



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Committee on Budgetary Control

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WORKING DOCUMENT

on European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 15/2013 (2013 discharge):
Has the Environment component of the LIFE programme been effective?

Committee on Budgetary Control

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Unida en la diversidad

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Introduction

The environmental policy of the European Union (EU) is integrated across the EU's main policy areas, and most of the main EU expenditure programmes include aspects related to environmental policy. The LIFE+ (L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement) programme covering the period from 2007-2013¹ supports the EU's general environmental priorities which encompasses a wide range of sectors. In Special Report (SR) 15/2013 the European Court of Auditors (ECA) analysed whether the "Environmental policy and governance" component (LIFE "Environment") of the LIFE programme is well designed and implemented in order to obtain effective results. The ECA SR 15/2013 covers the programming period between 2007 and 2013. Since one of the key objectives of the LIFE programme is to act as a catalyst for developing environmental policy and actions the audit as well assessed the effectiveness of this catalytic effect.

ECA Conclusions

The ECA arrived at the conclusion that that the LIFE "Environment" component was not operating effectively because it was not sufficiently well designed and implemented. It represents around 0,5% of the estimated EU environmental expenditure for the period 2007-2013, however the large number of programme's objectives make it inconsistent with the allocated budget. In order to target available resources on reaching the objectives set, it should include a limited number of defined specific priorities.

The LIFE programme establishes indicative national allocations which intend to secure funding for smaller Member States by 'blocking' a part of the budget for them. The ECA found that the results of the evaluation criteria used for the selection process can be distorted by the national allocations and can result in projects being selected with lower evaluation scores than rejected projects from other Member States.

The results of the LIFE programme should be appropriately and widely distributed, sustained and replicated which is particularly important given the programme's expected catalytic role and relatively small budget. The ECA found that the lack of coordinated dissemination activities undertaken did not sufficiently encourage the replication of project results, which partially explains the low replication of projects.

ECA Recommendations

In light of its findings the ECA recommended that:

1. in the establishment of the multiannual work programmes foreseen in the new LIFE programme, the legislative authorities should enable the Commission and the Member States to restrict eligible applications to limited strategic priorities and to set clear, specific, measurable and achievable objectives for projects to be funded;
2. the Commission's proposal for the new LIFE programme ends the national allocations for traditional projects, but keeps a geographical balance for integrated projects. In its application, the Commission should ensure that integrated projects are selected based

¹ OJ L 149, 9.6.2007, p. 1

on their merit and that geographical balance should not breach the principle of equal opportunities for applicants;

3. the Commission should improve the project selection evaluation forms and require the evaluators to provide separate assessments and scores for major project aspects in order to improve the quality and transparency of the selection process and to ensure that selected projects have the potential to contribute most towards the achievement of the programme's objectives;
4. the Commission should improve its programme management tools and consider introducing adequate common output and result indicators as well as follow-up information at project level, in order to facilitate an appropriate monitoring of the programme;
5. the Commission should improve its assessment of the reasonableness of claimed personnel costs, particularly for comparable projects, by making better use of information collected during the monitoring phase;
6. the Commission should increase its focus on the dissemination, sustainability and replication of LIFE projects;

Recomendaciones del ponente de opinión para una posible inclusión en el informe de aprobación de la gestión anual de la Comisión para 2013

El Parlamento Europeo,

- Destaca la necesidad de que el programa LIFE actúe como un catalizador de los cambios en el desarrollo y la aplicación de la política; hace hincapié en la necesidad de que la Comisión establezca objetivos claros, específicos, cuantificables y realizables para los proyectos que recibirán financiación;
- Resalta la necesidad de que los proyectos financiados con cargo al programa LIFE contribuyan a lograr los objetivos específicos en más de uno de los ámbitos prioritarios del programa; subraya la necesidad de que los proyectos financiados eviten el aislamiento y, al contrario, que tengan un carácter transnacional y contribuyan, de una manera cuantificable, a la difusión, la sostenibilidad y la reproducción de sus resultados en otros Estados miembros;
- Toma nota de que, en ocasiones, las asignaciones nacionales pueden alterar la selección de los mejores proyectos; anima a los Estados miembros a mantener el equilibrio geográfico proponiendo más proyectos integrados, pero insiste en que los fondos deben distribuirse ante todo sobre la base de los méritos de los proyectos y de ningún modo en detrimento de la calidad de los mismos;
- Señala que debe prestarse especial atención al potencial de los proyectos para ser difundidos, sostenidos y reproducidos; pide a la Comisión que determine indicadores claros para valorar el potencial de difusión, sostenibilidad y reproducción de los

proyectos evaluados a fin de lograr los objetivos del programa; anima a la Comisión a efectuar un seguimiento de estos objetivos;

- Pide a la Comisión que mejore sus instrumentos de gestión de programas con miras a evitar los procesos de selección no transparentes; ello incluye mejorar los formularios de selección de proyectos, introducir plantillas detalladas para la evaluación de los costes reclamados, una supervisión adecuada de los proyectos, crear indicadores comunes adecuados para el rendimiento y los resultados, y una supervisión exhaustiva del seguimiento de los proyectos;