



Press Release

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EU financial assistance for Turkey had only limited effect, say Auditors

EU financial assistance for Turkey, which aims to help align the country with EU laws, has had only a limited effect, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. Although the assistance was well designed, funding did not sufficiently address some fundamental needs in the rule of law and governance sectors, where critical reforms are overdue, say the auditors. In areas where there was more political will, such as customs, employment and taxation, projects did help bring Turkey into line with EU law. But the results may not be sustainable because of difficulties in spending the funds and backsliding on reforms.

EU financial assistance planned for Turkey from 2007 until 2020 through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance amounts to over €9 billion. The auditors focused on the priority sectors of rule of law, governance and human resources (education, employment and social policies), to which €3.8 billion had been allocated.

The auditors found that the Commission set funding objectives which were specific and consistent with the legal framework. The objectives for the rule of law, governance and human resources sectors were relevant and based on the needs which Turkey had identified to align itself with EU law and strengthen its administrative capacity.

In reality, however, the funds spent have barely addressed a number of fundamental needs, say the auditors. These are the independence and impartiality of the judicial system, the fight against high-level corruption and organised crime, press freedom, the prevention of conflicts of interest, and reinforcing external audit and civil society. According to the Commission's own analysis, say the auditors, progress in these areas has been unsatisfactory for several years, due to a lack of political will on the part of the Turkish authorities.

"From 2018 onwards, the Commission should better target funding for Turkey in areas where reforms are overdue and necessary for credible progress towards EU accession," said **Bettina Jakobsen, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report.**

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report.

The full report is available at www.eca.europa.eu.

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The auditors found that the Commission had decided to support sector-wide reforms rather than stand-alone projects. But sector assessments were not always comprehensive, notably in donor coordination, budget analysis and performance assessment.

Applying conditions to funding can help foster reform, say the auditors. But despite continuing unsatisfactory progress, the auditors found that the Commission had made little use of conditions to support reforms in the priority sectors. In particular, the Commission seldom used conditions such as the option of recentralising the management of projects or corrective measures if project conditions were not met. Furthermore, the possibility of suspending funding if the principles of democracy and rule of law were not complied with was not explicitly reflected in the regulations.

The projects audited generally delivered the intended outputs, which contributed to aligning Turkey with EU law and strengthening its administrative capacity, even if these were often delayed. But the sustainability of these positive results is at risk, say the auditors, mainly due to a lack of political will, a situation aggravated by the large-scale dismissals and suspensions of public officials and restrictions on civil society.

Another source of concern is that, due to widespread programming and implementation backlogs, the funding programme was significantly delayed. This led to reductions in both funding and the time available for the Turkish authorities to implement subsequent projects, and will further contribute to delaying tendering and contracting. The reasons for these delays were known: weak administrative capacity at some ministries for preparing project proposals, the transition to the sector approach and excessive staff turnover at the contracts unit which manages most of the EU funds spent in Turkey.

The auditors make a number of recommendations to improve the design and implementation of pre-accession assistance to Turkey. Furthermore, the audit results will feed into the Commission's mid-term review of funding, as well as into the design of future assistance programmes to EU enlargement countries.

Special Report No 7/2018 "EU pre-accession assistance to Turkey: Only limited results so far" is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.