Question for written answer E-002938/2013
to the Commission
Rule 117
Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE) and Romana Jordan (PPE)

Subject: Cost-effectiveness of investments in energy efficiency projects in public buildings

Since 2000, the European Union has made almost EUR 5 billion worth of cohesion policy funding available for the co-financing of energy efficiency measures in the Member States. The Commission has shared the responsibility for the sound financial management of these funds with national and regional authorities.

Recently, the Court of Auditors assessed whether these cohesion policy investments in energy efficiency were cost-effective. It audited 24 investment projects for public buildings in the Czech Republic, Italy and Lithuania, as these were the countries that received most cohesion and regional development funding support for energy efficiency measures in 2007-2013.

The Court of Auditors concluded that the right conditions in programming and financing had not been set to enable cost-effective energy efficiency investments and that the audited energy efficiency projects in public buildings were not cost-effective. The report states that only 10 % of EU cohesion funds earmarked for energy efficiency were being used correctly. According to one of the members of the Court, while Member States were using the money to refurbish public buildings, energy efficiency was, at best, a secondary concern. While it should be the aim, when using public money, to ensure a clear and swift return on investment, the general assessment of the Court is that, on average, the spending involved would not be recouped for 50 years.

1. Is the Commission aware of the outcome of this report, and what is its opinion on the Court of Auditors' conclusions?

2. Does the Commission agree that the cost-effectiveness concept – the best relationship between resources employed and results achieved – should be the leading principle when investing cohesion funds?

3. Given that the Court of Auditors' report only looked at investments made by public authorities, can the Commission indicate whether cohesion funds allocated to the private sector are spent more effectively?

4. Can the Commission comment on the idea of granting cities and rural areas that have developed sustainable energy action plans, and that have a proven track-record when it comes to cost-efficiency, priority access to EU funds?

5. How does the Commission look at setting a fixed range, such as 5-10 years, for the maximum payback period, set on a case-by-case basis for each individual Member State?

6. What steps will the Commission take to ensure cost-effective investments in energy efficiency through cohesion policy funding, and what conditions can the Commission introduce for such investments?