest to the end-users, and reminds that bad quality drinkable water can lead to health risks to European citizens;
2. Urges the Member States to deliver more information to citizens as regards the quality of drinkable water supplied to them, as in a number of Member States the citizens are not aware that the tap water is drinkable;
3. Deplores that Member States are not obliged to report on the quality of water of Small Water Supply Zones; hopes that the revised Drinking Water Directive remedies this situation;
4. Underlines the importance of sustainability of water infrastructure and stresses the significance of keeping citizens involved in maintenance of water infrastructure;
5. Emphases the crucial fact that water pricing policies must foster efficiency and recover the costs of water use.

**Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees**

**European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2017** on EU action for sustainability (2017/2009(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

29. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to address the significant delays in achieving good water status under the Water Framework Directive, and to
ensure the attainment of SDG 6; notes the EEA’s assessment that more than half of the river and lake water bodies in Europe have an ecological status that is classified as less than good and that water ecosystems are still experiencing the most significant deterioration and biodiversity decline; calls on the Commission to support innovative approaches to sustainable water management, including by unlocking the full potential of waste water, and applying the principles of circular economy in water management, by implementing measures to promote the safe reuse of waste water in agriculture and in the industrial and municipal sectors; emphasises that around 70 million Europeans experience water stress during the summer months; recalls, moreover, that approximately 2 % of the total population of the EU does not have full access to drinking water, which disproportionately affects vulnerable, marginalised groups; recalls, furthermore, that there are 10 deaths a day in Europe as a result of unsafe water and poor sanitation and hygiene;

75. Calls on the Commission to design, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, and provide, specific, tailored support for marginalised, low-income households and groups such as Roma people to ensure healthy lives and access to basic services and safe, clean natural resources such as air, water, affordable and modern energy and healthy nutrition, which would also contribute to attaining SDGs 1, 10 and 15 on ending poverty, reducing inequality and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies;

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European Parliament resolution of 14 April 2016 on meeting the antipoverty target in the light of increasing household costs (2015/2223(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

U. whereas the UN has affirmed that the human right to water and sanitation entitles everyone to good quality, safe, physically accessible, affordable, sufficient and acceptable water for personal and domestic uses; whereas a further UN recommendation has stated that 3 % of household income should be seen as a maximum for water payments where payments apply; whereas the privatisation of water services has a negative impact on households living in, or at risk of, poverty;

AU. whereas the United Nations General Assembly resolution 64/292 of 28 July 2010 entitled ‘The human right to water and sanitation’ recognises the right to safe and clean drinking water as a fundamental right essential to the full exercise of the right to life and of all human rights;

81. Recalls that the United Nations General Assembly recognises the right to clean and high-quality drinking water and to sanitation facilities as a human right; notes, however, that in certain regions, especially rural and remote regions, access to drinking water is not guaranteed and an increasing number of people face difficulties in paying their water bills; calls on the Commission and the Member States to do their utmost to ensure, without delay, that everyone has access to drinking water; encourages Member States to ensure a minimum water supply and to protect the human rights of vulnerable households;

82. Encourages the Member States therefore to do everything possible to ensure that all people have access to drinking water as soon as possible;

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European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015 on the follow-up to the European Citizens’ Initiative Right2Water (2014/2239(INI))

[The European parliament, ]

10. Calls on the Commission, in line with the primary objective of the Right2Water ECI, to come forward with legislative proposals, and, if appropriate, a revision of the
WFD, that would recognise universal access and the human right to water; advocates, moreover, that universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation be recognised in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;

16. Backs the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and stresses the importance of his work and that of his predecessor on recognition of this right;

17. Deplores the fact that in the EU-28 more than 1 million people still lack access to a safe and clean drinking water supply and nearly 2% of the population lacks access to sanitation, according to the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), and therefore urges the Commission to act immediately;

32. Calls on the Commission to support strongly efforts by Member States to develop and upgrade infrastructure that provides access to irrigation, sewerage and drinking water supply services;

33. Considers that the Drinking Water Directive has greatly contributed to the availability of high-quality drinking water across the EU and calls for decisive action by the Commission and the Member States in order to realise the environmental and health benefits available from favouring tap water consumption;

36. Highlights the importance of full and effective implementation of the WFD, the Groundwater Directive, the Drinking Water Directive and the Urban Wastewater Directive, and considers it vital to better coordinate their implementation with that of the directives on marine environment, biodiversity and flood protection; is concerned that the Union’s sectoral policy instruments do not sufficiently contribute to achieving the environmental quality standards for priority substances and the phasing-out objective for discharges, emissions and losses of priority hazardous substances in accordance with Article 4(1)(a) and Article 16(6) of the WFD; calls on the Commission and the Member States to bear in mind that water management has to be incorporated as a cross-cutting factor in legislation on other fields quintessential to it, such as energy, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, etc., in order to prevent pollution for example from illegal and unregulated hazardous waste sites or oil extraction or exploration; recalls that cross-compliance under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) sets out statutory management requirements based on existing EU laws relevant to farmers and rules of good agricultural and environmental conditions, including on water; recalls that farmers must abide by these rules in order to receive full CAP payments;

46. Recalls that the option of re-municipalising water services should continue to be ensured in the future without any restriction, and may be kept under local management if so chosen by the competent public authorities; highlights that Member States have a duty to ensure that water is guaranteed to all regardless of the operator, while making sure that the operators provide safe drinking water and improved sanitation;

59. Urges the Member States and regional and local authorities to move towards a genuine Social Agreement for Water, with the aim of guaranteeing the availability, stability and safe management of the resource, in particular by enacting policies such as the establishment of water solidarity funds and other mechanisms for social action to support people who are unable to afford access to water and sanitation services so as to meet security of supply requirements and not to endanger the human right to water; encourages all the Member States to introduce social action mechanisms such as those that already exist in some EU countries to safeguard the provision of drinking water for citizens in genuine hardship;
76. Recalls that, through water bills, EU citizens are bearing the cost of purification of water and water treatment, and stresses that enacting policies that effectively combine and reconcile water resource protection objectives with cost savings, such as ‘control at source’ approaches, are more efficient and financially preferable; recalls that according to the EEA’s 2015 report on the state of the environment, more than 40% of rivers and coastal waters are affected by diffuse pollution caused by agriculture, while between 20% and 25% are subjected to pollution deriving from point sources such as industrial structures, sewage systems and wastewater management networks; highlights the importance of effective implementation of the WFD and the Drinking Water Directive, better coordination as regards their implementation, more coherence when drafting legislation and more proactive measures for saving water resources and substantially increasing water use efficiency across all sectors (industries, households, agriculture, distribution networks); recalls that ensuring sustainable protection of natural areas such as freshwater ecosystems is also key to development and crucial for providing drinking water supplies, and reduces costs for citizens and operators;

97. Calls on the Commission to make renewal of ageing drinking water networks a priority in the Investment Plan for Europe by placing these projects on the list of Union projects; stresses the leverage effect which these projects would have on non-relocatable employment, thus helping to stimulate the green economy in Europe;

European Parliament resolution of 3 July 2012 on the implementation of EU water legislation, ahead of a necessary overall approach to European water challenges (2011/2297(INI))

[The European parliament, ]

12. Emphasises that the rate of groundwater recharge under agricultural and forestry land is very high and that farmers and foresters already have a particular responsibility in maintaining the purity of high quality groundwater; recognises the efforts by farmers to improve groundwater quality to date;

18. Stresses that water resources and related ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which could lead to a decline in the quantity and quality of water available, particularly drinking water, as well as to a rise in the frequency and intensity of floods and droughts; calls for climate change adaptation and mitigation policies to take due account of the impact on water resources; underlines the importance of risk prevention, mitigation and response strategies to prevent water-related extreme phenomena;

25. Points out that integrated water resource management and land planning at river-basin level should take into account water-dependent economic activities and water needs for all users, as well as a need for a holistic approach to water scarcity, and should ensure the sustainability of human activities on water;

26. Considers that wastewater from urban resources represents one of the most significant effects of pollution on the aquatic environment, in rivers and on the coast, and that the successful implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive will have a significant influence on the water quality in all Member States and thus on the successful implementation of the WFD;

28. Draws attention to a number of negative factors denounced by petitioners – including waste landfills, failure by competent authorities to control water quality, irregular or unlawful agricultural and industrial practices, urban and energy-related development, agriculture and industry – which impact on the environment and human health and are responsible for poor water quality; calls therefore for the establishment of more targeted incentives for efficient water management and – in particular for poor and rural populations – affordable access to water for all, and for the distribution of water in areas facing shortages, particularly those areas situated at a distance from large urban agglomerations equipped with water infrastructure.
Oral / Written Questions

EU financing of Hungary’s public water works projects in jeopardy, E-006647/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, István Ujhelyi (S&D), 25-10-2017
The withdrawal of over HUF 40 billion in EU funding is envisaged by a letter sent by the Commission to the Hungarian Government on the basis of an investigation of framework agreements for public water works projects to the value of HUF 420 billion and related procurement procedures for consultants. According to media reports, the Commission requested that these be suspended as soon as the procedures were advertised. The contract bundle, worth a total of HUF 439.5 billion (EUR 1.465 billion), affects six regions of Hungary; the winners were cast in stone, with no one else able to obtain orders for EU-funded drinking-water and waste-water projects in 2014-2020, so that there was no real competition. Unless the Hungarian Government rectifies the irregularities within the two months allowed by the EU procedure, financing is likely to be suspended.

1. Has the Hungarian Government replied to the Commission concerning this matter?
2. What specific findings did the Commission include in its letter to the Hungarian Government?
3. What amount of funding did it threaten to withdraw?
4. What legal consequences might await those responsible?

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Illos út, former site of the Budapest Vegyiművek - hazardous waste and danger, P-014595/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Benedek Jávor (Verts/ALE), 10-11-2015
At the former site of the Budapest Vegyiművek on Illos út road, 3 000 tonnes of hazardous waste are being stored irregularly, in rotten barrels on the bare ground and including some 100-200 tonnes of H2SO4, several hundred tonnes of 1.2 dichlorobenzene, several hundred tonnes of isopropanol, and numerous other substances falling into toxic categories such as DNBS. The Budapest batch of Hungary’s National Organisation for Rescue Services has said that it cannot take out proceedings as the plant is no longer in operation.

1. Given the above, what measures is the Commission taking to ensure that the provisions of the Seveso directive are met also in the case of material stored irregularly by companies that are now bankrupt and/or plants that are no longer in use?
2. Who is responsible for taking measures?

In the case of the Budapest Vegyiművek, the level of benzene concentration in the groundwater exceeds the permissible limit by hundreds of thousands of units.

3. What will the Commission do to enforce Hungary’s rehabilitation obligations, with particular regard to the fact that on this polluted site in the capital and close to the drinking water base of the city, the level of groundwater pollution exceeds both EU and national limits significantly?

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Supplying water to urban communities, E-011180/2015, Question for written answer E-011180-15 to the Commission, Rule 130, Daniel Buda (EPP), 10-07-2015
Romania is among the European countries that are less favoured in terms of its water resources, which are made up of 14% groundwater and 86% surface water. Even though surface water is inferior in quality to groundwater, it is preferred for drinking water treatment because it is available in large quantities. Regardless of the purpose for which water is used (for drinking water, in the food industry, etc.), the constant deterioration in water sources means that efforts must be made to preserve water quality, particularly in urban areas and in areas affected by many different sources of pollution.

1. Are any instruments available to the Commission through which it might convince Romania to develop the implementation of integrated environmental management, that would prevent and combat water pollution and improve water quality?

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Right to water, E-000432/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Kostadinka Kuneva (GUE/NGL), 26-01-2017
The first ever European Citizens’ Initiative, Right2Water, with over 1.800.000 signatures, has been met with indifference by the Commission. Thus far, follow-up to the initiative has been confined to political proclamations and little or nothing has been done to safeguard the right to water and access to it. Moreover, the right to water has been given uncontested acknowledgement as a human right protected by international and regional conventions (such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Council of Europe Recommendation), which includes not only the quality of drinking water, but also access to it in an equal and non-discriminatory manner. The Commission’s response, however, only suggests dealing with the relevant Directive on water quality. In addition, there has been a surge in the privatisation of drinking water resources during the last decade with potential unregulated side effects on the cost of drinking water for consumers. This can inadvertently influence access to water.

1. What does the Commission plan to propose by way of legislative and concrete follow-up to the Right2Water initiative?
2. Has the Commission carried out any assessment of the effect of water privatisation on the selling price of drinking water or does it have any plans to do so?

Legislative and policy progress since the Commission communication on the European citizen’s initiative on the right to water, E-005159/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ángela Vallina (GUE/NGL), 28-06-2016

In Written Question E-004846/2015, the author asked what measures the Commission would take with regard to the European Citizens’ Initiative on the right to water (Right2Water), which received nearly 2.000 signatures. The question referenced the communication published by the Commission, in which it passed comment on the lack of new proposals on guaranteeing access to water services to people at risk of social exclusion.

1. Have legislative changes been planned so that the Commission recognises universal access to water and water as a human right, as stipulated in Article 10 of the European Parliament Resolution of 8 September 2015?
2. Will a study on poverty, access to water and the affordability of water be carried out, as requested in Article 19 of the above resolution?

Perfluorinated alkylated substances in surface water, groundwater, and drinking-water, E-006208/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Damiano Zoffoli (S&D), 04-10-2017

Since 2013 an alarming quantity of perfluorinated alkylated substances has been found in surface water, groundwater, and drinking-water over a large part of the central Veneto region. This worrying situation is being caused by PFOS and PFAS emitted into the environment from an industrial site in the municipality of Trissino.
The national and regional authorities dealing with the matter have taken steps which have served to some extent to contain the scale of the pollution. The Veneto region should not, however, be considered an isolated case, since there are plants producing perfluorinated alkylated substances in many Member States. These substances make up a group of synthetic organofluorine compounds with a wide range of uses. They are highly persistent in the environment and pose a risk to the water system in the EU as a whole. On 23 September 2017 the Italian Minister of Health, Beatrice Lorenzin, spoke about an EU directive due to be issued in December that would, as had been called for, seek to standardise the PFAS parameters for waters in all Member States.

1. Can the Commission confirm that a directive is being drafted along those lines?
2. What parameters will be proposed, and which part of the water protection legislation will be amended?

Protection of drinking water, E-003907/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Kostas Chrysogonos (GUE/NGL), 12-06-2017

Under EC law, water is not a commercial product like any other but, rather, a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such(1). Despite this, the EU institutions, acting through the Troika, appear to be seeking the privatisation of water utilities in Member States, such as Greece. At the same time, 40% of rivers and coastal waters in the EU are polluted by agricultural runoff and between 20% and 25% by effluent directly traceable to industrial plant and waste water and sewage treatment systems(2). Furthermore, nothing has been done about the irresponsible waste of water. In Europe, between 10% and 40% of water is wasted through leaking pipes alone(3). Greece has the second-largest per capita water consumption in Europe, this being chiefly attributable to unsustainable irrigation methods(4).

In view of this:
1. What steps will the Commission take to protect drinking water and ensure safe and cheap access to it for everyone?
2. Can it guarantee that it will counter efforts to privatisate water utilities and further deregulate water supply and sewerage treatment?
3. Can it guarantee that it will exclude water supply and sewerage treatment from the CETA, TTIP or similar trade agreements

Monitoring of drinking water, E-006721/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Enrico Gasbarra (S&D), 06-09-2016

Will the Commission amend and broaden the monitoring criteria for drinking water, specifically, by reducing the scope for exceptions made by the Member States for permitted substances and by increasing the frequency (from every three years to at least every two years) with which Member States must send official monitoring reports to the Commission?

Access to water, E-007959/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ivan Jakovčić (ALDE), 19-05-2015

According to the World Health Organisation, 19 million Europeans do not have access to a source of drinking water that is adequately protected or to safe sanitation, and about 100 million people still lack access to piped water in their homes. The Commission has estimated that by 2007 at least 11% of Europe’s population and 17% of its territory had already been affected by water scarcity. While there is a framework for action in Europe, its implementation has been rather weak. The Water Framework Directive (WFD), introduced in 2000, has set an objective to get all lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater aquifers into a healthy state by 2015, by taking an integrated ecosystem-based approach. It is likely that almost half of Europe’s water bodies will miss the target.

1. What measures is the Commission taking to improve the implementation of current water legislation, aimed at promoting the protection and smarter use of water and at improving the quality of water?
2. How does it intend to deploy innovative solutions to tackle the water-related challenges in Europe?
EU-wide criteria for organic materials in contact with drinking water, E-005085/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Werner Langen (EPP), 31-03-2015

For German companies working with organic products which come into contact with drinking water, there is legal uncertainty both nationally and within the EU internal market. The German Federal Environment Agency’s guidelines for materials in contact with drinking water (KTW) have been notified to the EU Commission. A decision has yet to be made on whether the assessment criteria are permissible and whether these fall under national regulatory competence or EU Community law.

1. When is the Commission going to decide whether the assessment criteria for organic materials in contact with drinking water fall under national regulatory competence or EU Community law?
2. Is the Commission striving to create legally secure regulations for standard EU-wide drinking water hygiene?
3. Will the Commission protect established quality and approval marks and certifications (for example AFNOR, CSTB, DVGW, KIWAÖVGW, SVGW)?

Microplastics in tap water, E-006722/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Robert Rochefort (ALDE), 27-10-2017

The evaluation of the implementation of the directive on the quality of water intended for human consumption has showed that although the Member States meet many of the quality standards which have been introduced there are still flaws in the legislation, one being that the list of parameters and parametric values to be checked has become obsolete. What is more, the findings of a scientific study recently made public by OrbMedia have revealed the extent to which tap water is contaminated by plastic microparticles. Despite coming out on top in the study, Europe certainly cannot boast a clean bill of health: 72% of the European water samples analysed contained plastic microparticles.

1. Does the Commission know what impact microparticles are having on the quality of water and on public health?
2. In the light of the above, should appropriate measures not now be taken, in keeping with the precautionary principle?
3. In particular, when the Commission submits its proposal for a revision of the directive, will it include plastic molecules in the list of parameters to be monitored, or even stipulate that tap water must contain no such molecules at all?

Water protection, E-004704/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Doru-Claudian Frunzulică (S&D), 12-07-2017

Recent statistics have found that about 50% of the EU’s surface waters have still to attain good ecological status, and the EEA’s assessments of the status of and pressures on EU freshwater bodies show that heavy metals are a dominant pollutant for lakes. The delay of the WFD (Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC), the main legislative act on water protection at EU level, has been attributed to various circumstances, such as a lack of ambition by Member States, inadequate data availability and insufficient internal and external policy coherence.

1. What are the Commission’s recommendations to encourage Member States to follow a strategic roadmap with a view to improving water quality?
2. How does the Commission intend to address the lack of monitoring data, which is a major impediment to implementation of the directive?

Drinking water quality and transposition of European directives, E-008794/2013, WQ to the Commission, Rule 117, Iñaki Irazabalbeitia Fernández (Verts/ALE), 17-07-2013

The Oiola Reservoir, in Bizkaia province (Basque Country — Spain), is a catchment point for waters used to produce water for human consumption. In 2008, the Basque Government detected a high level of HCH/Lindane isomers in already treated waters. Specifically: 154 ng/l alpha-HCH; 26 ng/l beta-HCH and 13 ng/l delta-HCH, giving a total of 193 ng/l HCH. On the same date, the reservoir’s waters showed maximum levels of almost 500 ng/l HCH.
Several studies conducted were unable to determine the source of HCH contamination, but concluded that the contaminated waters came from the Gorriga stream and increased with heavy rain. Based on this, a protocol was issued setting a limit on the use of waters from the reservoir to a maximum flow of 50 l/s in the stream and a limit of 25 ng/l on the total of HCH isomers in these waters and 20 ng/l for each isomer. The Basque Government applies the limits laid down in Royal Decree 140/2003, which establishes health criteria for drinking water quality, including limits on pesticides — both individual (100 ng/l) and total (500 ng/l) — without express reference to HCH. This legislation has not been updated to meet new requirements under European legislation. This may involve the infringement of Directives 98/83/EC, 2000/60/EC, 2008/105/EC and 2009/90/EC.

1. Does the Commission consider the European directives on water quality for human consumption to have been correctly transposed and implemented?

Quality of water intended for human consumption, E-005143/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Lara Comi (EPP), 27-06-2016

The quality of ‘water intended for human consumption’ is regulated by laws drawn up at European level and transposed into national law, in order to ensure a high level of human health protection over time. Today consumers are free to choose whether to purchase pre-bottled mineral water or drink water from the main water supply network, directly from their homes or through the automatic distribution units open to the public known as ‘water kiosks’. At these kiosks, the organoleptic characteristics of the water are allegedly improved through the use of refining systems, in particular carbonation and/or refrigeration, possibly accompanied by processes of disinfection with ultraviolet rays, filtration or adsorption. However, with regard to filtration equipment, checking potential changes to microbiological parameters is often essential, given the potential for colonisation of the filtration material by microorganisms.

With this in mind, can the Commission indicate:

1. whether there is any European legislation in place that stipulates how often filters should be replaced or cleaned?
2. whether it is aware that filtered water is often sold at a lower price than bottled mineral water, resulting in unfair competition, partly due to misleading information which presents the former as an alternative to mineral water in terms of quality and properties?
3. how widespread the use of water kiosks in Europe is?
**Special report 13/2017 of 4 October 2017**

**A single European rail traffic management system: will the political choice ever become reality?**

**Transport | TEN-T Programme**

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<td>Report No / Date / Title</td>
<td>Special report no 13/2017: A single European rail traffic management system: will the political choice ever become reality?</td>
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<td>Summary</td>
<td>Questions asked:</td>
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<td>The Court assessed whether the ERTMS had been properly planned, deployed and managed and whether there was an individual business case. To do this, the Court examined:</td>
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<td>1. whether ERTMS had been deployed in a timely and effective manner based on proper planning and a proper cost estimate;</td>
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<td>2. whether there was a business case for individual infrastructure managers and railway undertakings;</td>
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<td>3. whether EU funding had been effectively managed to contribute towards ERTMS deployment.</td>
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<td>During its audit, six Member States were visted: Denmark, Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland. Altogether, these Member States partly cover all nine core network corridors where ERTMS has to be fully deployed by 2030. Auditors held interviews with the authorities of Member States (ministries in charge of transport and infrastructure investments, infrastructure managers and national safety authorities), passenger and freight rail operators, fleet owners and other stakeholders (notified bodies, various national and European rail associations).</td>
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<td>Findings:</td>
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<td>ERTMS was a strategic political choice and was launched with no overall cost estimate or appropriate planning for its deployment</td>
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<td>• ERTMS concept generally is not disputed by the rail sector</td>
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<td>• ERTMS deployment was a strategic political choice with no overall cost estimate</td>
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<td>• A thicket of legal obligations, priorities and deadlines</td>
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<td>• No deadline is set for decommissioning current national signalling systems</td>
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<td>• So far limited and patchy deployment of ERTMS</td>
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<td>Many infrastructure managers and railway undertakings have been reluctant to invest in ERTMS due to the lack of an individual business case</td>
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<td>• An overall positive outcome of ERTMS at EU level, but only in the long term</td>
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<td>• Many infrastructure managers and railway undertakings with diverse needs expected to invest in one system</td>
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<td>• ERTMS investments are costly</td>
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<td>• Compatibility and stability problems adversely affect the individual business case</td>
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<td>• New European Deployment Plan is a step forward but major challenges remain</td>
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EU funding can only cover a limited amount of the costly investment, and has not always been properly managed and targeted

- EU funding available for ERTMS deployment can only cover a limited amount of the investments
- Different issues with ERTMS projects related to the management mode
- EU funding has not always been well targeted

Recommendations:

1. Assessment of ERTMS deployment costs
The Commission and the Member States should analyse the total cost of ERTMS deployment (both trackside and on-board) by Member State, taking into account the core network and comprehensive network in order to introduce a single signalling system throughout the EU, given that the time horizon for this type of investment is 30-50 years. The assessment should not only include the cost of ERTMS equipment and its installation, but also all other associated costs based on the experience gained in front runner Member States deploying ERTMS on a large scale.

2. Decommissioning of national signalling systems
The Commission should seek agreement with the Member States on realistic, coordinated and legally binding targets for decommissioning the national signalling systems so as to avoid ERTMS becoming just an additional system to be installed.

3. Individual business case for infrastructure managers and railway undertakings
The Commission and the Member States should, together with rail stakeholders and the ERTMS supply industry, examine diverse financial mechanisms to support individual business cases for ERTMS deployment without any further excessive reliance on the EU budget.

4. Compatibility and stability of the system
   a) The Commission and ERA should, with the support of the supply industry, keep the ERTMS specifications stable, correct the remaining errors, eliminate the incompatibilities between the different ERTMS trackside versions already deployed and ensure future compatibility for all ERTMS lines. In order to do so, ERA should proactively engage in cooperation with the infrastructure managers and national safety authorities prior to the legal deadline in June 2019.
   b) The Commission and ERA should, in strong coordination with the supply industry, set a road map for developing a standardised on-board unit able to run on all ERTMS equipped lines.
   c) The Commission and ERA should work together with the industry to initiate and steer the development and promote the use of standard tendering templates for ERTMS projects available to all infrastructure managers and railway undertakings to ensure that the industry only delivers compatible ERTMS equipment.
   d) The Commission and ERA should facilitate the learning process for persons involved in ERTMS deployment and operation in each Member State so as to reduce the steep learning curve, by exploring different solutions, such as coordinated trainings or exchange of information and guidelines.

5. Role and resources of ERA
The Commission should assess whether ERA has the necessary resources to act as an efficient and effective system authority and fulfil its enhanced role and responsibilities on ERTMS under the Fourth Railway Package.

6. Alignment of national deployment plans, monitoring and enforcement
a) Member States should align their national deployment plans, in particular, when a deadline shown in the new European Deployment Plan is beyond 2023. The Commission should closely monitor and enforce the implementation of the new EDP. Whenever possible, Member States should synchronise the deployment deadlines for earlier crossborder projects, so as to avoid a patchwork deployment of ERTMS.

b) In view of long planning horizons in the ERTMS sector (going up to 2050), the Commission, in consultation with the Member States, should set milestones to allow proper monitoring of the progress.

7. Absorption of EU funds for ERTMS projects
The Commission should adapt the CEF funding procedures to better reflect the life-cycle of ERTMS projects so as to significantly reduce the level of decommitments and maximise the use of EU funding available for ERTMS investments.

8. Better targeting EU funding
The Commission and Member States should target EU funding available for ERTMS projects better in cases of both shared and direct management:
   a) when allocated to trackside equipment, it should be limited to cross-border sections or core network corridors, in line with the EU transport policy priorities;
   b) when allocated to on-board equipment, priority should be given to rail operators who are mostly involved in international traffic so as to encourage intramodal and intermodal competition.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur
CONT Working Document of 22/01/2018 on ECA Special Report 13/2017 (Discharge 2016): A single European rail traffic management system: will the political choice ever become reality?
Rapporteur: Claudia Schmidt (EPP)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Welcomes the Court’s report, and endorses its remarks and recommendations;
2. Notes that the Commission did not assess properly the impact of the legislative packages that it has launched since 2000 on the rail sector; regrets that the EU funds invested in the several projects cannot be considered cost-effective;
3. Notes that railway sector is generally very corporative which may affect the perception of the market liberalisation more as a threat than as an advantage;
4. Notes that the interest of Member States to enhance interoperability is not accompanied by a necessary estimation of costs and required funding; encourages Member States to set realistic targets when allocating EU financial support to the system ERTM and advises the Commission to set deadlines for implementation that can be met;
5. Considers that the costly investments required by this system accompanied by the nonimmediate benefit for those that bear the costs demand a strategic assessment of priorities setting within the Council/Member States; encourages Member States to focus on better coordination of the European deployment plan and make sure EU commitments are considered within their national priorities;
6. Is concerned with the high rate of decommitment related to TEN-T support for ERTMS projects mainly motivated by the fact that EU financial provisions are not aligned with the national implementation strategies; calls on the Commission to take the necessary measures to overcome these shortcomings;
7. Regrets that EU funding for on-board units is mostly taken up by domestic traffic and that freight transport cannot be supported by Cohesion funds; reminds that the rail freight transport is one key aspects of the single market;
8. Calls on the Commission to ensure that shortcomings related to incompatibilities of the system are effectively overcome within the next programming period;
9. Considers that the single rail market to be operational will require the full involvement of the market operators concerned prior to the allocation of EU funding; is of the opinion that the EU policy on the rail sector require a totally shift of strategy.
24. Notes that, in accordance with the provisions of the new Agency Regulation that entered into force in June 2016, the Agency is authorised to charge fees for some of its new competences including the issuing of safety certificates, vehicle authorisations and pre-approval of European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS) trackside projects; notes that the Agency is establishing a fee mechanism and is taking into account the practices of other agencies and relevant national bodies; asks the Agency to keep the discharge authority informed on the development and implementation of this new mechanism;

23. Supports the initiative taken by the Agency in 2015 to put in place a new process to get stronger engagement from Member States and stakeholders in the development of the 2016 work programme; welcomes the launch of the ERTMS Stakeholder platform and recalls that ERTMS is crucial for achieving a Single European Railway Area; stresses, therefore, that an optimised coordination of ERTMS development and deployment that ensures a single, transparent, stable, affordable, and interoperable ERTMS system throughout Europe is a key priority;

European Parliament resolution of 9 June 2016 on the competitiveness of the European rail supply industry (2015/2887(RSP))

[The European Parliament, ]

27. Welcomes the adoption of the technical pillar of the fourth Railway Package and asks for its speedy implementation as a key enabler for a real single market for rail products; stresses that increased interoperability and a stronger role for the European Railway Agency (ERA) will facilitate the harmonisation of the network and therefore have the potential to bring down costs for the development and authorisation of rolling stock and the European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS) trackside; points out the need to provide the ERA with sufficient human and financial resources to realise its new extended tasks; considers that the political pillar of the fourth Railway Package will determine the competitiveness of transport operators and, more generally, of buyers;

37. Asks the Commission to help with further harmonised deployment of the ERTMS, in cooperation with the ERA, within the EU and to promote ERTMS outside the EU;

43. Asks the Commission for a coherent EU trade strategy which ensures compliance with the principle of reciprocity, particularly in relation to Japan, China and the USA, and support for further internationalisation of RSI, especially SMEs, including through the promotion of European standards and technologies at international level, such as the ERTMS, and by looking into how to better protect the intellectual property rights (IPRs) of the European RSI (e.g. through a broader promotion of the IPR Helpdesk);

European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2017 on logistics in the EU and multimodal transport in the new TEN-T corridors (2015/2348(INI))
37. Regards the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) as a successful European project for the promotion of freight in the rail sector, and welcomes the efforts to accelerate its deployment by establishing milestones per corridor; is aware of the constraints that affect funding of multinational, multi-level (ERTMS) projects; invites the Commission and the European Investment Advisory Hub to come forward with specific funding solutions to ease access to European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) funding for ERTMS deployment in favour of both infrastructure and locomotive installations;

38. Considers that interoperability obstacles and constraints will be significantly reduced through the application by all Member States of the Interoperability Directive; underlines that, in addition, soft measures such as interoperable rolling stock (low wagons, multi-gauge locomotives, etc.) can also contribute to alleviating interoperability restrictions; urges Shift2Rail to analyse the EU market, as well as future developments, and to incentivise the availability of soft, multi-operable infrastructure and rolling stock solutions to support multimodal and combined transport;

European Parliament resolution of 25 October 2016 on improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe (2015/2347(INI))

37. Reiterates its support for the deployment of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) on all TEN-T core network corridors; believes that the full and swift implementation of the ERTMS must be an absolute EU priority in order to create a fully interoperable, functioning, efficient and attractive European Railway Area capable of competing with other modes of transport;

38. Calls on the Member States to adopt clear, long-term rail transport development strategies and to remove barriers to rail projects implemented using EU funding;

39. Underlines the need to step up investment in improving the quality of the railways in order to make them more accessible and attractive in the fields of both passenger and freight transport and to increase their share of the modal split, in accordance with goal no 3 on shifting to other modes as formulated in the EU White Paper on Transport;

European Parliament decision of 28 April 2016 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Railway Agency for the financial year 2014 (2015/2179(DEC))

23. Points out that the Agency's role in ensuring the safety and interoperability of European rail system; welcomes the Agency's role in following up the development, testing and implementation of European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS) as well as in evaluating the specific ERTMS projects; notes furthermore that a review of the Agency's role (e.g. one-stop-shop for vehicle authorisation and safety certification) and powers forms part of the
Fourth Railway Package; stresses that as it receives greater responsibilities, the Agency will need to be given the necessary financial, material and human resources to perform its new and additional tasks effectively and efficiently; notes with concern the contradiction between the recently approved legislation extending the Agency’s mission and the budgetary cuts related to the Agency to be implemented within the scope of the multi-annual financial framework 2014-2020;

24. Encourages the Agency to collaborate with Member States in order to increase the number and quality of railway projects, especially ERTMS projects, proposed under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) transport programme; recalls the Parliament’s position in budgetary procedure for recovering of total amounts relocated from the CEF to the European Fund for Strategic Investments;

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65. Calls, with regard to rail transport, for:
(…)
– the deployment of the European rail traffic management system (ERTMS) on all TEN-T core network corridors as a priority, including the corresponding on-board equipment on locomotives.

### Oral / Written Questions

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<td>11-10-2017</td>
<td>Delays in the establishment of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS), E-006399/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Salvatore Domenico Pogliese (EPP), 11-10-2017</td>
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<td>12-07-2017</td>
<td>Support for the ERTMS and public investment, E-004742/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Hugues Bayet (S&amp;D), 12-07-2017</td>
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By 2030, the ERTMS will have to replace national rail signalling systems which are not compatible with each other, to enable so-called interoperability within the EU. Report No 13/2017 of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) has highlighted a number of issues, widespread at European level, which have caused considerable delays in relation to the expected timelines. The ECA has estimated that at present only 8% of European railways are equipped with an operational ERTMS. Can the Commission therefore say:

1. How it intends to compensate for the lack of coordination between the implementation of the ERTMS on land and on board trains;
2. How it is planning to address the issue, highlighted by the European Court of Auditors, of EU financial provisions not being aligned with the life cycle of ERTMS projects, which is preventing Member States from actually benefiting from EU funds?

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The railway sector is crucial for the EU, not only for the sake of mobility and as a response to environmental challenges, but also as a provider of jobs (as many as 400,000 jobs are directly linked to the sector). Within the sector, the promotion of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) seems vital for linking up the European rail network and for creating jobs. In the Resolution approved by Parliament in June 2016 on the competitiveness of the European rail supply industry, the Commission is called on to help with further harmonised deployment of the ERTMS, in cooperation with the European Railway Agency (ERA), within the EU and to promote ERTMS outside the EU.

1. Can the Commission say exactly how it is planning to further promote the ERTMS, in particular through the Connecting Europe Facility and the European Fund for Strategic Investments?
2. Does it not take the view that the limits imposed on public investment in the context of austerity policy could have serious repercussions for the development of the ERTMS, and therefore for mobility within the EU?
1. Will the Commission press for an agreement on the technical pillar of the fourth railway package?
2. Will the Commission submit a proposal to the Rail Interoperability and Safety Committee in June 2015 on Baseline 3, representing a stable, mature and consistent version of the ERTMS that provides:
   - harmonised test specifications developed for and corresponding to Baseline 3;
   - the stability of this version for five years (unless changes can be justified on the grounds of safety concerns that are urgent and reasonable) and the strong capacity to manage change requests and the appropriate processes so as to ensure that the groups requesting changes are sufficiently representative of the whole sector;
   - TI standardisation documents — which are to be considered binding — and the prohibition of national rules which deviate from the specifications that have been agreed?
Special report 14/2017 of 26 September 2017
Performance review of case management at the Court of Justice of the European Union
EU Institutions and Other Bodies

Questions asked:
1. Did the CJEU’s case management procedures result in efficient treatment of cases and were they resolved in a timely manner?
2. Did the procedures in place promote the efficient handling of the cases lodged and could their timely resolution be enhanced?
3. How effective are the accountability tools in place at the CJEU?

Findings:
1. In recent years, the CJEU has taken significant organizational and procedural actions to enhance the efficiency of case handling and the reporting thereon. In particular, the introduction of indicative time frames for the accomplishment of key steps in the lifecycle of a case, together with the progressive development of monitoring tools and reports, has increased the focus on timeliness.
2. The CJEU publishes statistics and analyses on the outcome of its judicial activities. These statistics show that the average time required to adjudicate cases has reduced or remained the same despite an increase of the number of cases introduced.
3. Efforts have been made to reduce the significant backlog of cases that had built up at the General Court and progress had been made by the end of 2016 to significantly reduce the overall number of days of prolongation relating to a key step in the judicial procedure. This is the result of improved management efforts and initiatives, rather than through increased resources. The reform of that Court, notably through the doubling of the number of Judges and their respective Cabinets, can only have an impact in the future.
4. Currently the CJEU’s approach to setting an indicative time frame anticipates that the timelines set are to be respected on average. Lengthy cases are expected to be compensated by those requiring less time. Cases are still monitored individually and reminders issued when indicative deadlines are not met to ensure that focus is maintained on cases that have overrun those limits.
5. For the first part of the case management process, which is known as the written procedure, there is only limited scope to reduce the duration of this stage. It is mainly the responsibility of the Registries; it includes the reception of the case and the preparation of the case documents. This is mainly due to the application of the CJEU’s procedural rules, which provide for fixed deadlines for certain situations, for example the right of parties to reply. The CJEU however demonstrated a proactive approach to addressing certain problems, by adapting its Rules of Procedure for example in respect of the confidential treatment of cases and by implementing the use of ECuria to speed up the procedure for lodging a case.
6. The stages after the written procedure, which are in the main in the hands of the Judges in various judicial formations, Advocates-General and their référendaires, are normally the longest element of the case management process. Indicative time frames were not always respected. Reasons for that include the workload of Judges, the availability of référendaires, and the complexity of the cases. However, there was insufficient information on the
specific time attributable to the factors identified. In addition, there was little information provided regarding the availability and use of human resources in respect of specific cases. This prevented the ECA from concluding whether, and to what extent, there would have been scope for reduction of the duration of the selected cases.

7. The translation service also works toward a series of fixed time frames combined with tailored deadlines. Translation is not a factor lengthening the overall case duration, with a significant number of translation tasks finished within the deadlines.

8. The implementation of key performance indicators, which should allow inter-institutional comparisons to be made, is underway.

9. The IT systems in place at the CJEU are complex and rely on an ageing central database to which a large number of sub-systems have been added over time. The ECA has yet developed a fully integrated IT system to support case management. The ECA concludes that the longer term goal of the development of a more integrated approach should provide for efficiency gains, limit the need for duplication, minimize the need for manual input and reduce the need to support a large number of applications.

10. There are both advantages and disadvantages to the current regime whereby French is the language of deliberation and the de facto working language of the institution. Consideration has been given within the CJEU to performing a cost-benefit analysis on the possibility to extend the language of deliberation to languages other than French in the General Court and this could help to assess the situation and to provide support to any future decision.

11. There is potential to further enhance performance by a move toward more active individual case management. The CJEU’s current performance measurement approach is not based on tailored time frames for individual cases, taking into account complexity, workload, resources needed and staff availability. At present, the indicative time frames set for certain types of cases serve only as an overall management objective to be respected on average. Whilst this approach has undoubtedly driven improvements, average time taken to close certain types of cases or procedures cannot be equated to the notion of reasonable time taken to deal with each individual case.

Recommendations:

In order to improve case management, the CJEU should consider:

1. Measuring performance on a case-by-case basis by reference to a tailored timeframe, taking account of the actual resources employed. This would inform management of both problem cases and elements of good practice, and could be used to drive further efficiency gains.

2. Continuing the improvements made in terms of reporting on performance by moving toward the development of a system of reporting on the specific numbers of cases meeting expected time frames rather than average length of types of cases. It would permit more detailed reporting on results, thereby enhancing the CJEU accountability. This is particular pertinent in view of the new resources made available in the context of the reform.

3. Implementation of a policy allowing for a more flexible allocation of existing référendaires to help mitigate problems arising from factors related to the management of resources or organizational issues (unavailability of référendaires, workload of Judges, Advocates-General and their référendaires, re-assignment of cases due to the end of the Judges’ mandate).

4. Further raising the awareness of the Member States and the Council of the importance of the timely nomination and appointment of Judges.

5. Completing the cost-benefit analysis of the impact (organisational, budgetary and in terms of case duration) of a change of the current practice in the General Court to use languages other than French for deliberation.

6. The possibility of implementing a fully integrated IT system to support case management.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur: Ingeborg Gräßle (EPP)
1. Welcomes the Court’s report, and endorses its remarks and recommendations;
2. Criticises the CJEU for refusing the access of ECA to all the documents relevant in a case, only allowing the auditors to consult publicly available documents; reminds the CJEU that Court Members as well as its auditors are bound by confidentiality and professional secrecy in the performance of duties; regrets that référendaires could not be interviewed despite their crucial role in the Court’s work;
3. Notes with regret that the General Court from 2012 onwards has repeatedly exceeded the reasonable period of time within which a litigant is entitled to expect judgement to be delivered; invites the Court to come to the budgetary control committee to clarify the situation and to explain the appeals;
4. Notes that following the reform of the CJEU judicial structure, the allocation of Judges to the Chambers is made according to the caseload in different areas; is interested to know how this allocation is made, whether specialised Chambers are in place for certain areas and to have statistical data on the progress of files under the new system;
5. Regrets that the ECA excluded from the sampling the cases which took longer than twice the average duration; is of the opinion that not only the typical cases are relevant to assess the performance;
6. Suggests that the working languages in the CJEU, in particular the deliberations, to be enlarged to EN, FR and DE which are the working languages in the European institutions; encourages the CJEU to look for best practices in the European institutions to implement this reform of the language practices;
7. Notes that the référendaires are very influential in the performance of the CJEU but their role and regulatory rules remain unknown to the outside world;
8. Is concerned that in the overview of the most frequent factors affecting the duration of the written procedure at the General Court, the reception and processing of procedural document at Registry counts for 85%; asks whether the Registry has enough means to work;
9. Is concerned about the length of cases in the General Court where confidentiality issues are raised;
10. Takes note of the process to assign cases referred to the Courts; asks the Court to provide the rules stipulating the procedure of assignment in both Courts;
11. Notes that in 2014 and 2015 around 40% of cases in the General Court were assigned outside the rota system, which makes the system in itself becoming questionable; at the same time, raises doubts about the discretionary allocation of files within the General Court; regrets the lack of transparency in the procedure;
12. Is concerned that the judicial vacations is the most frequent factor affecting the duration of the handling of cases in the Court of Justice; proposes that hearings and deliberations on a broader range of cases - other than those with specific circumstances - are to be permitted during that period;
13. Notes that the sickness, maternity/parental leave or departure of the référendaires also have an impact in the duration of cases; asks the Court to consider possible alternative methods to overcome temporary absence and ensure the smooth progress of work;
14. Is of the opinion that resources are not shared proportionately among the Courts taking into account their respective workload; suggests that the “cellule des lecteurs d’arrêts” in the General Court to intervene at a later stage in the case;
15. Calls on the Member States to make sure that the decision of nomination of new judges is taken well in advance of the date of departure to ensure the handover and smooth transition of the workload;
16. Is concerned with the Court’s approach of “one-size-fits-all” applying to the various steps in the process; advises the Court to adapt the deadline set to take into account the typology and the complexity of cases;
17. Notes that intellectual property issues count to a relevant amount of cases in both Courts; encourages the Court to analyse ways of simplifying the procedures for these cases and consider a pre-review by the research and documentation services in the Court.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other: 2016/2154(DEC), 2015 discharge: EU general budget, Court of Justice
6. Notes that the Court of Justice’s budget is mostly administrative, with around 75% being used for expenditure concerning persons working within the Court of Justice and the remaining amount relating to buildings, furniture, equipment and special functions carried out by it; stresses, however, that introducing performance-based budgeting should not apply only to the Court of Justice’s budget as a whole but should include the setting of specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-based (SMART) targets to individual departments, units and staffs’ annual plans; in this respect, calls on the Court of Justice to introduce the principle of performance-based budgeting more widely in its daily operations;

7. Welcomes the productivity of the judicial activity of the Court of Justice in 2015, with 1,711 cases brought before the three courts and 1,755 cases completed; notes that this is the highest annual number of the cases in the Court of Justice’s history;

8. Notes that the Court of Justice completed 616 cases in 2015, which represents a decrease compared to 2014 (719 cases were completed in 2014), and had 713 new cases brought before it (compared to 622 in 2014);

9. Notes that in 2015 the General Court received 831 new cases and dealt with 987 cases, which constitutes a general increase when compared with previous years;

10. Notes that in 2015 the Civil Service Tribunal completed 152 cases, as in 2014, and had 167 new cases; stresses that ten years after its establishment, 2015 was the last year of existence of the Tribunal; believes that an in-depth assessment of those ten years of activity should be made by the Court of Justice;

11. Notes that the 2015 statistics for the three courts confirm the trend seen in recent years as regards the average duration of proceedings, which remains satisfactory (for the Court of Justice, 15.3 months requests for a preliminary ruling (compared with 15 months in 2014), 1.9 months for urgent requests for a preliminary ruling (compared with 2.2 months in 2014), 17.6 months for direct actions (compared with 20 months in 2014) and 14 months for appeals (compared with 14.5 months in 2014); for the General Court and Civil Service Tribunal, respectively 20.6 months (compared with 23.4 months in 2014) and 12.1 months (compared with 12.7 months in 2014) for all types of case; considers that the amendments to the Statute of the Court of Justice adopted in 2015 can only further enhance that streamlining;

12. Welcomes the fact that the number of cases concluded increased by 57% during the period 2007 to 2015, largely owing to the coordinated efforts of the courts and auxiliary staff, despite the extremely limited increase in auxiliary staff capacity over that period;

13. Notes that 2015 was the year of adoption of the judicial architectural reform of the Court of Justice, which was accompanied by the development of new rules of procedure for the General Court; understands that, by virtue of the number of judges of the General Court being doubled in a three-stage process extending until 2019, that reform will enable the Court of Justice to continue to deal with the increase in the number of cases; looks forward to analysing the achievements of that reform in the Court of Justice’s capacity to deal with cases within a reasonable period and in compliance with the requirements of a fair hearing;

14. Believes that that reform will allow the Court of Justice to deal with its increasing caseload more quickly and efficiently and serve the interests of those seeking justice, respecting their right to due process within a reasonable time, in line with the objectives of an effective, high-quality service;

19. Notes with satisfaction the improvements made in the e-Curia application and the fact that all Member States used it in 2015; considers that alongside the
dematerialisation of documents, data security should be improved;

20. Notes that, according to its annual management report for 2015, the Court of Justice works closely with the Court of Auditors’ team designated to carry out its performance review; in this regard notes that, at the beginning of the audit process, the Court of Justice raised obstacles to the work of the audit team; notes with satisfaction that the Court of Justice has improved its cooperation with the auditors and provided further documents to Court of Auditors; is aware that the principle of secrecy of deliberations is necessary to help preserve the independence of decision-makers, to promote consistency and finality of decisions and to prevent decision-makers from having to spend more time testifying about their decisions than making them; points out, however, that the secrecy of deliberations as principle ab ovo prevents any external control; invites the Court of Justice, therefore, to develop an internal control/remedy mechanism in order to provide in such cases a certain level of control;

29. Notes the cooperation of the Court of Justice with the Commission and Parliament’s interpretation services within the Interinstitutional Committee for Translation and Interpretation, particularly in the area of interpretation; expects that that cooperation will be extended to the translation area and supports it, where possible and without undermining the Court of Justice’s responsibilities;

30. Calls on the Court of Justice to provide Parliament with the costs of translation according to the harmonised methodology agreed within the Interinstitutional Working Group on key interinstitutional activity and performance indicators;

31. Notes that the translation directorate of the Court of Justice had a workload increase of 1.4% and that its productivity increased by 7% in 2015 due to the outsourcing of workload control and the implementation of new translation supporting tools;

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**2015/2157(DEC), 2014 discharge EU general budget, Court of Justice**

**Summary**

[The European Parliament,]

5. Welcomes the productivity of the judicial activity of the Court in 2014 with 1691 cases brought before the three courts and 1685 cases completed in that year;

6. Notes that the Court of Justice completed 719 cases in 2014 (701 completed cases in 2013) and had 622 new cases brought before it (699 in 2013); endorses the positive statistical results and believes performance can be improved in the future;

7. Takes note that in 2014 the General Court received 912 new cases, had 814 cases dealt with and 1423 cases pending, which represented a general increase in the number of proceedings when compared to 2012 and 2013;

8. Points out that the creation of nine temporary secretary posts at the General Court in 2014 strengthened the judicial team, ensuring its efficiency and increasing its rate of performance;

9. Notes that in 2014, the Civil Service Tribunal completed 152 cases, compared to 184 in 2013, and had 216 pending cases; notes that in 2014 the Tribunal was less efficient in its general judicial activity;
10. Encourages the Court of Justice to continue improving the use of the existing resources; is of the opinion that the internal reforms implemented in 2014, namely the reform of the Rules of Procedure governing the operations of the General Court and of the Civil Service Tribunal and the development of IT applications to improve the dealing with procedures and communication, have contributed to an optimisation of the use of resources;

11. Welcomes the Court of Auditors’ plan to carry out a review of the Court of Justice to assess its performance, following Parliament’s request made to it in the context of the discharge for 2013;

16. Notes with satisfaction the improvements made in the e-Curia application and the increased number of Member States that started using it in 2014; however regrets that there are three Member States that remain out of the list of users;

17. Invites the Court of Justice to step further into new technologies, so that a further reduction in the number of paper copies as well as in the number of meetings requiring translation and interpretation is possible without undermining the Court’s responsibilities;

18. Takes note that the activity of the translation directorate was considered satisfactory; believes that savings can still be made in relation to the non-judicial documents applying a restricted translation regime;

19. Notes that the Court of Justice takes part in the Working Group on Key Inter-institutional Activity and Performance Indicators (KIAPI) that analyses amongst other matters the costs of translations; regrets that the Court still does not provide data according to the harmonised methodology agreed within the KIAPI;

2014/2080(DEC), 2013 discharge EU general budget, Court of Justice

Summary

6. Notes that the Court of Justice completed 701 cases in 2013 (595 completed cases in 2012), had 699 new cases brought before it (632 in 2012), including 450 appeals and references for preliminary ruling; endorses the positive statistical results and finds that despite the good outcome, there is still margin for improvement;

7. Takes note that in 2013 the General Court received 790 new cases, had 702 cases dealt with and 1325 cases pending, constituting a general increase in the number of proceedings when compared to 2012; notes also that the duration of proceedings has slightly decreased; points out that the creation of a ninth chamber did not contribute in 2013 to an increase in the General Court’s efficiency yet notwithstanding this, reiterates its position that the General Court needs reinforcement in the area of human resources;

8. Notes that in 2013, the Civil Service Tribunal completed 184 cases, as against 121 in 2012 (i.e.an increase of 52 %), thus reducing the number of pending cases by 24 (i.e. a decrease of its backlog by 11 %); believes that the elimination of the Civil Service Tribunal is an inadequate solution to face the Council’s long lasting blockage;

9. Considers that there is still a margin for improvement within the existing resources at the disposal of the Court of Justice; stresses that the internal reforms implemented in 2013, namely the creation of a new chamber in the General Court and the new Advocate General, as well as the reform of the Rules of Procedure
governing the operation of the Court of Justice, particularly in the areas of languages and the use of technology, and other supplementary rules, have contributed to positive changes in the system that have enabled progress to be made in optimising resources; encourages the Court of Justice to continue with this approach;

10. Recommends that the institution be reorganised in such a way as to make a clearer separation between legal and administrative functions, thus bringing the setup more closely in line with Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights so that judges no longer run the risk of having to rule on appeals against acts in which their authorities have been directly involved;

11. Recalls that in its response to the discharge resolution 2012 the Court of Justice indicates that holding more hearings and issuing more judgments would not increase productivity significantly; points out that on the other hand, the Court of Justice asked to increase the number of judges; urges the Court of Justice to request an external peer review in order to be provided with external instruments to identify possible solutions to the problems raised by the Court of Justice;

16. Takes note of the improvements made in the e-Curia application; acknowledges that the application has not yet achieved its full potential; recommends that the Court of Justice establish a plan to encourage all the Member States to use it;

17. Acknowledges the launch in 2013 of the digital case-law reports project to replace the paper case-law reports; is of the opinion that this project could have been implemented earlier;

28. Recommends the establishment of some objective criteria to define the excessive delay in the period for delivering judgments;

Oral / Written Questions

Increase in the number of judges at the General Court, E-002763-16, WQ to Council, Rule 130, Raymond Finch (EFDD), 06-04-2016

In a critical report, Franklin Dehousse, judge at the EU's lower General Court, has called the recent increase in the number of judges in his court from 12 to 28 'useless spending' and 'manifestly excessive'. The extra judges will cost EUR 22.9 million a year, a 6.6% increase in the Court's budget, and a further 6.9 million in 'installation costs'. The increase was presented as a means of reducing backlogs. However, Dehousse said the case backlog had actually been reduced 'but no one in the EU institutions seemed to care'. He blamed both the Member States and the dishonesty of the European Court of Justice for the decision, accusing the court of lying about the size of its case log in order to double the size of the General Court. Doubling the number of General Court judges means that each EU Member State appoints two judges to sit in EU courts. Only the United Kingdom voted against the changes in June 2015.

1. What is the Council's reaction to this devastating report?
2. How does the Council justify this increase and useless spending at a time when national court systems across the EU are cutting costs and trying to boost productivity?


The call by the Court of Justice for an additional 12 judges to be appointed to the General Court has remained an unresolved issue for more than four years. The Council has recently put forward a proposal to appoint 28 more judges in three stages up to 2019. This increase will entail a steep rise in expenditure, since a single judge is estimated to cost roughly EUR 1 million a year. The efficiency of the courts' work is a more important consideration than cost, given that inefficient courts can cause damage many times greater than the money spent to pay for them. The fact of having more judges, however, does not necessarily mean that courts operate more effectively. In order to give a final verdict on the Council’s proposal to increase the number of judges, its impact needs to be assessed.

1. Does the Council have any impact assessment concerning the proposal to appoint an additional 28 judges to the Court of Justice?
2. In other words, is the procedure already under way or will such an assessment be made in the future?

Reform of the General Court of the European Union, E-009844-15. WQ to Council, Rule 130, Louis Michel (ALDE), 16-06-2015

The European Court of Justice plays a key role in ensuring that a federal Europe runs smoothly. Given the considerable backlog of cases it faces, it has been suggested that the number of judges appointed to the General Court of the European Union (currently one per Member State) should be doubled, from 28 to 56, including the seven judges appointed to the Civil Service Tribunal. Although any measure intended to help the Court work more effectively is welcome, a number of questions need to be asked.

1. Has an in-depth impact assessment been carried out which analyses the way the Court functions and how that functioning could be improved?
2. Is doubling the number of judges appointed to the General Court from 28 to 56, as currently suggested, the right way to ensure that the Court functions as effectively as possible?
3. Have other approaches been considered, such as increasing the number of law clerks or registry staff?
**Special report 16/2017 of 14 November 2017**

**Rural Development Programming: less complexity and more focus on results needed**

Agriculture and Rural Development | EAFRD Fund | Budgetary Control

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<td>Report No / Date / Title</td>
<td><strong>Special report No 16/2017 of 14/11/2017: Rural Development Programming: less complexity and more focus on results needed</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
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<td>Short summary of questions asked, observations, findings and recommendations</td>
<td>Questions asked: Has the new legislative framework (CPR, EAFRD and related Commission regulations) reflected an enhanced focus on performance and has the new programming process enabled and resulted in the production of quality RDPs thus potentially contributing to better results. In order to examine this, the Court has focused on checking: 1. the RDPs' consistency, complementarity and synergy with higher-level strategic documents 15 2. the definition and incorporation of the reinforced intervention logic in the RDPs. 3. whether the new performance framework is likely to enhance the focus on results. 4. the timeliness of RDP approval.</td>
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<td>Findings:</td>
<td>1. The Court found that the design of the 2014 – 2020 programming framework was more ambitious, but implementation was affected by significant shortcomings. Furthermore despite Commission’s efforts, the start of RDPs’ implementation, similarly to previous programming cycle, was delayed and the implementation of planned spending over the first three years was lower than in the previous period. The post 2020 CAP is currently under political debate and at this stage, it is unknown what will be its exact shape in the future. In preparing its recommendations, the Court assumed that future rural development policy would involve significant continuities with the current framework. The aim of integrating the EAFRD with other European Structural and Investment Funds was to increase the thematic concentration of EU spending by ensuring that the RDPs made a clear contribution to the Europe 2020 priorities, but also to foster coordination, complementarity and synergies between programmes. In practice, although this resulted in RDPs being consistent with strategic documents such as the Partnership Agreements, the RDPs’ contribution towards thematic objectives is difficult to assess because the relationships between the various programming documents are complex. Complementarity, synergies and coordination between RDPs and programmes from other ESIFs are not satisfactorily developed. 2. While the Commission sought to balance the amount of information presented in the RDPs, RDPs reviewed by the Court of Auditors were lengthy and required a significant administrative effort on the part of national authorities to meet the extensive new content requirements.</td>
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However, the main goal of addressing specific territorial needs better and demonstrating more clearly the links between identified needs and selected support measures is not achieved.

3. The Court found that the new performance framework has limited potential to enhance the focus on performance and results. The Common Monitoring and Evaluation System has the potential to improve the way rural development policy is monitored in that it could provide a step in the direction of addressing the vicious circle of defining contents of new programmes without timely result information from the previous periods. However, the lack of adequate assessments of the quality of data collection, combined with shortcomings in the choice of indicators and the fact that most result indicators do not fit the definition of a “result” indicator, are a significant limitation in terms of measuring policy results and their contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy.

The “performance reserve” is a misnomer because the indicators used for the performance review do not measure policy results but explicitly seek to measure expenditure and direct output. This being the case, the performance framework does not provide information about the RDPs’ objectives and expected results. Moreover, the audit confirmed the inherent risk of RDPs setting unambitious milestones and targets to avoid possible sanctions in the event of underperformance. In any case, when relevant milestones are not reached, the performance reserve is not lost as it can be reallocated to other priorities, and potential financial sanctions are not based on result indicators.

4. The Court found that the programming process required significant efforts by the Commission and the Member States, but that the implementation of the RDPs began more slowly than in the previous period. Support for Rural Development programming is a multi-stage process in which RDPs are the last stage. The financial allocation per Member State and the strategic legislative framework are decided by the EP and the Council before the programmes are drafted. RDPs should therefore be viewed more as tools for bringing national and European perspectives into line than as documents triggering the process of building national RD strategies from scratch.

Despite the RDPs’ rather limited role in the multi-stage process described above, a considerable administrative effort was required of the Commission and the Member States to prepare and approve all the RDPs. A long delay in adopting the legal framework (December 2013) impacted the timeframe for submitting and approving the programming documents; when combined with complex RDP content requirements, this meant that RDPs were approved and new programmes implemented after the programming period has already started.

A total of 118 RDPs were approved by the Commission within a 20-month period (April 2014 - December 2015), these figures compare favourably with the 94 RDPs approved within 24 months for the 2007-2013 programming period. However, despite the efforts made, RDPs were approved later than in the previous period and most of them did not start to be implemented before mid-2015; with some starting, only in 2016.

Consequently, about 90 % of the EAFRD financial plan remained unspent at the beginning 2017 (the fourth year of the programming period) whilst the equivalent figure in the previous period was 83 %. This entails a risk to full implementation of the financial plan, as well as an emphasis on absorption, meaning that the results-oriented approach endorsed by the Commission is undermined. Delays in implementing programmes under the MFFs are general and recurrent problems, increasing the risks of excessive focus on absorption and planning new MFF before having the results of EU spending under the preceding one.

Recommendations:

The Commission should:

a) ensure that its policy proposals further develop the requirements concerning consistency between individual programmes;

b) review the design of programming documents with a view to simplifying their content and reducing the number of requirements;
c) work with the Member States to ensure that the enhanced annual implementation reporting of 2019 provides clear and comprehensive information on programme achievements;
d) define the various types of indicators more accurately, benefiting from good practices established by national authorities and international organisations;
e) review and take stock of the experience from the implementation of the current system including: the impact of the performance reserve, the appropriateness of result indicators used to access the performance reserve and the use made of financial sanctions to address underperformance;
f) prepare its legislative proposals for rural development policy post 2020 in good time.

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should consider aligning the long-term strategy and policy-making into line with the budgetary cycle and conducting a comprehensive spending review before a new long-term budget is set.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

Rapporteur: Karin Kadenbach (S&D)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur,]

1. When preparing the post 2020 programming period, in order to enhance the focus on performance and results, increase integration between RDPs and other programmes and to improve assessments of the RDPs’ contribution towards the strategic objectives:
   a) the Commission ensure that its policy proposals indicate how consistency between individual programmes will be enhanced through further development of requirements.
   b) the Member States specify how coordination, complementarity and synergy mechanisms will be implemented, followed up and reported on in the context of overarching EU objectives and rules.

2. The Commission review the design of programming documents with a view to simplifying their content and reducing the number of requirements for the post-2020 programming period. In particular, it should limit programming documents’ structure to those elements and options that are essential for correct planning, implementation and monitoring of RD expenditure.

3. The Commission work with the Member States to ensure that the enhanced annual implementation reporting of 2019 provides clear and comprehensive information on programme achievements and that the required answers to common evaluation questions provide an improved basis for the next programming period.

4. When preparing the post 2020 programming period, the Commission define more accurately, in the context of overarching EU objectives for agriculture and rural development, the types of indicators to be set in order to assess the results and impact of rural development interventions. It could benefit in this process from the experience and solutions already developed by other international organisations (e.g. the WHO, the World Bank and the OECD) focussing on performance and results. The Commission need to ensure the continuity of the type of investment currently carried out by the second pillar of the common agricultural policy, which is an essential financing instrument for boosting economic growth promoting competitiveness, innovation and employment in lagging regions’ rural and mountainous areas and ensuring sustainable rural development. The Commission promote and facilitate national cooperation and networking in order to disseminate good performance measurement practices developed at national level.

5. For the post 2020 programming period, the Commission review and take stock of the experience from the implementation of the current system including:
   a) the impact of the performance reserve and what alternative mechanism(s) could better improve performance;
   b) the appropriateness and measurability of result indicators used to access the performance reserve and;
   c) the use made of financial sanctions to address underperformance.

6. The Council and the Commission consider aligning the long-term strategy and policy-making into line with the budgetary cycle and conducting a comprehensive spending review before a new long-term budget is set.

In order to allow approval of RDPs at the start of the next programming period, the Commission should indicate in its legislative proposals what changes in the timing of
policy design, programming and implementation are included to ensure that RDPs can be approved at the start of the next programming period to allow for timely implementation from 2020.

7. Is of the opinion that the decision on the duration of the MFF should strike the right balance between two seemingly conflicting requirements: on the one hand, the need for several EU policies – especially those under shared management, such as agriculture and cohesion – to operate on the basis of the stability and predictability of a commitment of at least seven years, and, on the other hand, the need for democratic legitimacy and accountability that results from the synchronisation of each financial framework with the five-year political cycle of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

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<th>Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees</th>
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<td>European Parliament resolution of 18 May 2010 on simplification of the CAP (2009/2155(INI))</td>
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[The European Parliament, ]

50. Considers that legislation which presents a conflict with other legislation should be regularised before being imposed on the farmer (e.g. environment legislation and single payments scheme);

51. Considers that the definitions in rural development legislation should be reviewed and, if necessary, expanded in order to ensure consistency with direct payment legislation;

53. Calls for the introduction of precisely defined obligations on farmers with a view to eliminating the lack of transparency regarding penalties;

55. Stresses that the current complex system of indicators needs to be reviewed and simplified, and that the monitoring system, annual reports and ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post evaluations have created an overly complex system of indicators and reports;

56. Asks the Commission to examine the use of outcome agreements as a simple and more efficient method for the delivery of public goods in the future;

57. Calls for the introduction of a simplified and consistent system of indicators, which would implicitly result in greater ease of understanding and application, pertinent evaluations and less bureaucracy;

59. Stresses that simplification of the CAP must go hand in hand with simplification of its implementation, and calls on the Member States to minimise the bureaucratic formalities required of potential CAP beneficiaries, especially in the area of rural development;

60. Calls on Member States, in their national rural development programmes, to place at the disposal of potential beneficiaries systems that guarantee transparency, and to grant them the necessary time to prepare applications for financing and meet the various eligibility criteria for the aid schemes; calls on the Commission to ensure that this matter is a permanent feature of the bilateral discussions with the Member States;

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<td>Implementation of rural development programmes in Member States, P-007159/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marijana Petir (EPP), 21-11-2017</td>
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According to the Court of Auditors’ special report, the EU is planning to earmark nearly EUR 100 billion for the period from 2014 to 2020, but there have been certain delays. The year 2023 is the cut-off point for eligible expenditure from the 2014-2020 programming period, which means that if the expenditure is to be spread evenly throughout the period concerned (that is to say, from the time when the individual RDPs are approved up to 2023), average expenditure in 2018 should be 41%. Out of the ten Member States examined, six are expected to fall below that average spending level. Furthermore, compared with the previous programming period, indicators show that about 90% of the EAFRD financial plan had remained unused at the beginning of 2017 (i.e. the fourth year of the programming period), whereas the corresponding figure for the preceding period was 83%.
1. How much money was paid out under the EAFRD financial plan in this budgetary period per Member State/region up to 1 November 2017 (expressed as a percentage of the total allocation)?

2. How much EAFRD funding had been contracted out by 1 November 2017?

3. In the light of experience to date and the indicators above, how much EAFRD financial plan funding per Member State/region does the Commission think will be left unused at the end of the programming period?

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**Rural development programmes**, E-005480/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&D), 31-03-2015

The European Commission is still involved in the lengthy process of approving the 118 rural development programmes. In the first quarter of 2015, only 18 RDPs were approved, in addition to the nine that were approved at the end of 2014. A total of EUR 35 billion has been allocated to these 27 RDPs, equivalent to 36% of the entire sum available from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in the period 2014 — 2020, which is around EUR 98 billion.

1. Can the Commission clarify what action it intends to take to reduce the amount the time required to send comments on the programmes submitted by the Member States?

2. How does it intend to guarantee the implementation of at least those measures that it has itself identified as a priority and that are in line with the Europe 2020 strategy, including start-up grants and support measures for producer organisations, to stimulate competitiveness in the agricultural sector, including especially by means of generational change?

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**The launch of the new National Rural Development Programme risks being postponed**, E-003554/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Daniel Buda (EPP), 04-03-2015

Last year, Romania was among the first countries to submit to Brussels the official form of the National Rural Development Programme and, half a year later, it is still on the waiting list. While other European farmers from the EU Member States have already submitted projects in order to access EU funds, in Romania, the commencement date for the submission of such projects, and the extent of the new National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 are not yet known. According to recent statements by the president of the League of Agricultural Producers Associations in Romania, not even the guidelines for the applicants for EU funding have been drawn up, and this is vital for the implementation of such a programme, especially since most of the time the applicants have to cope with cumbersome or even hostile legislation. Moreover, it has to be taken into account that in other EU Member States there are several programmes of this kind, while in Romania there is only one (which is not operating).

1. Does the Commission envisage a measure whereby to advance the commencement date of the new Romanian National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020?

2. What would be the Commission’s recommendations regarding the implementation of several national rural development programmes, so as to take into account the specificities of each region?

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**European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development**, E-001475/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Clare Moody (S&D), 30-01-2015

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is vital for delivering European environmental objectives contributing to the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020. The European Court of Auditors (ECA) published Special Report No 7 in 2011 entitled ‘Is Agri-Environment Support Well Designed and Managed’, in which they raised concerns over the rigorousness of the Commission’s assessment of key elements in rural development programmes (RDPs). The ECA recommended that, to avoid rushing through draft RDP approval plans by the Commission, there should be a higher contribution of sub-measures with higher environmental potential. This is to ensure that...
agri-environmental expenditure is targeted effectively. The RDPs can also be subject to delay owing to the Commission prioritising the MFF review.

1. Can the Commission explain what action is being taken to address the ECA’s recommendations?
2. Can the Commission guarantee that Member State RDPs will at least maintain the level of commitment made during the 2007-2013 programming period as far as their agri-environmental budget is concerned, as required in Recital 22 of the EAFRD regulation?
3. Can the Commission state how it will ensure that there is better integration of planned accounting exercises so that future planned review processes are not at risk of being rushed or interrupted?

Approval of Member States’ Rural Development Programmes, P-000499/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marijana Petir (EPP), 15-01-2015

The Rural Development Programme is an important document that serves as the basis and framework for the successful development of rural areas in the Member States, including in Croatia. This document is a prerequisite for serious investments in rural areas, which are vital to ensuring that rural inhabitants have a decent standard of life and, ultimately, that they are able to remain in their rural areas.

1. Could the Commission provide information on how many and what types of Rural Development Programmes have been approved so far and at what tempo the remaining programmes will be adopted?
2. Could the Commission also provide detailed information on the status of Croatia’s Rural Development Programme, on how its adoption process is proceeding, and on the problems that may arise during this process?

Launch of new rural development projects, E-010261/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Clara Eugenia Aguiera Garcia (S&D), 04-12-2014

Commissioner Hogan recently told Parliament’s Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development that owing to the delay in approving the multiannual financial framework (MFF), only eight Member States would have their rural development programmes approved by January 2015. With regard to Spain:

1. Can the Commission say what the state of play is concerning approval of the national programme and those of the autonomous communities?
2. By what date does the Commission expect the new programming to become operational at national and regional level?
### Special Report 17/2017 of 16 November 2017

**The Commission’s intervention in the Greek financial crisis**

Economic and Monetary Affairs

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<td>Report No / Date / Title</td>
<td>Special report No 17/2017 of 16 November 2017: The Commission’s intervention in the Greek financial crisis</td>
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| Summary | **Questions asked:**<br>Was the Commission’s management of the Adjustment Programmes for Greece appropriate?<br>1. Did the Commission have appropriate arrangements in place for managing the programmes?<br>2. Were the policy conditions appropriately designed and effectively implemented?<br>3. Did the adjustment programmes meet their main objectives?<br><br>**Findings:**<br>At the start of the Greek programme, the Commission had no experience in the management of such a process. Procedures were established after almost a year, but they focused on the formal arrangements for approval of documents, information flows and the timeline for disbursements. There were no specific internal Commission guidelines on the actual design of the programmes’ conditions, for example in terms of scope or level of detail.<br>Despite a growing number of conditions, the first and second programmes did not adequately prioritise their relative importance and they were not embedded in a broader strategy for the country. The Commission did put in place a functioning system for assessing the conditions, but the Court found consequential weaknesses, in particular for the assessment of implementation of structural reforms.<br>Despite the complex institutional arrangements within the programmes, the operational details of the Commission’s co-operation with programmes partners, primarily the IMF and the ECB, were never formalised.<br>The overall economic framework for the design of programmes was made up of the funding gap calculations and macroeconomic projections. The Commission regularly updated its analysis in this respect and the accuracy of projections was similar when compared to other international organisations. However, the Court found weaknesses in documentation, justification of the assumptions and quality controls.<br>An in-depth analysis of the design and implementation of reforms in four crucial policy fields (taxation, public administration, labour market and the financial sector) provides a mixed picture. The taxation and public administration reforms brought fiscal savings, but the implementation of structural components was weaker. The labour market has become more flexible and competitive, while further regulatory changes are still on the way in the third programme. The financial sector was substantially re-structured, but this came at a cost of over 45 billion euros injected into the banking system, out of which only a small part can...
potentially be recovered. Across all policy fields, the implementation of a number of key reforms happened with significant delays or was not effective.

Overall, the design of the conditions did make the progress of reform possible, but the Court found weaknesses. Some key measures were not sufficiently justified or adapted to specific sector weaknesses. For others, the Commission did not comprehensively consider Greece’s implementation capacity in the design process and thus did not adapt the scope and timing accordingly. The Court also found cases of conditions with too narrow a scope to address key sector imbalances and late inclusion of measures addressing key imbalances in the programme.

The Commission did not carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the first two programmes, although such an analysis could be pertinent for adjusting the reform process. As of mid-2017, Greece still requires external financial support, which indicates that the earlier programmes, also due to implementation weaknesses, were not able to restore the country’s ability to finance its needs on the markets.

The specific objectives of the programmes were met only to a limited extent:
- Return to growth: GDP shrank during the programmes by over a quarter and Greece did not return to growth, as initially envisaged, in 2012.
- Fiscal sustainability: there was large scale fiscal consolidation in terms of structural balances. But due to adverse macroeconomic developments and interest costs on existing debt, the debt to GDP ratio kept increasing.
- Financial stability: the programmes ensured short-term financial stability, but were unable to avert a sharp deterioration of the banks’ balance sheets, primarily due to adverse macroeconomic and political developments, and the banks’ ability to provide finance to the real economy was restricted.

**Recommendations:**
The European Commission should:

1. Improve the procedures for the design of support programmes, in particular by outlining the scope of any analytical work necessary to justify the content of the conditions.
2. Better prioritise the conditions and specify measures urgently needed to address the imbalances that are crucial for achieving the objectives of the programmes.
3. Where relevant to address the underlying economic imbalances, ensure that the programmes are embedded in an overall growth strategy for the country.
4. Have in place clear procedures and, where appropriate, define KPIs to ensure that programme monitoring is systematic and accurately documented.
5. More comprehensively address data gaps from the outset.
6. Seek to reach an agreement with programme partners so that the roles and methods of co-operation are specified and transparent.
7. Better document the assumptions and modifications made to the economic calculations underlying the programme’s design.
8. Be more systematic in assessing the administrative capacity of the Member State to implement the reforms and the need for technical assistance. The conditions should be adapted to the results of this analysis.
9. Enhance its analytical work on programme design. It should, in particular, address the appropriateness and timing of measures, given the specific situation in the Member State.
10. Carry out interim evaluation for successive programmes of combined duration exceeding three years and use the results to assess their design and monitoring arrangements.
11. Analyse the appropriate support and surveillance framework for the period after the programme ends.

**Rapporteur: Hannu Takkula (ALDE)**

[Recommendations by the rapporteur,]

1. Thanks the Court for preparing a comprehensive report on a very significant topic, which is closely linked to the activities of the Budgetary Control Committee; regrets that it took three years to draft the audit report; underlines the importance of rightly timed reports as this would facilitate the work of the Commission and the European Parliament considerably;
2. Deplores that the ECA had only a limited mandate in auditing the EU financial assistance to Greece that was managed by the troika consisting of the Commission, European Central Bank and IMF and did not receive adequate information from the ECB; encourages the ECB in the spirit of mutual cooperation to provide information allowing the Court to have a broader picture of the use of EU funds;
3. Points out to the complicated economic situation throughout Europe and especially the challenging political situation in Greece during the implementation of the EU financial assistance as it had a direct impact on the efficiency of the implementation of the assistance;
4. Underlines the vital importance of transparency in use of EU funds in different financial assistance instruments implemented in Greece;
5. Asks the Commission to improve the general procedures for designing support programmes, in particular by outlining the scope of the analytical work needed to justify the content of the conditions and where possible by indicating the tools which could be drawn upon in relevant situations;
6. Underlines the needs of the Commission to improve its arrangements for monitoring the implementation and roll-out of reforms so as to identify better administrative or other impediments to the effective implementation of the reforms; additionally the Commission needs to ensure that it has the necessary resources to undertake such assessments.

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<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
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<td>[The European Parliament,]</td>
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<td>3. Regrets that the Court has not included in this report all the Member States that received financial assistance since the beginning of the financial crisis, including the programme for Greece in order to facilitate a comparison</td>
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<td>4. Welcomes however that the Court will produce a separate special report on Greece; calls on the Court to compare the results of both special reports and in particular to address the suggestions of the Parliament to the report on Greece, including medium and long term results (i.e. present debate on possible debt-relief);</td>
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<td>33. Notes that at the time this resolution was being drafted, the Commission had already presented its proposal for the establishment of the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP); welcomes the fact that the Commission has evidently taken the recommendations from the Court into consideration and hopes the SRSP will emerge as a strong tool for technical assistance based on the lessons learned from the Task Force on Greece;</td>
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<td>37. Regrets that the beneficiary Member State as well as the task force did not provide the Commission with regular activity reports; points out that the Commission should insist on receiving quarterly activity reports without excessive delay and a comprehensive final report in the form of an ex-post evaluation within a reasonable timeframe after the conclusion of the work of the Task Force on Greece; requests that the Commission monitor the implementation of technical assistance systematically in order to focus on results-oriented technical assistance; requests further that the technical assistance and the Task Force on Greece should include in their various reports an accounting of how and where exactly the so-called 'bailout' funds for Greece were disbursed;</td>
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| Oral / Written Questions | **ECB refusal to supply the European Court of Auditors with information regarding the memorandum provisions for Greece**, E-007161-17, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Kostadinka Kuneva (GUE/NGL), Stelios Kouloglou (GUE/NGL), 21/11/2017
In a recent Special Report entitled: 'The Commission's intervention in the Greek financial crisis'(1), the European Court of Auditors (ECA) examined the management of the three economic adjustment programmes for Greece, revealing serious institutional shortcomings and inefficiency and making eleven recommendations to the Commission, which the latter has accepted. In line with its remit under Article 287 TFEU, the ECA also requested information from the European Central Bank (ECB), which, as a member of both the Troika and the Quartet, was responsible for evaluating and monitoring compliance with the terms of financial assistance in cooperation with the Commission. However, the ECB refused to provide this information, leaving the ECA unable to identify its role in the Memorandums of Understanding, as pointed out in its special report.
In view of this:
1. How does the Commission, as guardian of the Treaties, assess the ECB's attitude towards the institutional audit authority, bearing in mind that the operational effectiveness of the bank which ought to be controlled by the ECA is not independent of the decisions taken by it?
2. How are the eleven ECA recommendations reflected by its third assessment and the debt negotiations? |

|  | **Structural Reform Support Service in Greece**, E-006973-17, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Maria Spyraki (PPE), 10/11/2017
Following the Parliament’s report on future perspectives for Technical Assistance, which points out the findings of the Court of Auditors regarding the mixed results of technical assistance in achieving effective and sustainable reforms in Greece, the Commission has communicated a response stating the following:
“The Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) in Greece has fully enforced the recommendations of the Court of Auditors regarding the structure of technical assistance (preparing a list of experts, methods for supplier selection process, etc.). (...) SRSS has helped in 144 reform projects in Greece, related to measures taken by Greece as part of the Economic Adjustment Programme, according to SRSS reports submitted to the Eurogroup Working Group and the Eurogroup of 24 October and 7 November 2016, respectively.
In view of this, will the Commission say:
1. What funds have been allocated to SRSS for its operations in Greece, where have they come from and how much has been absorbed so far?
2. What is the SRSS fund management framework and who is responsible for monitoring funded projects on behalf of the Greek Government?
3. Does the SRSS help prepare any updated reform project list by providing technical assistance to the Greek Government? |

|  | **Report on the social implications of the third memorandum**, E-005782-17, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL), 18/09/2017
On 19 August 2015, the Commission adopted its report on the social implications of the new programme for Greece. The report concludes that the burden of adjustment was being equitably distributed under the programme, taking account of the most pressing social needs and challenges facing Greece. However, the report omits a number of the programme’s key policies and fails to analyse their social implications in terms of a living standards, earnings and the rights of workers, the unemployed, insured persons and pensioners. Given that an analysis of the social impact of an adjustment programme must, by definition, record the implications of the policies adopted:
1. Has the Commission examined the effects, if any, of pension cuts, tax hikes and the changes resulting from ‘insurance reform’ on the lower and middle classes in Greece?
2. Has it examined the impact of VAT adjustments on the living standards of the lower and middle classes? |
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Was a similar report drawn up regarding the measures taken following completion of the first and second assessments, such as the reduction of the tax-free threshold?</td>
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**Healthcare system in Greece**, E-006888-17, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Gabriele Preuß (S&D), 8/11/2017
The quality of the healthcare system in Greece has declined since the beginning of the financial crisis. In particular, the emigration of doctors has severely weakened Greek healthcare. Since 2011, there has been an EU working group to improve the system.
1. Are there any initiatives from the Commission specifically addressing the lack of doctors?
2. What specific measures has the EU working group planned to improve the situation in Greece?
3. A total of EUR 300 million are to be made available by the Greek Government for reforms in 2017 and 2018. Does the Commission monitor whether reforms are implemented in the health sector?

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**Third Macroeconomic Adjustment Programme for Greece**, E-003802-17, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Ernest Urtasun (Verts/ALE), 8/06/2017
Regulation (EU) No 472/2013 calls for a distributional impact assessment of the macroeconomic adjustment programmes by requiring the expected distribution of the adjustment effort to be made public. Similarly, Jean-Claude Juncker committed in his opening statement at Parliament to ensuring that all future reform programmes will undergo both a fiscal sustainability assessment and a social impact assessment.(2)
1. Is the Commission committed to conducting and making public a social impact assessment on the measures that have been added to the Greek programme in the conclusion of the second review, including the reduction of the tax-free threshold and further pensions cuts?

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**Results of the memorandum of understanding and cohesion policy in Greece**, E-008488-16, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Rosa D'Amato (EFDD), Laura Agea (EFDD), Marco Zanni (EFDD), 10/11/2016
Having taken note of the 15 reforms implemented within the time scale set by the Tsipras government, and its commitment to completing the final steps needed to bring the privatisation fund into operation and reform the revenue agency, the Eurogroup recently gave the go-ahead for disbursement to Greece of a new tranche of loans worth EUR 2.8 billion. However, while a first instalment of EUR 1.1 billion was given the green light straightaway, the remaining EUR 1.7 billion has been frozen until the institutions can ascertain that an identical sum in sovereign debt has been repaid from private funds.
1. Bearing in mind that, in the past, the various tranches of aid were used chiefly to reimburse the ECB and other banking entities, can the Commission say what Greece has really achieved on the poverty, education, health, welfare state and employment fronts as a result of delivering on what was agreed with the troika (IMF, ECB, the Commission) in the memorandum of understanding?
2. Furthermore, in order to have a complete overview of the Greek situation, how much did the EU’s cohesion policy contribute in the 2007-2013 period to employment in Greece?

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**Court of Auditors report on financial assistance provided to countries in difficulties**, E-000777-16, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Elisa Ferreira (S&D), 28/01/2016
The European Court of Auditors has just published a special report entitled ‘Financial assistance provided to countries in difficulties’. This detailed technical report is highly critical of the Commission, which is jointly responsible for the design and monitoring of assistance programmes. Many of the criticisms made by the Court of Auditors confirm the conclusions already reached by Parliament in its report of 28 February 2014 on the operations of the Troika in the euro area programme countries. The Commission has given a vague and generic response to the Court’s criticisms.

1. What specific measures is the Commission implementing in order to remedy the shortcomings detected? Is it prepared, within the framework of its institutional responsibilities, to present the changes made to Parliament and give firm commitments to modify the procedures criticised by both the Court of Auditors and Parliament?

2. What changes is the Commission making to the assistance programmes still underway, notably in Greece, in order to correct the serious errors described?

3. Can the Commission guarantee that the action it takes to exercise its responsibilities in the context of economic governance rules is not and will not involve errors and procedures similar to those that have been criticised?

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Court of Auditors special report on the Task Force for Greece, E-002127-16, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marco Zanni (EFDD, 10/03/2016)

According to Court of Auditors Special Report No 19/2015 on the Task Force for Greece (TFGR), the Commission failed properly to analyse other options when setting up the task force, whose job it is to identify and coordinate the technical assistance needed by Greece (Decision 2011/734/EU of 20 July 2011). In particular, it failed to demonstrate that the institutional set-up and mandate of the TFGR were best suited to addressing existing capacity weaknesses. The court also states, in point 18 of the report, that the TFGR’s operational procedures have never been subjected to a review, despite the fact that the Commission provided for such a review in the aforementioned decision of 20 July 2011. Given that the TFGR is required to submit quarterly reports on its work and progress to the Greek authorities and the Commission, can the Commission say:

1. Why only seven of the 15 quarterly reports that should have been submitted over the period running from July 2011 to the summer of 2015 were actually drawn up;

2. Whether the TFGR’s operational procedures have in fact been reviewed as required under the decision of 20 July 2011, and if so, what the review entailed?

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Ineffectiveness of the Task Force for Greece, P-001366-16, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Kostas Chrysogonos (GUE/NGL), 17/02/2016

The work of the Task Force for Greece, established to support the reforms and provide technical assistance to Greece, is flawed, is undermined by inadequate procedures and is ineffective, according to a European Court of Auditors report published a few days ago(1). Specifically, the report refers to the rushed establishment of the Task Force, which led to a lack of strategic thinking and of a comprehensive analysis of the available options and also dependency on external factors which have affected its moves(2). In view of the above, will the Commission say:

1. Does it acknowledge the truth of the findings of the Court’s report? What procedure will it follow to apportion blame for these failures that are contributing to the brutal impoverishment of the Greek people?

2. What changes will it make to improve the effectiveness of the new Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) which has replaced the Task Force for Greece (TFGR)?
Special report 18/2017 of 30 November 2017
Single European Sky (SES): a changed culture but not a single sky
Transport

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<td>Summary</td>
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<td>Questions asked:</td>
<td>In this audit the Court assessed whether the EU’s SES initiative has so far resulted in a more efficient European Air Traffic Management (ATM). To do this, we examined: 1. whether the SES initiative was justified; 2. whether the SES’s regulatory components, in particular the performance and charging schemes as well as the functional airspace blocks, have effectively contributed to a more efficient European ATM; 3. whether the SES’s technological component (the SESAR project) has made an effective contribution to the performance of European ATM.</td>
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<td>Findings:</td>
<td>1. The SES initiative was justified because European air traffic management was hindered by national monopolies and fragmentation. The various components of the policy form a coherent set that indeed targets those shortcomings. However, changes in traffic patterns meant that the high level goals established in 2005 for the initiative became partly unachievable and partly irrelevant. 2. The performance and charging schemes aim at mitigating the negative effects of a monopolistic service provision by establishing binding targets and establishing common rules for the charging of costs to airspace users. They have fostered a culture of efficiency and transparency at the level of air navigation service providers (ANSPs). However, the quantitative results fell below expectations: delays have generally been above the targets set in performance plans and, despite reaching a record low in 2013, have been increasing since; unit rates paid by airspace users are heavily dependent on traffic volumes and have only decreased by 4 % between 2011 and 2016, which is below the EU-wide reduction set by the Commission. 3. The absence of substantive defragmentation, coupled with slower traffic growth, are key contributors to the lacklustre quantitative results shown by the performance scheme. Current Functional Airspace Blocks (FABs) essentially provide a forum for cooperation between stakeholders of neighbouring States but have proved ineffective in targeting fragmentation, whether at the levels of airspace management, service provision or procurement of technical equipment. 4. The oversight role attributed to National Supervisory Authorities (NSAs) is hampered by the fact that they are not always fully independent from ANSPs and in some cases do not have the necessary resources to fulfil it. We also found a limitation, particularly in the area of cost-efficiency, where regular checks on costs charged to airspace users are not being conducted. 5. The process of adopting targets for the performance scheme is lengthy and complex. Reaching agreements between the Commission and Member States has proved to be difficult, particularly in the areas of capacity and cost-efficiency. In addition, some indicators used to measure ATM performance contain shortcomings as they do not capture relevant aspects of that performance. 6. SESAR’s definition and development phases promoted the commitment of key stakeholders to a common technological plan and its development phase transformed a previously fragmented R&amp;D environment into a coordinated one. The SESAR JU has been gradually releasing technological and operational...</td>
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improvements, packaged under a number of “SESAR Solutions”. However, the EU’s role in the project has evolved from its original inception as regards scope, timeframe and financial magnitude, all of which have been significantly extended. The SESAR project now pursues an open-ended, continuously evolving R&D vision which is not aligned with the regulatory framework that governs the SESAR Joint Undertaking. This misalignment impacts negatively on the accountability of the Joint Undertaking. As of 2016, only a small part of the Master Plan in-place had actually been executed and SESAR performance ambitions were re-set for 2035, not 2020 as originally envisaged. In addition, individual R&D projects were launched without the support of a specific cost benefit analysis demonstrating their added value.

Recommendations:
The Commission should:
1. review the SES high level goals;
2. analyse other policy options targeting defragmentation;
3. ensure full independence and capacity of NSAs and cover the inspection gap at the level of the charging scheme;
4. streamline the performance scheme;
5. review certain key performance indicators;
6. review the EU’s support structure to R&D in light of its objectives;
7. reinforce the accountability of the SESAR JU;
8. prioritize EU support to R&D solutions that promote defragmentation and a competitive environment.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

Rapporteur: Marian-Jean Marinescu (EPP)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

1. Points out the lack of full implementation of the Single European Sky due to resistance of certain air professions, which defend their own prerogatives, and due to lack of strong political will of the Member States to fulfil the needs for implementation of this directive;
2. Deplores that although the European Union managed to eliminate land borders between the Schengen Member States, it has not been so far been able to eliminate borders in the air among the same Member States, which leads to common losses of the value of 5 billion EUR annually;
3. Points out that the implementation of the Single European Sky would reduce CO2 emissions of the aviation industry up to 10%, which would significantly help in reaching the fulfilment of the Paris Climate Agreement;
4. Asks the Commission to look more into the details of the deliverables of the SESAR Joint Undertaking as they might not be applicable to the current situation where the Single European Sky has not been implemented and they risk being applied in air systems which are not able to cooperate with each other;
5. Asks the Commission to present details of its contract with Eurocontrol in order to monitor the spending of EU taxpayers’ money;
6. Points out to the need of implementation of the independence of the National Security Authorities (NSA) and tasking them with sufficient financial and organisational needs;
7. Asks the Commission to inform the Committee why it has not launched infringement procedures on the non-implementation of the Functional Airspace Blocks (FABs), which were supposed to be operational in 2012 but have not been functioning until now.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on an Aviation Strategy for Europe (2016/2062(INI))
[The European Parliament, ]
I. whereas, even though the Single European Sky provides for the establishment of functional airspace blocks (FABs), the implementation of those FABs has, to date, been considerably delayed; whereas, therefore, the Commission has estimated that some EUR 5 billion per year are being lost because of the lack of progress in this regard;

3. Urges the Council and the Member States finally to make swift progress on other essential dossiers which are currently deadlocked, such as the Recast of the Regulation on the Implementation of the Single European Sky (SES2+) and the revision of the Slot Regulation and the Air Passenger Rights Regulations; calls on the Commission to rethink ongoing initiatives and propose viable alternatives to remove the deficiencies of the aviation sector resulting from the late and incomplete implementation of EU legislation such as the Single European Sky (SES); stresses that if legal clarity and certainty are to be ensured the publication of guidelines, although helpful, is no substitute for the proper revision of the existing regulations;

4. Stresses that the aviation files blocked in Council are meant to equip the EU with better legal certainty and a strengthened framework for the protection of Air passengers’ rights, a more efficient and rational use of EU airspace and improved provisions to implement the Single European Sky, all essential elements for the realisation of the Aviation strategy; calls on the Council to take steps to move forward the negotiations on these files;

12. Notes that Article 3 of Regulation (EC) No 551/2004 foresees, without prejudice to the sovereignty of Member States over their airspace, the establishment of a single European upper flight information region (EUIR), and calls on the Commission to implement this, as it will allow the overcoming of regional bottlenecks and enable continuity of air services in the densest parts of the airspace in the event of unforeseen circumstances or disruptions of air traffic; believes that the EUIR will allow the gradual establishment of a Trans-European Motorway of the Sky, which would be another step towards the completion of the Single European Sky and a cost-effective management of the EU airspace; welcomes the progress already made in the field of air traffic management aiming at increasing efficiency and reducing costs and emissions, in particular thanks to the work of the Network Manager, and calls on the Member States to complete the FABs without any further delay in order to facilitate further progress towards the Single European Sky;

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European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2017 on a European Strategy for LowEmission Mobility (2016/2327(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

15. Strongly encourages the Member States to accelerate the implementation of the Single European Sky, as the current fragmentation leads to longer flight times, delays, additional fuel burn and increased CO2 emissions; points out that this would contribute to achieving a 10 % reduction in emissions;

64. Underlines the importance of R&D for tackling technological challenges regarding lowemission mobility; urges the Commission to continue its strong support for research programmes such as Clean Sky and SESAR (the Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research);

115. Asks the Commission to improve aviation efficiency, inter alia by ensuring the speedy implementation by Member States of the Single European Sky, actively participating in the work of ICAO in order to secure ambitious international CO2 standards, and providing appropriate funding for the Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research (SESAR) Joint Undertaking and the Clean Sky Joint Technology Initiatives;

116. Recalls that airspace is also part of the EU single market, and that any fragmentation resulting from its inefficient use or from diverging national practices (concerning,
for instance, operational procedures, taxes, levies, etc.), causes longer flight times, delays, extra fuel burn, and higher levels of CO2 emissions, in addition to negatively impacting the rest of the market and hampering the EU's competitiveness;

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European Parliament decision of 27 April 2017 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the SESAR Joint Undertaking for the financial year 2015 (2016/2195(DEC))

[The European Parliament, ]

A. whereas the SESAR Joint Undertaking ("the Joint Undertaking") was set up in February 2007 to run the Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research (SESAR) programme, which aims to modernise traffic management in Europe;

19. Notes that the administrative board adopted in December 2015 the ATM Master Plan (2015 Edition) covering both SESAR development and deployment; welcomes the development of a SESAR vision 2035+, setting aspirational performance ambitions and preliminary business views;

22. Highlights the vital role of the Joint Undertaking in coordinating and implementing research into the SESAR project, which is a pillar project of the Single European Sky.

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European Parliament decision of 28 April 2016 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the SESAR Joint Undertaking for the financial year 2014 (2015/2197(DEC))

[The European Parliament, ]

A. whereas the SESAR Joint Undertaking ("the Joint Undertaking") was set up in February 2007 to run the Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research (SESAR) programme that aims to modernise traffic management in Europe,

B. whereas the SESAR 2 Joint Undertaking replaced the SESAR Joint Undertaking in June 2014 according to the adoption of Council Regulation (EU) No 721/2014 and extended the lifetime of the Joint Undertaking for the period up to 31 December 2024,

E. whereas the Joint Undertaking was designed as a public-private partnership with the Union and Eurocontrol as founding members,

F. whereas the budget for 2008-2016 developed phase of the SESAR project is EUR 2 100 000 000 and is to be provided in equal parts by the Union, Eurocontrol and the participating public and private partners,

21. Highlights the vital role of the Joint Undertaking in coordinating and implementing research into the SESAR project, which is a pillar project of the Single European Sky; notes also that 2014 marks the beginning of the deployment phase of the SESAR project; welcomes, in this regard, the establishment of a SESAR Deployment Manager to report on and to monitor the implementation of new operational solutions and technological improvements developed by SESAR, ensuring its effective deployment;
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2. Calls on the Commission to take into account and include the fundamental points of Parliament’s positions at first reading on Single European Sky 2+ (SES2+) and the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and from its resolution of 2 July 2013 on the EU’s External Aviation Policy when drafting the Aviation Package;

3. Emphasises that the aeronautics industry is a major contributor to EU growth and jobs and is closely linked to competitiveness in the EU aviation sector (e.g. positive export balance, cleaner technologies for European aircraft, SESAR deployment, SES, maintenance chain), generating a turnover of around EUR 100 billion per year and sustaining some 500 000 direct jobs; asks therefore for proactive policies aimed at supporting and developing the aeronautics industry;

13. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to accelerate the implementation of the Single European Sky through the adoption of the SES2+ package, as the existing fragmentation of European airspace is a major burden on European air carriers;

21. Calls for the full implementation of the SESAR programme, which requires close cooperation among, and a financial commitment from, the Commission, air navigation service providers, air carriers and airports; calls therefore for a total system approach in all aviation domains covering all phases of the flight, starting on the ground, with a stronger role for the EASA within the SES-SESAR environment of an EU-EASA system governing safety, security, environment and performance; calls on the Commission to ensure the completion of the original Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) budget, which was affected by the establishment of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI);

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63. Calls, with regard to air transport, for:
- a thorough preparation and swift adoption of a comprehensive Aviation Package, including: a new regulatory framework on civil drones that ensures safety, security and fundamental rights while fostering the economic potential that civil drones offer to European businesses, especially SMEs and start-ups; revision of the EASA Regulation to clarify its role vis-à-vis national aviation authorities and strengthen its abilities to oversee aviation safety in all Member States, including their remote regions, and promote EU rules and standards globally,
- all necessary actions by the Member States to accelerate the implementation of the Single European Sky, through the adoption of the SES2+ package, the full implementation and operation of functional airspace blocks (FABs) and the deployment of the future air traffic management system (SESAR), so as to defragment the...
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EU airspace with a view to reducing flight delays, improving safety and mitigating the environmental impact of air transport,

all necessary actions by the Member States to accelerate the implementation of the Single European Sky, through the adoption of the SES2+ package, the full implementation and operation of functional airspace blocks (FABs) and the deployment of the future air traffic management system (SESAR), so as to defragment the EU airspace with a view to reducing flight delays, improving safety and mitigating the environmental impact of air transport,

Progress made with the implementation of the second 'Single European Sky' legislative package, E-005190/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Claudia Ţapardel (S&D), 09-08-2017

With the unprecedented growth in European air traffic, more effective coordination between the Member State air traffic control authorities is necessary. The ‘Single European Sky’ (SES) legislative initiative was a significant step in this direction. The second SES package (SES II) seeks to build on progress achieved in this vital European sector. However, the ultimate objective, a common aviation area, is far from being achieved, even in part, despite the fact that this would be a major advantage for the Union. The dominant role of the national authorities in this area remains an important obstacle that must be overcome.

1. In view of this, what measures will the Commission take to achieve the SES II objectives?

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EASA-Eurocontrol roadmap, P-002351/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Tibor Szanyi (S&D), 31-03-2017

For years, a possibility which has been under consideration is that of centralising the Member States’ civil aviation responsibilities in Europe. In this context, a distinction is made between Air Traffic Management/Air Navigation Services (ATM/ANS) and other tasks of the authorities (such as airlines, licences and training companies). The Aviation Strategy [COM(2015) 598 final] calls for a ‘fully optimised air traffic management system’; it also calls for the tasks of the European Aviation Safety Agency and Eurocontrol to be ‘defined in a manner that ensures that both organisations complement each other’s tasks, so that overlaps can be avoided and costs reduced’. It is worth noting that regulation (EC) No 1108/2009 already transferred tasks relating, inter alia, to air traffic management from Eurocontrol to EASA.

As regards the ‘other tasks of the authorities’ distinct from air traffic management, the Aviation Strategy also states that adapting the regulatory framework is central in order to enhance the performance of the European internal market. In this context, it is stated that ‘a single European aviation authority should be the longer term ambition’. The Commission is currently working on an ‘EASA-Eurocontrol roadmap’.

1. In what form and what legislative framework, and within what time frame, is it anticipated that liberalisation of air traffic management would be undertaken, so that Eurocontrol or another authority can take over air traffic management tasks from the Member States?

2. With exactly what aim, in what form, on what legal basis, within what time frame and for exactly which fields, can a transfer of responsibilities between EASA and Eurocontrol be expected after completion of the promised ‘EASA-Eurocontrol roadmap’ or similar initiatives?

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Requirements applicable to organisations recognised by Regulation (EC) No 550/2004, E-005349/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Sergio Gaetano Cofferati (S&D), 30-06-2016

On 19 June 2015, Italy’s national Civil Aviation Authority (ENAC) issued the National Air Traffic Control Agency (ENAV) with an Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSP) licence, which authorises the holder to provide air traffic, communication, navigation, supervision and meteorology services for aviation and aeronautical information for Italy, as provided for by Regulation (EC) No 550/2004. However, navigation and supervision services are in fact provided by the company Techno Sky, which, although wholly controlled by ENAV, is not in possession of the required certifications on the same footing through monitoring of the company’s operations by ENAV.

1. Can the Commission indicate, therefore, whether it considers it legitimate for the certificates for the services described to have been issued to an air traffic services company which uses outside staff to actually provide them?

2. What action will the Commission take to enforce the regulations in force concerning air traffic safety in the various Member States?
Overlap of competencies between EASA, Eurocontrol and other aviation authorities, E-003690/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marie-Christine Arnautu (ENF), 02-05-2016

The Commission recently presented a draft regulation which would establish an ‘EU aviation safety agency’. This agency will take over from the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), created around 15 years ago. Its main objective was to be the authority in charge of issuing certifications for aeronautical products in the EU. The agency’s functions have been extended over time, particularly in 2008. These functions should be strengthened within the new agency. This development raises concerns. The International Civil Aviation Organisation (linked to the UN), Eurocontrol and several other national authorities are also involved in aviation safety and air traffic management. As an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1960, which today includes 41 states (including all of the EU Member States), Eurocontrol has considerably greater means at its disposal than EASA, in terms of both staff and technical expertise. Could the Commission answer the following questions:

1. What objectives and what long-term strategy is the Commission following with regard to extending EASA’s competencies?
2. How does the Commission justify its agency encroaching on the competencies of Eurocontrol and the national agencies?
3. How will tasks be divided between these different agencies in the future?

European airspace, E-004404/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Deirdre Clune (EPP), 31-05-2016

European airspace as a whole is inefficient, and the slow implementation of the single European sky initiative has had financial and environmental costs. The estimated costs of Europe’s fragmented airspace are at least EUR 5 billion a year.

1. In this light, the ultimate goal should be a single European airspace, but does the Commission have any initiatives currently under way that would result in the implementation of this European airspace?

Eurocontrol - Network Manager for the Single European Sky, E-003488/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marian-Jean Marinescu (EPP), 28-04-2016

In 2011 the Commission nominated Eurocontrol as the Network Manager for the Single European Sky. We understand that the Commission has recently initiated an audit of the Network Manager.

1. Did the Network Manager provide a satisfactory contribution to European air traffic management (ATM)?
2. Could the Commission clarify the scope and objectives of this audit?
3. What use does the Commission intend to make of the audit results?

Single European Sky (SES) - Frequency issues, E-014980/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Jill Seymour (EFDD), 24-11-2015

1. Does the Commission anticipate mandating an additional radio frequency to increase capacity for Data Link Communications, considering that the only frequency currently in use is for ALL European traffic and the system is therefore suffering from capacity issues?
With the Single European Sky project pressing forward, what issues does the Commission believe will arise when one Member State’s air traffic control takes industrial action and goes on strike?

1. For example, if French ATC goes on strike what impact would it have under the SES on other Member States?

SESAR project and SES 2+, E-012175/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Rosa D'Amato (EFDD), Daniela Aiuto (EFDD), 26-08-2015

The SESAR (Single European Sky ATM Research) project was launched with a view to developing the innovative technological components required for the establishment of a new, interoperable air traffic management system as part of the Single European Sky (SES) scheme. The goal was to move away from the current fragmented approach to air traffic control and to focus research and development efforts on building homogeneous, modern air traffic control systems that will triple capacity, reduce route costs by half, improve safety by a factor of 10 and reduce the environmental impact of each flight by 10%. These targets have been carried over to the second SES package. However, owing to airline policy choices and an insufficient degree of harmonisation of route charges, the Single European Sky system is currently being undermined by a constant search for the lowest possible route charges which is resulting in longer flying distances and higher emissions.

1. Is the Commission aware of this situation?
2. Can the relevant agencies (Eurocontrol and the EASA) say how many more air miles are being flown than would be the case if direct routes were used?
3. How does the Commission intend to address this problem?

Public-private partnerships and single European airspace, E-006580/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 23-04-2015

The Single European Sky (SES) initiative, launched in 1999, aims to improve air traffic management (ATM) and air navigation services (ANS) through the increased integration of European airspace. It has been feared from the start that this project may be too strongly geared to reducing costs and too closely directed towards the market, with the aim of handing a series of activities that have until now been the responsibility of national governments to private companies. These fears have been further nourished by the fact that Indra, a multinational consultancy and technology company, has become a full partner in the SESAR Joint Undertaking (SJU), a public-private company funded by the Commission and Eurocontrol. This joint venture is to promote the Single European Sky ATM Research programme (SESAR) to investigate and develop technologies that will improve air traffic management in the EU. The programme has a total budget of EUR 1.9 billion until 2016.

1. Can the Commission say what criteria were used as the basis for setting up this public-private partnership, rather than creating a 100% public joint venture involving the Member States and drawing on all the knowledge accumulated by the corresponding air traffic control bodies?
The Single European Sky (SES) initiative was launched in 1999, with a view to improving the performance of air traffic management (ATM) and of air navigation services (ANS) by closer integration of European airspace. According to the forecasts of the European Commission, Single European Sky (provided that it is concluded by around 2030) will be able to triple airspace capacity, halve the costs associated with air traffic management and improve safety by up to a factor of ten.

The new package will result in the separation of the three main functions of regulation, supervision and air navigation, which are today covered by the DGAC. It also aims to outsource certain ‘support functions’ such as meteorology, currently performed by national authorities. Various bodies for civil aviation have publically expressed concerns with regard to policies that focus on cost reduction which may have consequences for the quality of air traffic control.

1. I ask the Commission for a progress report on the Single European Sky project and ask what guarantees it is able to give those who fear deregulation of the sector and all the risks associated with a function which has always been carried out by Member States.

Cost of SESAR system, E-011020/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marie-Christine Arnautu (NI), 18-12-2014

In early December, the Council agreed, at least in part, to the Single European Sky project. However, based on previous experience in other sectors, there is reason to doubt the efficiency of this future technocratic labyrinth. For example, in the border control sector, centralisation in Brussels has proven to be inefficient since the Schengen Agreements entered into force. In the aviation sector, the Member States of the European Union are quite capable of ensuring the safety and efficiency of their airspace. The creation of a Single European Sky is therefore an attack on the principle of subsidiarity, as defined in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union.

1. Can the Commission explain what exactly makes the Member States incapable of achieving the objectives laid down in the aviation sector?
2. Will the Commission say exactly how much the implementation of the Single European Sky will cost European taxpayers?
3. Can the Commission explain how it obtained the figure of 328 000 new jobs that will be created by implementing the Single European Sky and indicate how many positions for highly qualified air traffic controllers will be abolished in the Member States?
3. What measures does the Commission intend to take to help achieve the objectives of the SES initiative?

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Single European Sky (SES) Reference Period 2: non-compliant German performance plan, E-007895/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Gesine Meissner (ALDE), 14-10-2014

The SES Performance Scheme is one of the key pillars of the Single European Sky. The aim of the scheme is to achieve the general objectives of the SES as detailed in Article 1 of Regulation 549/2004. By fixing EU-wide and local targets, it is intended to drive performance improvements in European aviation, in particular in the field of cost efficiency. The Performance Review Body (PRB) has begun to review the Member States’ proposed performance plans for the second reference period. The German proposal includes an increase in en-route charges of 30.4%, amounting to a cost increase of EUR 300 million annually, even though the objective of the performance scheme is to improve cost efficiency. Ruling that the German performance plan cannot be assessed, as it does not comply with States’ legal obligations under the SES, the PRB has passed it on to the Commission for action.

1. How will the Commission react to the non-compliance of the German plan?
2. How does the non-compliant German plan affect the setting and application of the 2015 unit rate?

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Safeguarding civil air traffic management, E-006956/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, István Ujhelyi (S&D), 17-09-2014

According to Austro Control, problems were caused in the airspace of a number of neighbouring countries as a result of a NATO exercise held in Hungary in the summer, with civil air traffic management rendered for a time inoperable in Austria and some other Member States in the region, including Hungary. It seems that NATO specialists were trying out various aspects of electronic warfare, including interfering with aircraft signalling devices; however, in so doing, they switched off — over half the continent — the devices which automatically send data on direction and speed to the relevant authorities from the flight decks of airborne aircraft. These authorities have the task of guaranteeing the unhindered operation of air traffic.

1. What European-level rules and institutional links exist between civil and military airtraffic management?
2. What protocols are there between the Commission, Eurocontrol and EASA covering such eventualities?
3. Are civil aircraft safe during military exercises?
**Special report 21/2017 of 12 December 2017**

**Greening: a more complex income support scheme, not yet environmentally effective**

Agriculture and Rural Development | Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) | EAGF Fund | Environment

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| Summary | **Questions asked:**  
Was greening capable of enhancing the CAP’s environmental and climate performance, in accordance with the objective set in the relevant EU legislation?  

In order to reply to this main audit question, the Court examined:  
1. intervention logic, existence of clear and sufficiently ambitious targets for greening and the justification for the policy’s budget allocation;  
2. benefits that greening can be expected to produce for the environment and climate;  
3. complexity which greening adds to the CAP.  

**Findings:**  
1. Greening serves two distinct objectives. On the one hand it is meant to enhance the CAP’s environmental and climate performance. On the other hand – as a CAP direct payment - it remains an instrument for supporting farmers’ income. Only the first of these objectives is explicitly stated in the legislation;  
2. The Court found that the green payment lacks a fully developed intervention logic. The Commission has not set specific targets or otherwise specified what greening can be expected to achieve for the environment and climate. Any assessment of the effectiveness of the policy will additionally be affected by the fragmentary knowledge of the baseline situations in particular in terms of biodiversity and the quality of soil, including organic carbon content;  
3. The initial Commission proposal for greening was more ambitious in environmental terms. The subsequent dilution of the policy’s environmental content did not change the level of funding proposed. This was set, from the outset, at 30 % of CAP direct payments. On average, greening subsidies exceed significantly the cost to farmers (including from lost income) of meeting greening requirements. This is because the greening budget was fixed without a link to the policy’s level of environmental ambition. Greening remains, essentially, an income support scheme;  
4. Greening is unlikely to provide significant benefits for the environment and climate, mainly because of the significant deadweight which affects the policy. This deadweight arises primarily from the fact that greening requirements are generally undemanding and largely reflect normal farming practice. Additionally, due to extensive exemptions most farmers (65 %) are able to benefit from the green payment without actually being subject to greening obligations. As a result, greening leads to a positive change in farming practices on only a very limited share of EU farmland. The Court estimate that farmers created new EFAs and increased crop diversification on only around 3.5 % of arable land, i.e. around 2 % of all EU farmland. Additionally, according to a JRC study, new greening requirements relating to permanent grassland resulted in a change in farming practices on only 1.5 % of EU farmland. Overall, around 5 % land farmed in the EU was reallocated due to greening;  

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5. The Court also found that certain design limitations reduced the effectiveness of the three greening practices. Crop diversification could not provide the full environmental benefits of crop rotation. The Environmentally sensitive permanent grassland (ESPG) designation was based mainly on biodiversity-related criteria and poorly targeted carbon rich permanent grassland outside Natura 2000 areas. Finally, the predominance of productive EFA types, combined with a lack of meaningful requirements on management, limited the positive impact of EFAs on biodiversity;

6. Member States have a significant degree of flexibility in implementing greening, especially as regards the choice of EFA types and the designation of ESPG. The Court found that, in general, they do not use this flexibility to maximise the policy’s environmental and climate benefits. Rather, they strive to implement greening in a way which minimises the burden on themselves and their farmers. The Commission has limited power to push Member States towards greening implementation options offering greater environmental benefits;

7. Greening has had limited impact for the baseline of Pillar II environmental measures, mainly because the commitments proposed to farmers under these measures were above greening requirements even before the green payment was introduced;

8. Greening adds significant complexity to the CAP which is not justified in view of the results that greening can be expected to produce. This complexity arises not least because of how greening overlaps with the CAP’s other environmental instruments (cross-compliance and the Pilar II environmental measures), creating the risk of deadweight and double funding. Certain decisions and actions by the Commission and Member States mitigate these risks. The recent amendment of the secondary legislation has addressed certain concerns farmers and Member States have regarding the policy’s complexity. We also found that Commission’s supervision of how Member States implement greening was good;

9. Greening resembles GAECs in that it is also, essentially, a set of basic environmental conditions applicable to income support. What sets it apart from GAECs is the higher potential penalties for non-compliance.

**Recommendations:**

1. For the next CAP reform, the Commission develop a complete intervention logic for the EU environmental and climate-related action regarding agriculture, including specific targets and based on up-to-date scientific understanding of the phenomena concerned.
   a) As part of the intervention logic, the Commission should define needs, inputs, processes, outcomes, results, impacts and the relevant external factors;
   b) The Commission should define specific targets for the CAP’s contribution to the environmental and climate-related objectives of the EU;
   c) In order to make it possible to design an effective policy and subsequently to monitor and evaluate its implementation, the Commission should develop models and data sets regarding biodiversity, soil condition (including soil carbon content) and other relevant environmental and climate-related issues.

2. As preparation for developing its proposal for the next CAP reform, the Commission review and take stock of the implementation of the current CAP. In building this proposal, the Commission should be guided by the following principles:
   a) Farmers should only have access to CAP payments if they meet a set of basic environmental norms:
      • These norms should encompass areas covered by the current GAECs and the generalised greening requirements (which are both meant to go beyond the requirements of environmental legislation). This would simplify the system of CAP direct payments by avoiding artificial and confusing distinctions between essentially similar instruments;
      • Penalties for non-compliance with these combined norms should be sufficient to act as a deterrent;
      • In order to avoid double funding, all such basic norms should be fully incorporated in the environmental baseline for any programmed action regarding agriculture.
   b) Specific, local environmental and climate-related needs can be appropriately addressed through stronger programmed action regarding agriculture that is based on:
      • the achievement of performance targets; • and funding reflecting an assessment of the average costs incurred and income foregone in relation to actions and practices going beyond the environmental baseline.
   c) When Member States are given options to choose from in their implementation of the CAP, they should be required to demonstrate, prior to
implementation, that the options they select are effective and efficient in terms of achieving policy objectives.

CONT Committee Working Document; Rapporteur

Rapporteur: Tomáš Zdechovský (EPP)

[Recommendations by the rapporteur, ]

3. Welcomes the recommendations proposed by the European Court of Auditors and invites the European Commission to follow-up on these recommendations and remarks outlined in the ECA report;

4. Notes the considerably high spending on the new green payment representing 30 % of all CAP direct payments and almost 8 % of the whole EU budget, whilst notes with concern that this amount does not correspond to the level of ambition that the green payment offers; invites the Commission to take this into account when preparing a CAP reform;

5. Regrets the fact that it remains unclear how greening is expected to contribute to the broader EU targets on climate change; calls on the Commission to create a specific action plan for greening as a part of a new CAP reform that would clearly outline the intervention logic and also a set of specific, measurable targets;

6. Is concerned that the greening instrument remains an income support measure that even allows the farmers to increase their income by up to 1%, while not in many cases necessarily imposing any obligations or costs related to the implementation, thus hindering the raison d’être of the financing; calls on the Commission to develop more stringent rules on farmers, while avoiding overuse of exemptions;

7. Is concerned by the level of complexity and transparency of greening and CAP itself; calls on the Commission to streamline the greening programme and the entire CAP in order to raise the level of transparency and to avoid the high risk of abuse;

8. Is particularly worried by the conclusion of the European Court of Auditors that the greening is unlikely to provide significant benefits for the environment and climate and calls on the Commission to reconsider the existence of the instrument and the possibility to re-invest the considerable greening funds into already existing, often overlapping programmes that have proven to be more effective and justified.

Related EP Reports / Resolutions of other committees

**European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2016** on the mid-term review of the EU’s Biodiversity Strategy (2015/2137(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

11. Calls on the Commission to enhance the role that biodiversity and ecosystems play in economic affairs, with a view to moving to a green economy urges the Commission to step up the measures taken in support of the greening of the European Semester; stresses that biodiversity is an overall social responsibility which cannot be based solely on public expenditure;

38. Notes with regret that there has not yet been a measurable improvement in biodiversity status in agriculture, but recognises that it is still too early to gauge the real effectiveness of the reformed CAP; welcomes the Commission’s plans to evaluate progress in implementing the CAP, and urges the Commission and the Member States to monitor, assess and, if necessary, improve the effectiveness of greening measures –including the assessment of Member State flexibility – and relevant rural development measures in the context of the CAP; calls on the Commission to take account of its findings in the mid term review of the CAP;

41. Calls on the Commission, in the interests of transparency, to make public the justifications given by Member States for their choice of greening measures;
42. Insists that the Commission and the Member States ensure that financial resources under the CAP are redirected from subsidising environmentally harmful activities to financing sustainable agricultural practices and maintaining connected biodiversity;

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[The European Parliament, ]

E. whereas the cost of controls and of providing advice to stakeholders and farmers is currently estimated at EUR 4 billion annually at Member State level, and is likely to rise, as could error rates, with the implementation of the latest CAP reform, in particular the introduction of ‘greening’ measures;

L. whereas greening measures introduced by the last reform of the common agricultural policy aim to achieve improved agricultural sustainability through the effect of various instruments:
   - simplified and more targeted cross-compliance;
   - the Green Direct Payment and voluntary measures that are beneficial for the environment and climate change in rural development;

21. Expects the Commission to urgently make full use of the process of simplification of the CAP, especially with regard to the burdensome and complex regulations governing cross-compliance and greening which ultimately impacts upon farmers across Europe;

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European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2012 on the farm input supply chain: structure and implications (2011/2114(INI))

[The European Parliament, ]

23. Considers that efficient measures for on-farm and local energy saving and management should be made available throughout the EU via rural development programmes and the optional ‘greening’ measures of the future of the CAP;

26. Calls furthermore on the Commission and Council to include investments in precision farming in an optional EU-wide list of ‘greening’ measures to be rewarded within the CAP, as these innovative practices (such as GPS-based soil monitoring) have similar positive effects on climate change mitigation, soil and water quality and farmers’ finances (with significantly reduced use of fertilisers, water, soil improvers, plant protection products and pesticides, which will reduce input costs for farmers);

42. Draws in this regard the Commission’s attention to the positive effect that precision farming has on water use (through GPS-based monitoring of soil conditions and weather forecasts) and demands that investments in these and other innovative solutions which decrease the use of inputs such as water, fertilisers and plant protection products can be covered by ‘greening’ options of the future CAP;

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30. Believes that natural resource protection should be more closely linked to the granting of direct payments and calls, therefore, for the introduction, through a greening component, of an EU-wide incentivisation scheme with the objective of ensuring farm sustainability and long-term food security through effective management of scarce resources (water, energy, soil) while reducing production costs in the long term by reducing input use; believes that this scheme should provide maximum support for farmers who are engaged or who wish to engage, step by step, more in agricultural practices designed to achieve more sustainable production systems;

32. Rejects the implementation of a new additional payment system that leads to extra control and sanction systems for greening; insists that practical hurdles for farmers and administrative complexity for authorities must be avoided; insists, moreover, that, in order to streamline the administrative procedures associated with these measures, all agricultural controls should be, as far as possible, operated concomitantly;

33. Calls therefore on the Commission to submit as soon as possible an impact assessment of the administrative practicalities involved in the implementation of a greening component; emphasises that environmental measures have the potential to boost farmers’ production efficiency and insists that any possible costs and income foregone, arising from the implementation of such measures, should be covered;

34. Takes the view that further greening should be pursued across Member States by means of a priority catalogue of area-based and/or farm-level measures that are 100% EU-financed; considers that any recipient of these particular payments must implement a certain number of greening measures, which should build on existing structures, chosen from a national or a regional list established by the Member State on the basis of a broader EU list, which is applicable to all types of farming; considers that examples of such measures could include:
   - support for low carbon emissions and measures to limit or capture GHG emissions
   - support for low energy consumption and energy efficiency
   - buffer strips, field margins, presence of hedges, etc.
   - permanent pastures
   - precision farming techniques
   - crop rotation and crop diversity
   - feed efficiency plans;

**Oral / Written Questions**

**CAP and ‘greening’, E-007653/2017, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL), 12-12-2017**

In a new report from the European Court of Auditors, it is stated that payments to encourage farmers to ‘go green’ are not likely to significantly enhance the CAP’s environmental and climate performance. The auditors noted that the new payments complicated the system and have led to changes to farming practices in only five per cent of EU farmland. The auditors noted that the Commission did not develop a complete intervention logic for green payments, nor did it set clear and sufficiently ambitious environmental objectives for greening to be achieved. They also noted that greening is unlikely to deliver significant benefits for the environment or climate, mainly because a large percentage of the practices subsidised would have been carried out even without the payments. The auditors consider that greening has changed farming practices in only five per cent of EU farmland.

1. What does the Commission think of the report and what concrete measures does it intend to take to make this component of CAP more effective, making it less complex and bureaucratic?
Payments for greening measures within the CAP, E-001979/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marian Harkin (ALDE), 03-03-2016
1. In relation to its answer to Question E-015485/2015, given by Commissioner Hogan, in which it was stated that ‘Ireland chose to derogate from the general rule by opting for a proportionate greening payment’, can the Commission outline how many countries derogated from the general rule by opting for a proportionate greening payment?

Implementation of the greening of the common agricultural policy (CAP) II, E-000673/2016, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Maria Heubuch (Verts/ALE), Maria Noichl (S&D), 28-01-2016
The Commission has commissioned an assessment of the implementation of the greening of the CAP. Greening measures are subject to three criteria: grassland preservation, crop diversity and the creation of ecological focus areas on 5% of arable land. In terms of citizens’ participation in important European projects such as the CAP, it is essential that public opinion in the EU can form its own views at an early stage on the implementation of the greening measures. For this to be possible, the data and facts relating to implementation of greening must be made public and scientists must be able (independently from publicly commissioned assessments) to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of this policy instrument using these data and facts and thus contribute to public discussion of the policy instrument.

1. What information does the Commission have about the use made in 2015 of fallow land/set-aside areas in the EU as compared with 2010-2014? (Please provide a breakdown of areas by Member State.)
2. What information does the Commission have about the stock of landscape features in the EU in the period 2010-2014? (Please provide a breakdown by area and Member State.)

Payments for greening measures within the CAP, E-015485/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marian Harkin (ALDE), 07-12-2015
Since the reformed CAP entered into force, farmers who are entitled to claim support under the Basic Payment Scheme have had to adhere to greening rules on areas of land eligibility. However, in some regions of Ireland payment per hectare for greening can vary hugely, e.g. on 1 hectare the greening payment could be up to EUR 220 per hectare and in a different region this could be as low as EUR 50 per hectare, despite the fact that the requirements are identical.
Taking this into consideration, does the Commission:
1. Plan to address the imbalance in greening payments in Ireland?
2. Intend to use exactly the same criteria for measuring the outcomes of greening in all areas of Ireland?

Results of the EU’s Green Action Plan, E-005298/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Gabriel Mato (EPP), Carlos Iturgaiz (EPP), 31-03-2015
The EU has introduced a Green Action Plan (GAP) for SMEs which will enable them to exploit the business opportunities that the transition to a green economy offers, by improving productivity and driving down costs in European SMEs through resource efficiency, by supporting green entrepreneurship and by exploiting and developing Europe’s leadership in green processes and technologies. The GAP constitutes an integral support strategy for SMEs with a series of objectives and actions structured around areas such as greening SMEs for more competitiveness and sustainability, green entrepreneurship for the companies of the future,
opportunities for SMEs in a greener value chain, access to the markets for green SMEs and governance.

1. What results have been obtained up to this point through the implementation of the Green Action Plan?
2. How does the Commission intend to ensure that the GAP is extended so that more companies are able to sign up and benefit from it?

'Greening' and associated subsidies, E-004857/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Kostas Chrysogonos (GUE/NGL), 27-03-2015

The 'greening' scheme to be applied to farmers under the common agricultural policy 2015-2020 requires holdings with over 10 hectares of agricultural land at their disposal to alternate at least two crops, with the main crop accounting for no more than 75% of the land, and for holdings with over 15 hectares of agricultural land at their disposal to set aside 5% of their land as an ecological focus area. Cotton farming, which accounts for 40-45% of irrigated land in Greece and provides a source of income for approximately 100,000 rural families, is subsidised in the form of coupled support of EUR 187 million for agricultural land totalling 250,000 hectares. However, the proposed policy provides for cotton farming to be cut back to 200,000 hectares, which will cause additional cuts of EUR 40 million to rural income from coupled support for cotton. In view of the above, will the Commission say:

1. What measures have been taken or are being planned to protect the income of farmers/beneficiaries of coupled support, especially in countries in economic crisis, where farmers are among the financially weakest members of society?

Greening, E-000683/2015, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Francesc Gambús (EPP), 20-01-2015

Commissioner Hogan recently stated that greening would not be put off for a year. This could have negative effects for farmers who have already sown, as well as making them less competitive — and this in an industry that has already been hit hard by the economic situation. In this context:

What steps is the Commission intending to take to mitigate the economic damage that this could wreak on European farmers?

Is the Commission looking into the possibility of introducing a one-year moratorium on the 30% cut in direct payments under the CAP in cases in which the sowing has already been done?

Simplification of the rules on the greening of aid and on geographical indications, E-010934/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Marc Tarabella (S&D), 17-12-2014

At the Council meeting held on Monday, 15 December 2014, Commissioner Phil Hogan outlined the areas to be simplified as part of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): the regulations on the common organisation of agricultural markets, the direct payments system (including the rules on ecological focus areas in the context of the greening of aid) and the rules on geographical indications.

1. Can the Commission say exactly how it intends to simplify the rules on the greening of aid and on geographical indications?

Greening Europe’s agriculture, E-009975/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), 28-11-2014

Europe’s agricultural sector is set to undergo significant changes in the near future, particularly as regards greening. The Member States are warning the Commission that the directive on organic farming should be revised. Representatives of the Member States focused primarily on avoiding further burdens on farmers arising from the Commission’s proposed new monitoring model.
2. Does the Commission intend to hold off on the planned directive while it incorporates the Member States’ demands into its text?
3. How will the new directive take account of the differing levels of ecological development in the Member States?

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Common agricultural policy: review of greening provisions, E-006523/2014, WQ to the Commission, Rule 130, Nicola Caputo (S&D), 03-09-2014

The new CAP’s greening provisions set out in Article 43 of Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 are likely to cause a number of problems, not least excessive bureaucracy, and necessitate procedures that are too costly and complicated for many farmers, with funding being paid to landowners irrespective of the amount actually invested by them in environmentally friendly cultivation. The proposal to earmark 30% of funding to more effective environmental greening is likely to complicate the management of many holdings, especially Italian olive groves, vineyards and fruit orchards that are already regarded as environmentally friendly in terms of sustainability and CO2 capture. In view of this:

1. Will the Commission review the greening provisions with a view to encouraging greater flexibility in the various Member States, adapting them to specific local and environmental conditions and ensuring that the Italian farming sector is not penalised as a result?
2. Will it take account of the fact that benefits of agriculture are not limited to more effective environmental protection alone? Could the funding review not focus also on employment or other relevant issues deserving of greater consideration?
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This rolling check-list presents an overview of the Special Reports of the European Court of Auditors (ECA), concentrating on those relevant for the 2016 discharge procedure. It strives to link the research topics of the Special Reports to relevant debates and positions within the European Parliament, including the working documents of the Committee on Budgetary Control, the work of the specialised parliamentary committees, forthcoming plenary resolutions and individual questions by Members.

This check-list has been prepared by the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit of the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), the EP’s in-house research service and think-tank, as part of its on-going support for parliamentary committees and individual Members in scrutinising the executive in its implementation of EU law, policies and programmes.

The European Parliament is strongly committed to Better Law-Making, and particularly to the effective use of ex-ante impact assessment and ex-post evaluation throughout the entire legislative cycle. It is in this spirit that the Parliament has a particular interest in following the transposition, implementation and enforcement of EU law, and, more generally, monitoring the impact, operation, effectiveness and delivery of policy and programmes in practice.