

Question for written answer E-001224/2023
to the Commission
Rule 138
Ignazio Corrao (Verts/ALE)

Subject: 'See Sicily': the mismanagement of EU funds in Sicily and the risk of funding withdrawal

On 20 February 2023, Sicily Region's Audit Authority (AdA) published a final report¹ on the 'See Sicily' project, which was allocated EUR 74.9 million in funding under Action 6.8.3 of the European Regional Development Fund's (ERDF) 2014-2020 Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for Sicily. The report revealed alarming irregularities.

Spending on promotional activities alone increased almost five-fold, soaring from the EUR 4.9 million budgeted in 2020 to EUR 23.9 million in 2022.

Major compliance issues include: the failure to map out the project and plan its services, the lack of specific targets or a cost breakdown for individual activities, and the project's non-compliance with the Procurement Code.

The audit found an error rate of 25% for certified expenditure on promotional activities.

What is more, given the project's poor performance and the irregularities revealed in the audit, the AdA cannot rule out the possibility – pending further examination and the application of a financial correction of 25% – that See Sicily's promotional campaign was wholly financed through direct awards.

If confirmed, this error rate could result in around EUR 1 billion being withdrawn from ROP Sicily ERDF 2014-2020.

In view of this:

1. Has the Commission taken up the issues raised by the audit with the Sicilian authorities?
2. Can it clarify whether withdrawn funds can be recovered?
3. Can it provide information on the state of implementation, spending and certification in relation to ROP Sicily ERDF 2014-2020?

Submitted: 14.4.2023

¹ Final report on the audit of operations (Article 127(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 – Procurement of goods and services – Phase II.