



Press Release

Luxembourg, 25 January 2016

Danube water quality: little improvement due to "lack of ambition" in management plans, say EU Auditors

There has been little improvement in water quality along the Danube, despite countries in the river basin implementing the EU Water Framework Directive since 2004, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. The auditors highlight "lack of ambition" in the countries' plans as the main reason for the limited progress. The audit focused on four Member States in the Danube river basin - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.

"EU water policy should ensure a sufficient quantity of good-quality water for people's needs and for the environment," said Mr **George Pufan**, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. *"For that to happen along the Danube, countries need to step up their efforts."*

Between 2007 and 2013, the European Regional Development Fund/Cohesion Fund provided €6.35 billion to Member States in the Danube basin for waste water treatment. Over the same period, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development provided €6.39 billion to compensate farmers taking agri-environmental measures.

But the Member States' 2009 river basin management plans lacked ambition. The auditors pointed to a poor targeting of measures for water bodies of unsatisfactory quality. This was due in particular to shortcomings in monitoring systems resulting in a lack of data both on the type and sources of pollution that caused water bodies to fail. In addition, Member States exempted, without sufficient justification, a significant number of water bodies from important deadlines for reaching good quality status.

There were delays in the implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, while the Nitrates Directive (aimed at reducing nitrogen emissions) was not being fully exploited. Furthermore, treatment plants and industrial installations needing specific emission limits were not identified. Additional measures in the field of agriculture were rendered less effective as they were mainly of a voluntary nature.

The auditors make a number of recommendations both to the Member States and to the European Commission.

The Member States should:

- improve their monitoring and diagnosis systems for water pollution;

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on www.eca.europa.eu

ECA Press

Mark Rogerson – Spokesperson T: (+352) 4398 47063

Damijan Fišer – Press Officer T: (+352) 4398 45410

12, rue Alcide De Gasperi - L-1615 Luxembourg

E: press@eca.europa.eu @EUAuditorsECA eca.europa.eu

M: (+352) 691 55 30 63

M: (+352) 621 55 22 24

- provide clear and valid justifications when granting exemptions;
- identify cost-effective measures to be targeted;
- and consider charges or taxation to discourage emissions.

The Commission should:

- provide guidelines for differentiated reporting on progress;
- examine binding criteria for Member State inspections of urban waste water treatment plants;
- consider limiting phosphorus application on land;
- and provide guidance on cost recovery in relation to environmental damage caused by diffuse pollution (pollution caused by a range of activities). Currently, the 'polluter pays' principle is only partially applied to diffuse pollution from agriculture.

The Commission and the Member States should jointly assess the effectiveness of the enforcement mechanisms in agriculture.

Notes to Editors

"Danube river basin II: Quality of water" is the second report on the Danube river basin published by the European Court of Auditors. It assessed the quality of water in the Danube river basin taking account of multiple factors, on the basis of the Water Framework Directive. The first report, "EU funding of Urban Waste Water Treatment plants in the Danube river basin", was published in July 2015.

Europe's waters are affected by organic and nutrient pollution as well as by pollution from chemical substances. Water pollution originates from various sources such as households, industrial installations and agriculture. The 2000 Water Framework Directive harmonized previous EU legislation in the field of water policy. The Directive introduced the river basin management plan as a key implementation tool. The first plans were due in 2009 with updates required in December 2015. These plans have to provide information as to the water quality of the various water bodies, reasons for failing to achieve the required "good ecological and chemical status" and any necessary remedial measures.

Special Report No 23/2015: **Water quality in the Danube river basin: progress in implementing the Water Framework Directive but still some way to go** is available in English (other languages to follow shortly).