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WORKING DOCUMENT

on ECA Special Report 12/2017 (2016 Discharge): Implementing the Drinking Water Directive: water quality and access to it improved in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, but investment needs remain substantial

Committee on Budgetary Control

Rapporteur: Tomáš Zdechovský

SUMMARY

The Court of Auditors (ECA) examined whether EU actions improved the quality of drinking water in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania as required by the 1998 Drinking Water Directive. Overall, the Court concluded that the situation has improved significantly. Nevertheless, there are still areas where citizens are supplied with water from the public supply network that is not fully in compliance with EU standards.

Moreover, significant further national public and private funding will be needed to ensure access to good quality water to all citizens in these Member States and to ensure that EU funded investments in water facilities can be adequately maintained.

Among other things, the Court recommended that several remaining issues are addressed in the context of the current revision of the Drinking Water Directive and that the sustainability of water infrastructure is ensured while safeguarding the affordability of the service.

The ECA concluded that the Commission:

1. Should 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. The Commission should 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:

4. Should 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.
5. Should:
 - (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.

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. Emphasizes the crucial fact that water pricing policies must foster efficiency and recover the costs of water use.