



Press Release

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Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania water quality improved, but significant funds still needed, say EU Auditors

The quality of drinking water available to consumers in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania has improved in recent years thanks to EU funding, but a significant amount of money still needs to be invested, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors.

The auditors examined EU action on drinking water quality in the three Member States. The audit covered the period from the Member States' accession to the end of 2016. Overall, they found that access and supply had improved – largely due to significant EU investment in recent years.

Between 2007 and 2020, European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund support for the management and supply of drinking water in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania will total €3.7 billion.

However, the auditors point out that there are still areas where water from the public network does not fully comply with the 1998 EU Drinking Water Directive. In addition, significant further national public and private investment will be needed to provide access to good quality water for everyone in these Member States and to ensure that EU-funded investments can be adequately maintained.

“Financial support from the EU budget to these water networks has been substantial, but it should not replace expenditure by the Member States,” said Mr George Pufan, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “Overall, these three countries will have to invest more than €6 billion by the end of 2020 to cover their needs.”

The auditors recommend that the European Commission should:

- follow up on gaps in Member State monitoring and enforce the Drinking Water Directive;
- modify the Directive to ensure that Member States inform the Commission about derogations for Small Water Supply Zones; require regular and timely reporting by Member States and extend this requirement to Small Water Supply Zones; improve the requirements for

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.

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the provision of adequate and up-to-date information on the quality of water available to consumers; support Member States in promoting actions aimed at the reduction of water losses.

The Member States should:

- require as part of the selection criteria for water facility projects that contribute to national targets the inclusion of plans to reduce water losses;
- ensure that tariffs provide for sustainable infrastructure;
- if necessary, provide financial or other forms of support to households for whom water costs are above the affordability rate.

Note to Editors

The protection of EU citizens' health through safe access to quality drinking water has long been an element of EU policy. Since 1975, the EU has had in place legislation on water, aimed at protecting consumers and water users against harmful effects. The Drinking Water Directive, covering standards for water intended for human consumption, was adopted in 1980 and subsequently revised in 1998. The Directive is currently under revision once again.

In December 2013, the EU citizens' initiative "Right2Water" collected nearly 1.9 million signatures. It invited the European Commission "[...] to propose legislation implementing the human right to water and sanitation, as recognized by the UN, and promoting the provision of water and sanitation as essential public services for all". In 2014, the Commission encouraged Member States to ensure access to a minimum water supply for all EU citizens.

Special Report No 12/2017: "Implementing the Drinking Water Directive: water quality and access to it improved in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, but investment needs remain substantial" is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.