

JASPERS regional support: good initiative, but better definition of objectives needed, say Croatia, Poland and EU auditors

JASPERS (Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions) was overall a good initiative to support new Member States in the development and approval of project proposals, according to a Synthesis Report issued today by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) and the national audit offices of Croatia and Poland. However, the auditors could not say whether the initiative achieved its purpose, as needs assessments were missing before launching the initiative and there were no clear measurable objectives. They recommend a better definition of objectives, milestones and criteria. This would allow the initiative to focus on those activities that add the most value.

"We looked at the effectiveness of the JASPERS initiative together with our peers from Croatia and Poland. This coordinated audit showed that complex issues with several players at EU and national level can indeed be examined more comprehensively and efficiently by international cooperation," said ECA Member Oskar Herics, responsible for the ECA's contribution to this audit. "All participants benefited from the mutual exchange of experience, views and ideas," he added.

This report comes after the ECA published its own special report on JASPERS in January, in which it called for better targeting of the initiative. The auditors now largely reiterate the ECA's observations and state that the initiative had positive impact on the quality of the underlying project documentation, which contributed to quicker project approval at Commission level, and that it increased its focus on building Member States' administrative capacity. However, they note that JASPERS' impact did not yet result in higher degrees of independence from assistance and that there were shortcomings in the monitoring and evaluation of its activities. There was also not enough information available to determine possible improvements to the assistance provided by JASPERS, the auditors say, which resulted in missing potential gains in efficiency and effectiveness of its operation.

About JASPERS

The European Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) set up JASPERS to provide Member States joining since 2004 with independent, free-of-charge advice to help them prepare high-quality proposals for large-scale regional investment projects. The initiative is managed by the EIB and is mainly financed by the Commission through the EU budget. Its actual cost between commencing operations in 2006 and the end of 2016 was around €284 million.

During this time, JASPERS completed 1147 tasks, two thirds of which concerned major projects. Poland accounted for around 27 % of all completed tasks and Croatia for around 4 %. In the same period, the Commission approved 963 major projects from the 2007-2013 programme period, over half of which were supported by JASPERS. The total amount invested in these projects was around €77.6 billion; the total EU contribution was €46.2 billion.

About the audit

The audit objectives of the three Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) had a similar focus from an EU respectively national perspective and the audit approach was consistent with the SAI international standards:

- The ECA assessed whether JASPERS had made a positive contribution to the development and overall quality of the EU financed projects in those Member States it supported, as well as improved their administrative capacity. In addition to Croatia and Poland, in which the ECA conducted the audit in close cooperation with their SAIs, the ECA also carried out the audit in Malta and Romania, as well as at the Commission and the EIB.
- The State Audit Office of Croatia assessed whether JASPERS' impact on the project proposals submitted by Croatia for co-financing from EU-funds was efficient.
- The Supreme Audit Office of Poland assessed whether JASPERS resulted in an increased quality of grant applications and, as such, a better use of the European funds in Poland, as well as boosted the country's administrative capacity, namely through increased competence, knowledge and experience.

The audit work was carried out in full cooperation and a spirit of trust. Each of the three SAIs maintained their independence and produced its own audit report, which it published individually.