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FAREWELL TO MRS MÁIRE GEOGHEGAN-QUINN, FORMER MEMBER OF THE ECA AND NEWLY DESIGNATED COMMISSIONER FOR RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

By Rosmarie Carotti

Mrs Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN was a Member of the European Court of Auditors from March 2000. She was then nominated for the Commission where she took office on February 10, 2010.



R.C.: *Commissioner, how did your nomination materialize? We all know that you had to pass a hearing in the European Parliament, but how did things go at national level?*

Commissioner Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN: An Taoiseach (the Irish Prime Minister) nominated me for the Commission in the light of my experience at national and European levels. I did not participate in any selection process. The fact that I was offered the important portfolio of Research, Innovation and Science by President Barroso was considered, nationally, to be a significant achievement.

R.C.: *You have always stood up for your convictions and for the role of women in professional life. What initiatives do you intend to put forward to improve European Research, Innovation and Science in general, but also the part women play in it?*

Commissioner Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN: My task is to move research, innovation and science to the heart of European policy. That is the only way to achieve sustainable, green economic growth. EU research funding makes a massive contribution to quality of life in Europe and to economic competitiveness, in medicine, energy and nanotechnology to name just a few fields. I want to make that better known – communication is a big part of the task. In policy terms, building on the excellent work of my predecessors, I want to make improvements in three specific areas, so that Europe punches its weight globally: completing the European Research Area, in other words a true single market in research; simplifying the way we fund research; and making a closer connection between laboratory science and bringing new products and services to market.

We cannot afford to waste talent. I will make a major effort to increase women's role in technological progress. We need a campaign, using positive female role models, but nice adverts are not enough. Women are well represented in scientific education but not in the profession – they tend to drop out when they have family commitments. We need to make science careers - and entrepreneurship - more attractive and more family friendly. I also want to look at whether EU research funding programmes give a fair chance to women and if not, to put that right.

R.C.: *Since March 2000, you have been a Member of the European Court of Auditors. In what respect this experience with auditing and budgeting will be useful in your new portfolio?*

Commissioner Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN: From the Court, I bring to my new role the following:

- An awareness of the usefulness of the Court's work for the Commission in aiming to eliminate systems failings and weakness and assure value for money.
- The conviction that adequate and effective internal control systems are necessary to avoid budgetary loss and waste.
- An understanding of the importance of open and honest dialogue between the Court and the Commission.
- A strong respect for the work of the Court.

I'll be responsible for a funding programme worth over € 50 billion! I aim to simplify funding procedures while at the same time reinforcing financial control - once an auditor always an auditor! There is no contradiction between simplification and control – as the Court knows very well, it is not by multiplying layers of bureaucracy that you best protect public money. I think my experience as a Court Member will enhance my credibility both politically and with the beneficiaries. I look forward to working together on important issues such as Tolerable Risk of Error in modernising the sound financial management of our instruments.

R.C.: *Politicians have to compromise but never lose sight of their ultimate goal. Can you describe your ideal picture of a European Research Area? Do you believe in clusters and who would decide on their location and composition?*

Commissioner Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN: A European Research Area is a place in which researchers, knowledge and new technology can circulate and grow across Europe as readily as goods can today. To achieve a European Research Area we need improvements in five areas. First, making it easier for researchers to build careers across borders. Second, avoiding duplication of funding and work through better joint programming. Third, improving Europe's research and scientific infrastructure to world class levels. Fourth, efficient knowledge transfer so that the results of research are used to maximum effect across Europe. And last but not least, international cooperation. Climate change, for example, is a global problem and we can only tackle it by working internationally.

It is also a question of culture. Science must belong in society, not be seen as some kind of strange and slightly frightening world apart, as is too often the case. In the end all of this will serve to ensure that good ideas improve society, nurture employment and help us to develop our way of life.

On clusters, yes, they have often proved successful. For the Commission and governments it is a case of making it easier for clusters to grow up where that makes sense, with infrastructure and strategic help. Not a question of top down decisions second guessing the private sector.

R.C.: *Concerning Research, Innovation and Science, how can the Commission improve the international cooperation and the cooperation between private and public sector?*

Commissioner Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN: The Commission is ideally placed to do these things and is already doing them. I want to build on that. For example, we can integrate scientific cooperation more into international trade discussions. We can negotiate on international research initiatives such as the ITER nuclear fusion project on behalf of all 27 Member States, achieving the same critical mass in terms of economic and scientific capacity as, say, the US or China.

We need to get the policy framework right to encourage private investment in research and get closer to the target of 3% of GDP invested in research overall. That will be a key part of the Europe 2020 Strategy the EU will implement to move our economy out of the crisis and towards consistent sustainable growth. The Commission has also set up several very promising public private partnerships in areas such as innovative medicines and clean cars. Feedback we have is that those could work better if we adapted the framework better to private sector needs, and that will be a priority – while fully defending the public interest, of course.

R.C.: *The European Commission policy paper on innovation will be defined in 2010. What ideas do you intend to bring forward?*

Commissioner Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN: I intend to work with my colleagues in the college to identify targeted political priorities that will need to be addressed to create a new innovation-friendly regulatory, market and policy environment. Innovation means putting new ideas into practice and generating better jobs, new knowledge and a more competitive long-term perspective for Europe in a global economy. This will mean identifying the bottlenecks, simplifying the instruments, communicating the benefits and improving the science base to enable a new knowledge based economy and society to take shape.

R.C.: *And the last question, on what occasions will we see you back in the Court again?*

Commissioner Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN: I hope that I will continue to have regular contact with my ex-colleagues at the Court and they will certainly be most welcome to see me whenever they are in Brussels. I would like to take the opportunity to convey to both the Members and all the staff of the Court how much I valued my time at the Court and appreciated the support and friendship that I received. It is my intention to build on the strong personal and professional relationships which have been built up over the past 10 years. I leave the Court with a certain sadness but with many happy memories. Finally, I would like to thank all those, Members and Staff, who have advised, assisted and supported me in my various areas of responsibility since I took up duty as a Member of the Court on 1 March 2000.



Mrs Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN and her Cabinet in the ECA

CURRICULUM VITAE

Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN

Personal details

- Irish.
- Born September 5, 1950 in Galway, Ireland.
- Married.
- 2 children.

Current duties

- Since March 2000: Member of the European Court of Auditors.

Political career

- 1994 -1997: Member of Dáil Éireann and Opposition Spokesperson on Health.
- 1993 -1994: Minister for Justice. Member of the Irish Government team which negotiated the Joint Declaration of December 1993, by the British and Irish Governments, on Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland.
- 1992: Minister for Tourism, Transport and Communications.
- 1991 -1992: Member of Dáil Éireann.
- 1987 - 1991: Minister for European Affairs. Chaired inter-departmental cttee. on EU policy with responsibility for co-ordinating Ireland's EU Presidency in 1990. During the Presidency chaired the Budget, Telecommunications, Culture and Development Councils.
- 1982 - 1987: Member of Dáil Éireann. Chairwoman of 1st Joint Parliamentary Cttee. on Women's Rights and Member of Parliamentary Cttee. on Marital Breakdown.
- 1982: Minister of State for Education.
- 1981 - 1982: Member of Dáil Éireann.
- 1979 - 1981: Minister for the Gaeltacht (1st woman Cabinet Minister since the foundation of the State).
- 1977 - 1979: Minister of State for Commerce.
- 1975 – 1977: Member of Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament).

Professional career

- 1970 -1975: Teacher
- 1997 - 2000: Columnist with "The Irish Times" newspaper; TV presenter; Part-time business consultant; Non executive director Aer Lingus; Non-executive director Ryan Hotels.

Other activities

- Former Member of the Governing authority of the National University of Ireland Galway.
- 1996: Publication "The Green Diamond".

Education

- 1970: Graduated in teaching.
- 1968: Graduated from secondary school.

Languages

- Irish: mother tongue.
- English: fluent.
- French: basic knowledge.



BILAN DU MANDAT - ENTRETIEN AVEC M. JÚLIUS MOLNÁR, MEMBRE DE LA COUR

Entretien par Rosmarie Carotti



M. Július Molnár

R.C.: Quel est le bilan de votre mandat comme Membre de la Cour affecté au Groupe d'audit I ?

M. Július Molnár: Il est toujours délicat de dresser soi-même le bilan de sa propre action. Il vaut mieux laisser ce soin à ceux qui restent... C'est d'ailleurs ce qui se produit dans certaines Institutions Supérieures de Contrôle, où l'on prononce « l'éloge » des membres partis en retraite, expression qui permet, hors de la présence des intéressés, d'esquisser leur portrait, avec des nuances d'ombre et de lumière. Je peux seulement dire que je me suis efforcé d'apporter ma contribution aux travaux du Groupe, et j'espère avoir été utile. Il faut rappeler à cette occasion que notre travail est toujours un travail d'équipe, d'abord avec les auditeurs, à tous les niveaux, et bien sûr avec tous mes Collègues, c'est bien le sens du beau mot de « collégialité ». Donc, j'espère avoir apporté ma pierre à la collégialité, et contribué avec tous à faire en sorte que le Groupe I soit une équipe qui gagne !

R.C.: Vous avez organisé le séminaire de la Cour à Bratislava, ce qui était une façon de plus pour faire connaître la Cour en Slovaquie. Comment le travail de la Cour est-il perçu au niveau national en Slovaquie ?

M. Július Molnár: Comme nous le savons tous, il y a un certain manque de connaissance des citoyens européens vis-à-vis des Institutions européennes en général, et la nôtre n'échappe pas à cette situation. La Cour a entrepris depuis quelques années des efforts vigoureux pour développer et rendre plus efficace sa communication, vers les autres Institutions comme vers les gouvernements et les citoyens. Cela dit, il est clair que le Séminaire des Membres est une bonne occasion supplémentaire de mieux faire connaître la Cour et ses travaux. En Slovaquie, j'ai la conviction que la Cour est une Institution écoutée et respectée. C'est d'autant plus vrai dans la situation budgétaire et financière difficile que traversent aujourd'hui tous les Etats européens. Dans ce contexte, les messages de rigueur, de responsabilité et de transparence qu'adresse la Cour dans ses rapports peuvent constituer un appui précieux pour conforter les efforts des gouvernements dans la même direction.

R.C.: Comment avez-vous vécu les grandes réformes : la mise en place d'une comptabilité patrimoniale à la Commission, le principe du single audit, etc ?

M. Július Molnár: C'est une grande chance d'avoir pu vivre une période marquée par un tel mouvement de modernisation de toutes les règles financières : réforme des outils budgétaires et comptables, refonte des règlements sectoriels, et mise en œuvre d'actions directement inspirées par l'avis de la Cour sur le « single audit ». Participer, en tant qu'auditeur, à des réformes en train de se faire a été assez exaltant, car par définition l'histoire n'est pas écrite : échecs, revirements, bifurcations sont toujours possibles, ce n'est qu'après coup que le paysage traversé se fige. Avec à présent un peu de recul, on peut dire que certaines de ces réformes très lourdes, notamment le passage

à la comptabilité patrimoniale, ont été mises en place avec un assez grand succès, auquel la Cour a du reste contribué par la qualité de ses observations. Cela dit, j'observe une tendance de fond à la « complexification » des règles et des normes, même lorsqu'il s'agit, paradoxalement, de « simplifier », comme dans le cas de la réforme de la PAC de 2003. Cette complexité donne parfois un côté un peu baroque à l'édifice qui se construit sous nos yeux...

R.C.: De quel rapport spécial publié sous votre responsabilité êtes-vous particulièrement fier ?

M. Július Molnár: Je vous dirais sans ambages que je suis fier de tous les rapports spéciaux auquel j'ai contribué, comme l'on est fier de tous ses enfants ! Mais je suis surtout fier des auditeurs qui ont porté avec moi chacun de ces rapports, car c'est bien leur travail et leur ténacité qui ont permis d'élaborer des produits de qualité, capables de traverser toutes les étapes, de surmonter tous les obstacles, jusqu'à l'adoption et à la publication finale. L'accueil fait ensuite à nos travaux par nos partenaires institutionnels et par le grand public est une autre affaire ! L'actualité du moment peut être tournée vers bien d'autres sujets, et nos rapports passer alors presque inaperçus dans l'immédiat. Dans d'autres circonstances, une conjonction d'événements extérieurs peut attirer l'attention des autorités politiques et des médias, et donner du coup à nos rapports une résonance plus forte. C'est ce qui s'est par exemple produit pour le rapport spécial 14/2009 sur le marché du lait, et je m'en réjouis, même s'il faut bien entendu distinguer écho médiatique et impact réel.

R.C.: Quels seront les défis majeurs pour la Cour pour les années à venir?

M. Július Molnár: Je crois que la Cour a déjà fait face depuis 2004, et avec succès, au défis majeurs que constituaient l'arrivée simultanée de 10 Membres supplémentaires, et la forte croissance des effectifs que cet élargissement a entraînée. L'Institution a montré à cette occasion une grande capacité d'adaptation, de réflexion – je pense au « self assessment » par exemple-, et de réforme – notamment avec le plan d'action issu de la « peer-review ». Une étape importante dans la vie de la Cour devrait être franchie en 2010 avec la mise en œuvre d'un nouveau règlement intérieur, c'est-à-dire d'une nouvelle charte pour son organisation et son fonctionnement. Je suis persuadé que l'Institution saura pleinement tirer parti de ces nouvelles règles du jeu. Dans les années à venir, les difficultés pourraient peut-être, à mon avis, moins venir de l'architecture d'ensemble, qui semble à la fois flexible et solide ; mais bien plutôt des « détails », c'est-à-dire de l'accumulation des procédures, des normes et des règles dans tous les processus...Il s'agit bien de la fameuse « complexification » un peu baroque dont je parlais tout à l'heure, qui envahit tous les domaines avec les intentions les plus louables, mais qui peut aussi devenir paralysante. Comment encadrer efficacement les activités sans trop brider les énergies et les initiatives dont nous avons besoin ? La mise en œuvre d'une véritable « simplification » est peut-être le principal défi des années à venir. Mais je garde confiance dans la capacité d'adaptation de l'Institution. Après tout, l'âge classique, avec ses lignes beaucoup plus sobres, a bien succédé au foisonnement de l'époque baroque !



INTERPARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY OF EU FUNDS IN EU MEMBER STATES, 28-29 JANUARY 2010, THE HAGUE

By Rosmarie Carotti



Photo: Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal

Improving National Accountability of EU funds' Interparliamentary Conference. The Hague, 28-29 January 2010

The context: On 18 March 2004, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) adopted the Opinion No 2/2004 on the 'single audit' model. Since the 2004 discharge, which was given in April 2006 and for which Mr Terry Wynn, the British Member of the Committee on Budgetary Control of the European Parliament (COCOBU) was the rapporteur, the European Parliament has asked that there should be National Declarations by the Ministers of Finance of each Member State. Examples are the Dutch EU Member State declaration by the Dutch Algemene Rekenkamer and the 'Consolidated statement of the use of EU funds in the UK' which was audited by the UK NAO.

National audit reports and certificates, however, are not restricted to National Declarations (see for example the report of the Danish Rigsrevisionen). The term rather comprises all types of voluntary audit engagements by national audit bodies in relation to the use of EU funds, excluding legally required reports and certificates. In line with its Opinion N° 6/2007, the Court mentions the following sources of additional evidence for the ECA's Statement of assurance : annual summaries, national declarations and national audit reports and certificates.

'Annual summaries' provide an overview of the available audits and declarations and are produced annually by Member States in the context of shared management for all on-going programming periods. They are required by Art. 53b (3) of the Financial Regulation (FR) and Art. 42a of its Implementing Rules (IR).

Enhanced cooperation with national institutions is supported by the ECA. It is also a concept discussed within the Think-Tank created in the ECA. The issue is to assess in how far the ECA can rely on the work carried out in the Member States and then how to find a modus operandi.

In this moment, the Court continues to explore if, and to what extent, opinions produced by national audit bodies on systems and/or the legality and regularity of income and expenditure may constitute audit evidence on which the Court can place reliance. In this respect the Court is participating in a pilot project of joint audits with other Supreme Audit Institutions of EU Member States.

The Public Expenditure Committee of the House of Representatives of the States General of The Netherlands had convened a meeting on 28-29 January 2010 in The Hague under the label "Interparliamentary Conference", reflecting the fact that the main invitees were representatives of the Public Account Committees in the different Member States. A few years earlier the COCOBU of the European Parliament organised a similar conference with the participation of the budgetary control committees of the Parliaments of the Member States.

The aim of the Conference in The Hague was to step up efforts to further improve national accountability of EU spending. For this purpose a discussion paper had been sent to the participants to gather comments in advance of the conference, in order to structure discussions and prioritize issues. This paper and other relevant information such as the speeches, presentations given during the Conference and the final Conference statement can be found on the website of the Dutch House of Representatives: www.houseofrepresentatives.nl/conference.

The key note speakers were:

For the European Parliament, [Mr. de Magistris, Chair of the Committee on Budgetary Control \(COCOBU\)](#);

For the European Court of Auditors (ECA), Prof. Bonnici, the Member responsible for the declaration of assurance (DAS),

For the Dutch Court of Audit, [Mr. De Vries, Vice-President of the Dutch Court of Audit](#)

Mr Engwirda, Dutch Member of the Court, was also present in the "Oude Zaal" of the House of Representatives in The Hague, as the conference was organised by the Dutch Budgetary Control Committee, of which he was the Chairman for eight years when he was a Member of the national Parliament.

Mr Ten Hoopen, vice President of the House of Representatives of The Netherlands opened the session on Friday 29 January focusing on national accountability of EU funds. He then introduced the first key-note speaker, Mr de Magistris, Chairman of the Committee on Budgetary Control of the European Parliament.

As former prosecutor in Italy, Mr de Magistris, while recognising the excellent work done by the ECA in the field of combating financial irregularities, stressed the risk of fraud in public expense including the international ramifications of organised crime. His wish was greater independence for OLAF from the Commission and the creation of a European Prosecutor's Office.

After him, Prof. Bonnici focused in his presentation on the role of the ECA, on the declaration of assurance (DAS) and on the results of the audits as per its 2008 Annual Report.

Each year the ECA has taken an independent sample for DAS purposes and the results have proven to be consistent over time. The DAS has withstood a detailed, technical and critical assessment by the peers. Even if the ECA's analysis is not by Member State or expenditure, it does provide feedback at the national level and the results from the samples are an important indicator.

This statement of assurance is divided into two parts; one is an assessment on the reliability of the accounts of the European Union and here the ECA has for the last two years been able to give a 'clean' opinion. The second part deals with the regularity and legality of underlying transactions. There has been progress but problems persist.

In this context, Prof. Bonnici mentioned that the Court will be taking part in a pilot-project on coordinated audits involving 3 SAIs (one of these SAIs is that of the Netherlands, the other ones being the Czech Republic and Denmark). The Court's position concerning coordinated / joint audits will then be formulated according to the feedback from this pilot project.



First from right : Mr Maarten Engwirda, Member of the Court

Around 80% of the EU budget falls under "shared management", most of which is related to structural funds, agriculture and rural development. Over 80% of the expenditure concerns payments in form of grants made on the basis of claims submitted by many and diverse final beneficiaries. These payments represent therefore a high risk area. Another problem is the complexity of the rules applied in the implementation of so many different expenditure programmes in the Member States. Much of these funds is managed by local authorities.

The ECA has highlighted the importance of effective primary controls, i.e. at the level where the money is spent. This stresses the importance of the role of Member States, of national parliaments and institutions and the need to establish closer cooperation between ECA and national SAIs with due respect of the respective mandates and mutual independence.

Mr Engwirda, Member of the Court, said he very much believes in this cooperation and in stimulating the budgetary control committees of the other Member States of the EU to encourage their Ministers of Finance to come with national declarations. He personally had encouraged the Minister of Finance of his country, the Netherlands, to provide a national declaration. Mr Engwirda is convinced that this is the way to improve the financial management of the EU because so much money is spent in and by the Member States.

Since 2007, the Dutch government voluntarily issues an EU Member State Declaration in which it accounts for the EU funds it has received in shared management with the European Commission.

In the discussions, many Member States described their role in controlling EU expenditure at national level and Sweden stressed that its government has as of the first of January 2008 a new framework. The aim is to secure the proper use of EU funds through issuing a National Declaration on a voluntary basis to the Swedish Parliament, the ECA and the EU Commission.

Some Member States were of the opinion that their systems were functioning very well and that national declarations therefore would not add value or they questioned the cost/benefit ratio in national declarations.

The morning session was closed by Mr Frans de Nérée tot Babberich, a Member of the Dutch House of Representatives. The political problem today, he said, was that the accountability of the EU funding has been below the standards set by the ECA and the European countries themselves

for too many years. Nevertheless there is a large consensus on the need to improve national accountability of the EU funds, even more so in the light of the present financial crisis.

As he stressed, the Lisbon Treaty gives national parliaments a more prominent role in influencing European policies. The new Treaty also explicitly mentions that the management and control on the EU funding is shared responsibility between Member States and European institutions. In the spirit of subsidiarity, spending from the EU funds at national level is best managed by national and regional authorities.

The European financial regulation specifies, so Mr de Nérée, that all Member States have to issue the so-called Annual Summary of audits of the EU funding in their country. These Annual Summaries however lack elements to make them a suitable tool to account for all EU funds. And not all Annual Summaries contain the same elements. The Annual Summaries need therefore to be improved. That was also the conclusion of a study made by the European Parliament last year. This implies a change of the financial regulation, which has to be revised anyway following the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. But national Members of Parliament do not need to wait for the EU legislation to change and can already take measures.

There are at least two important elements of EU legislation to review: the financial regulation and the interinstitutional agreement, which will be largely incorporated into the financial regulation. Both legal texts contain rules on management and accountability of the EU funds.

In Mr de Nérée tot Babberich's view, the way EU funding is organised in Europe in a very complicated bureaucratic way which does not help to improve the accountability of these funds and is not the most efficient way to spend taxpayers money. Therefore, simplification of the budget and of budgetary procedures and rules is more than necessary. National SAIs do have all the resources and instruments they need. If best practices in the Member States are identified in a more structured way and if best practices are rewarded, then the ECA can devote more its resources to regions where major deficiencies persist.

Mr Gijs de Vries, Vice-President of the Netherlands Court of Audit, recalled that the European Union's budget may represent only around 1% of EU GNI, but at over 141 billion euro it exceeds the national budgets of several EU Member States. The Member States, together with the European Commission, are responsible for improving the legality, regularity and effectiveness of the EU expenditure. The European Commission, for example, has drafted Annual Activity Reports by its Directorates general and also a synthesis report. At national level, Member States issue Annual Summaries and some Member States issue National Declarations. The SAIs are conducting more audits on the implementation of the EU funds in the Member States. The number of the European SAIs which issue overall reports on European financial management has now risen to ten.

Mr de Vries then referred to the intervention of Mr de Magistris on fighting fraud at European level. OLAF has an important role to play in this field at European level. However, OLAF needs the cooperation of national authorities, national prosecutors. It is important for the European and national Parliaments to ensure that this cooperation materializes and is also extended to Eurojust, the agency where investigating judges and prosecutors work together to improve the respect of European law.

Turning back to the ways national and European institutions can improve regularity, legality and effectiveness of the underlying transactions in the EU budget, he focused on the role of national parliaments and SAIs. To be able to effectively monitor public spending, national parliaments must be properly informed. Instruments such as National Declarations and Annual Summaries can be particularly useful to improve the necessary transparency and accountability to national parliaments. It is important however to note the differences between the two tools. They differ as to their status, content and liability.

Member States declarations are public documents, available to national parliaments and to citizens. While National Declarations should provide assurance about the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions of the EU expenditure, Annual Summaries do not. The summaries summarize the available information on accountability reporting and audits at national level.

Furthermore, the National Declarations of Denmark, The Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom have been audited by the national Audit Office in each country. The Annual Summaries, by contrast, have not been subject to independent external scrutiny by the national SAI.

However as several Member States have proven reluctant to provide National Declarations and the Commission has offered only tepid support. If national Parliaments are to receive full and independent audited information about the spending of European funds in their country, they will to have further insist on this matter. They may invite their national government to issue an annual Member State declaration. They could also ask their SAI to provide an independent assessment. National parliaments may also find it useful to discuss the annual report and certain special reports by the ECA which often contain important information for the respective Member State as well as reports by national SAIs.

Ultimately, accountability by national governments about the legality and regularity of EU spending in the Member States must not be left to the discretion of governments. Accountability to the people should be an obligation, not a matter of choice. The obligation to issue a Member State declaration and to have it audited by the SAI should be included in the European Union's financial regulation. The current financial regulation is under review, and reflection about its revision will be a priority on the agenda of the incoming Commission. The European Commission should exercise its responsibility under the Treaty and issue the necessary proposal. The European Parliament could strengthen the Commission's position.

National Declarations are nevertheless a still imperfect instrument. They need to be aligned so that they can be compared at international level and there is still scope for improvement.. In The Netherlands, for example, the National Declaration so far only applies to expenditure by the EU; it does not yet cover the remittances provided by the Dutch to the European Union. But payments to Brussels are equally important to the citizens as payments from Brussels.

In the meantime transparency and accountability could be enhanced if Member States agreed to publish their Annual Summaries. This would permit the Commission in turn to publish the recommendations it provides to Member States to improve the quality of the Annual Summaries.

Some have argued that possibly the best way to enable the ECA to provide a positive declaration of assurance would be to increase the tolerable level of error. The European Commission in particular has invited reflection on the tolerable risk of error. There is, indeed, a strong argument to be made that the cost of control should not be disproportionate to its benefits. In fact, the Committee of Presidents of SAIs in the Union is preparing a report on the cost of controls in the Member States.

Mr de Vries, as he said, trusts that this report will be made available to all national parliaments. However a note of caution should persist. The cost of control of the European budget depends to a considerable degree on the nature of the underlying regulations. The more complex the rules, the higher the costs of control is likely to be. Of course, greater complexity also contributes to higher rates of error. Furthermore, the cost of control by Member States tends to be influenced by the quality of the national systems of control. Efforts should therefore be focused on simplification of the regulations at European level and improvement of control systems at national level rather than on increasing the tolerable level of error.



Prof. Josef Bonnici's presentation of the DAS

The final point raised by Mr de Vries was that attention needs to be paid not only to the legality and regularity of EU spending but also to the effectiveness of expenditure. He underlined that much time and effort is being invested in improving the conditions for the ECA to issue a positive DAS, and rightly so. Improving the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions must remain a priority both of the institutions of the European Union and of national authorities. However, public expenditure must not only be rule-based but also effective. Governments are expected to provide value for money, regardless of whether the funds are raised domestically or provided by the European Union. The ECA is to be commended for the increasing attention to performance audits of the policies of the European Union and the role of the Commission.

One consequence of the process of European integration is that the legitimacy of the national States has become inextricably intertwined with the legitimacy of the EU. National institutions and European institutions must work together, respectful of each other's responsibilities and independence, but with the common objective of safeguarding the public interest.

Summing up, the Conference fully met its aims, to bring together Members of Parliament of national budget control committees from EU countries, to discuss their role in controlling EU expenditure in their respective Member States and to talk about improving accountability of EU funds in general.

Nothing nevertheless in the proceedings of the Conference is to be considered as binding. It was an exchange of views and general discussion. Within this context, the organisers did also sound out the representatives of the Public Accounts Committees whether they would support the formulation of a resolution which could be forwarded to the COSAC Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the EU (COSAC). (<http://www.cosac.eu/en/>). The draft resolution was adopted by acclamation. However, this initiative did not involve the Court in any manner. It must be noted that this item was discussed only in the second session of the conference (Perspectives in the Member States) and not in the first session (Accountability in Europe) where Prof Bonnici and De Magistris (COCOBU) were the key speakers. Their role was that of "invited guests" and they were not part of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly.

To say it in the words of Mr Engwirda, it was just an exchange of views but every representative, every national budgetary Control Committee can draw its own conclusions and hopefully see the need of responsabilizing its Member State.



ANNUAL MEETING OF AUDIT GROUP IV OF THE ECA on 21 January 2010

By Maura McElhinney



Mrs Irena Petruškevičienė, Dean of Group IV

Ms Irena Petruškevičienė, Dean of Group IV, convened this second part of the Group's annual meeting in the wake of the seminar «The Risk of Fraud - What is our Role?», on which the Journal reported in its November edition. While that first part was devoted to a professional topic, the purpose of this part of the annual meeting was to share views and ideas on the Group's activities and to suggest ideas for the future. The Dean recalled that such annual meetings had now become a good tradition; also aimed at enhancing the team spirit in the group.

Audit Group IV assesses both the collection and the spending of EU funds and covers a range of diverse areas: Administrative expenditure of the European Union Institutions; Borrowing, lending and banking activities; Agencies and other decentralised bodies; Internal policies of the European Union; and Revenue of the European Union.

Ms Petruškevičienė recalled some major developments in terms of work output over the last twelve months, noting that Group IV provided four of the eleven chapters of the annual report and three of the fourteen special reports published in 2009.

As regards staff movements, the last year brought a change at the helm of the directorate of the group. Between January 2009 and January 2010, 19 staff left the audit units and the directorate of the group, whilst 26 joined.

Ms Petruškevičienė, whose mandate will come to an end in May this year, also addressed some changes which are likely to affect the Group's activities this year.

If the Council gives the green light for the Court's new rules of procedure, the Court will in future operate in Chambers instead of Groups. This reorganisation coincides with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty but is not triggered by the Lisbon Treaty.

As Ms Petruškevičienė explained, in fact, the Court is now going to use an option which has already existed for many years - to give more responsibility to groups of Members, including the responsibility to adopt a final product, such as a special report or an opinion, for publication without first referring it to the Court.

Nevertheless, she felt that the new Treaty will bring additional challenges for the audits in the field of administrative expenditure of Group IV. To mention just one: the creation of the new European External Action Service.

Ms Petruškevičienė then gave the floor to Mr Mark Crisp, who as Director of the Group presented his views on potential areas for improvement.

He explained that the target of Group IV is to deliver 10 special reports in the four-year period 2009 - 2012. To this purpose, he examined the key performance indicators applied, particularly KPI 7 on the timeliness of Statements of Preliminary Findings (SPFs). Mr Crisp was pleased to report that the Group's achievement in 2009 in issuing 47% of SPFs within the required eight-week timeframe exceeded the Court's target of 36%.

However, it was noted that different targets for SPF issuance may be needed for DAS and performance audits; allowances for holiday periods may need to be built into the system; KPIs are only indicators and that analysis of reasons for deviations is important; and the primary measurement of an audit is its quality, which may be overlooked if there is an undue focus on timeliness.

Mr Crisp also addressed what he felt were the main points emerging from the 2008 discharge meetings with the Budget Committee of the Council, some of which may be relevant to AGIV. These included concerns expressed by some delegations in the Council about the sample sizes, the approach regarding the audit of advances, the number of final beneficiaries audited, the comparison between chapters and the sometimes very small areas of the budget concerned. While recognising that the key issue is what is expressed in the Discharge Resolution, which may differ from these points, it was nevertheless noted that the points raised are important, and that the Court should address them and be prepared to defend its methodology.

Mr Crisp expressed the view that the future set-up of the Court, and its reorganisation in Chambers, would be a major challenge and wondered if it could entail changes in the responsibilities of the audit directorates. Members highlighted the two main changes to be introduced under the Chamber system: the increased responsibility to be given to Chambers, which will adopt certain documents without reference to the Court, and the fact that the Administrative Committee in essence becomes the Court's management committee, to assure greater coherence concerning strategic issues. It was agreed that time is needed to see how Chambers will work in practice.

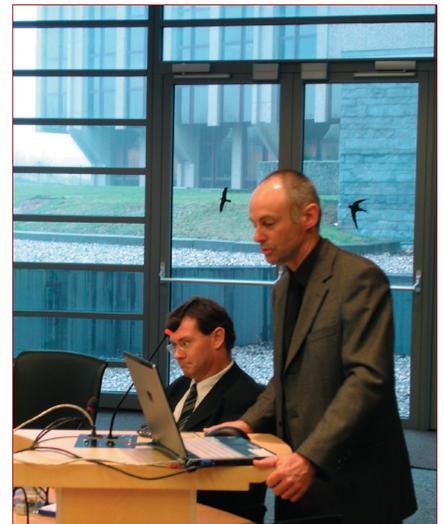
Other matters raised included the following:

the potential for pooling and mobility of auditors across Units;

the search for a solution concerning the audit of agencies whose number is likely to increase further;

the need to consider the Commission's upcoming papers on tolerable risk of error;

the request to Directorates to identify ways to improve COMPASS.



Mr Mark Crisp, Director of Group IV



Left to right: Mr Peter Schoenberger, Head of Cabinet, Mrs Irena Petruškevičienė, Member of the Court and Mr Igors Ludboržs, Member of the Court



LES AVANTAGES D'UNE BASE DE DONNÉES POUR LES TRAVAUX DE LA COUR, LE CAS DES BÉNÉFICIAIRES DE LA PAC

Questions posées à Maria Luisa Gomez (NR3) et Ignacio Calleja (AMS)

par Rosmarie Carotti

A l'initiative des unités AMS et NR3, l'unité de la Formation professionnelle a convié le personnel à une présentation donnée par Maria Luisa Gomez-Valcárcel (NR3) et Ignacio Calleja (AMS) sur la création d'une base de données avec les données des paiements effectués aux bénéficiaires de la Politique Agricole Commune (PAC). Cette approche s'avère très utile pour les analyses et la prise de connaissance des bénéficiaires, des lignes budgétaires etc. ainsi que pour l'identification d'éventuels sujets d'audit, la préparation des missions etc..



Mme Maria Luisa Gomez

R. C.: Dans votre présentation vous avez montré le projet développé conjointement par les unités AMS et NR3 pour la création d'une base de données concernant les bénéficiaires de la Politique Agricole Commune.

Pouvez-vous expliquer les principaux passages des données, du bénéficiaire, de l'État membre, de la Commission à votre nouvelle base de données?

Maria Luisa Gomez (NR3) et Ignacio Calleja (AMS): Dans le cadre de la procédure d'apurement des comptes et suite aux dispositions du Règlement N° 885/2006, les États Membres doivent adresser à la Commission des fichiers informatiques avec le détail des paiements et recettes effectués par les organismes payeurs pour le compte du Feaga et Feader. Ils sont connus comme les fichiers CATS (Clearance Audit Trail System) dont la forme et le contenu sont établis par la Commission via les règlements successifs «des tableaux des X », pour l'exercice 2009 le règlement (CE) 941/2008.



M. Ignacio Calleja

Les fichiers sont habituellement «récupérés» par les auditeurs du Groupe I directement sur le serveur de la Commission grâce à des accès mis à disposition par celle-ci, et analysés sur une base individuelle (les données d'un État Membre pour un exercice). Récemment l'unité NR3 a lancé un projet de création et de mise à disposition des auditeurs du groupe d'une base de données sur la base des fichiers des derniers exercices pour l'ensemble des États Membres, qui permettra des analyses beaucoup plus détaillées.

R. C.: Quelles sont les questions auxquelles vous êtes à même de répondre grâce à cette nouvelle base de données?

Maria Luisa Gomez (NR3) et Ignacio Calleja (AMS): Cette approche permettra de réaliser des analyses plus approfondies (évolution des données, comparaison entre les États Membres, identification de «faiblesses », analyse des modalités de mise en œuvre des actions de la PAC par les États Membres, analyse des bénéficiaires, connaissance du degré de concentration des paiements concernant les différentes lignes budgétaires, identification des principaux bénéficiaires par ligne budgétaire aussi bien à niveau de EU-27 ou à l'intérieur d'un État Membre etc...), de faciliter la préparation des missions grâce à la disponibilité immédiate de certaines informations, ainsi que d'identifier des éventuels sujets d'audit.

R. C.: Vous avez dit qu'à 20% des bénéficiaires de la PAC reviennent 80% des aides. Il s'agit donc en grande partie de sociétés qui opèrent pour des plus ou moins petits propriétaires. Sera-t-il un jour possible d'identifier ces derniers?

Maria Luisa Gomez (NR3) et Ignacio Calleja (AMS): Dans la majorité des États Membres les codes d'identification unique des bénéficiaires ne permettent pas une distinction « directe » entre personnes physiques et morales, ce qui empêche de connaître la participation des deux catégories de bénéficiaires dans les différents « catégories » de paiements.

D'autre part, l'identification que vous évoquez serait seulement possible après la publication de la liste des propriétaires des sociétés bénéficiaires des aides. Cette mesure qui a déjà été mise en place par exemple par les États-Unis, nous semble loin d'être envisageable dans certains des États Membres.

R. C.: L'utilité d'une base est fonction de la fiabilité des données stockées. Quelles sont les faiblesses que vous avez rencontrées dans l'encodage des données? Quelles améliorations préconisez-vous aux différents niveaux (États, Commission, Cour)?

Maria Luisa Gomez (NR3) et Ignacio Calleja (AMS): Nous avons constaté des faiblesses dans l'encodage de données relatives au nom et l'adresse ainsi que dans l'attribution des codes d'identification unique des bénéficiaires.

A priori c'est une indication de l'existence de faiblesses dans les systèmes des États Membres, mais une analyse au cas par cas permettrait d'en connaître les causes et leur importance ainsi que les éventuelles améliorations. Évidemment, un système informatique unique pour l'ensemble des organismes payeurs d'un État Membre, permettant un encodage unique par bénéficiaire indépendamment de la localisation de ses exploitations et des types d'aides ainsi que la réalisation de contrôles de cohérence des données, réduit considérablement le risque d'erreurs.

R. C.: Pensez-vous qu'il sera un jour possible d'avoir un code unique européen? Quel en serait l'avantage?

Maria Luisa Gomez (NR3) et Ignacio Calleja (AMS): La mise en place d'un code unique européen exigerait un système centralisé à la Commission européenne pour son attribution et son contrôle.

Ce code unique permettrait la consolidation des données « européennes » des bénéficiaires et donc une image plus fidèle de la distribution des fonds de la Politique Agricole Commune. À l'heure actuelle ni la Commission ni les États Membres n'envisagent son instauration. Peut être dans le futur...



THE SPECIAL REPORT ON PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMME AND ITS HEALTH PROMOTION ACTIONS

By Jana Hošková, Auditor of Group II

Late October 2009 the Training Department together with the audit team organised a lunchtime presentation on the performance audit that led to the Special Report 02/2009 on the Public Health Programme (2003-2007) (PHP) and its health promotion actions, published by the Court in July 2009. This article provides you with an insight into the background, audit criteria and questions, methods and lessons learnt.



Mrs Jana Hošková

What is the audit background?

Public health policy is a relatively new area in the EU. The major impetus was provided by the EU Treaty which introduced a specific article on public health in 1993. Article 152 was crucial to our audit in that it sets out clearly the competences of Member States and the Commission¹. The PHPs have been directly managed by the Commission since 1996. The projects funded were administered by the DG for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) until 2005, when a new Public Health Executive Agency (later EAHC) was established.

The overall aim of the PHP “to protect human health and improve public health” was broken down into three general objectives which also defined the three programme strands: health information, health threats, and health determinants. The three strands of PHP are relatively diverse, therefore the audit covered only health determinants. This was the largest of the three strands in budgetary terms, with an EC contribution of app. 81 million euro. The PHP was assigned a total budget of app. 354 million euro for the 2003-2008 period (originally projected for 6 years). 352 projects with an EC contribution totalling 232 million euro were funded during the period 2003-2007. The grant agreements are normally concluded with a co-financing of 60% (exceptionally up to 80%). On 1 January 2008 the PHP was replaced by the Second Health Programme projected for 2008-2013. The concept and structure of the new programme was used for comparison and the proposed recommendations were tested on the new programme. This was appreciated by the Parliament and the Council. It helps them identify those areas where action can be taken.

This performance audit was the first the Court carried out on the area. Being of lower budgetary importance compared to other policy areas, public health had not previously been audited by the Court.

What were the audit questions and what did we conclude?

The audit was on the effectiveness of the projects, ie. whether the right conditions were set for the success of the projects financed from the EU budget.

¹ The Commission's main role in the area of public health is to facilitate cooperation between Member States authorities and to implement the incentive measures foreseen by the Treaty, mostly by lending financial support to final beneficiaries. Community activities should be directed towards “improving public health, preventing human illnesses and diseases, and obviating sources of danger to human health”.

The main question was broken down to three sub-questions:

1) if the design of the PHP provided a suitable framework for the effective implementation and monitoring of actions; 2) if the Commission ensured, at the programme implementation and project selection stage, that projects were likely to achieve sustainable results, were complementary and provided EU added value; and 3) if the Commission and project coordinators ensured that projects were managed effectively.

The Court concluded that it was difficult for the projects to demonstrate any impact on the citizens' health. As a consequence, the Court questioned the utility of the third strand of the PHP. With this conclusion we targetted not only the Commission, but also the legislators who approved the Programme Decision in 2002. The three institutions should reconsider the scope for EU public health activities, and specify objectives that are commensurate with the available budget. They should also reconsider the approach to EU funding in this area. Therefore the current cooperation mechanisms, such as the open method of coordination, should be used to greater extent.²

What methods were used to collect audit evidence?

We used several methods of enquiry and undertook extensive scientific and policy papers study. On the programme level the audit was based on an analysis of PHP and a review of evaluations, and on an analysis of six selected areas such as drugs, alcohol, tobacco, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, and nutrition and physical activity.

On the project level, we conducted a quantitative portfolio analysis of the whole population of PHP projects. There we performed a budgetary analysis, time to contract, success rate of project proposals and analysis of all action areas where the projects could apply for funding. A detailed qualitative assessment of a sample of 36 projects was complemented by on-the-spot visits to several Member States and phone interviews. Related to this assessment was also the online survey of project partners with a response rate of 47,9%. The main assumption was that a prerequisite for a successful project is a well-working and balanced partnership.

Further, we interviewed staff from the DG SANCO, from the EAHC and consulted stakeholders from several national ministries of health and national public health institutes. A group of experts³ was convened twice, at the APM stage in order to help the audit team define the audit criteria, for example by suggesting the „Research-Development-Implementation cycle“ as a framework for analysis, and at the end of the audit field work by reviewing the preliminary audit findings and discussing potential recommendations.

2 For the answers to the three subquestions please see the pages 40-42 of the SR 02/2009 on <http://eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/2838313.PDF>

3 Experts are used increasingly at the Court. The Court is not an expert in public health. Experts help the audit team to put things in the right context. The use of experts provides assurance for the institution. But the tasks and responsibilities of the experts need to be clearly defined.

What were the audit criteria applied?

Health promotion theory was used to understand what kind of outcomes projects were intended to produce and if this is in line with the types of action the Commission can support. These criteria were specific for this audit. Generally accepted management theory developed standards such as SMART criteria for objectives were used, but adapted to the health promotion actions. (EQUIHP tool)⁴ We ran a survey among the project participants and consulted the AMS department and used ECA interview and evaluation techniques (for ex-post evaluations of the projects: usefulness, coherence, robustness, impartiality and clarity).

The audit team used the legal framework as an audit criterion. One can argue that this is compliance rather than performance audit. We were convinced that a performance audit does necessarily include compliance issues. In a project-based performance audit, the legal framework can answer serious questions of inconsistency among projects, duplicity, lack of monitoring, or such a basic question of why the project did not accomplish its objectives. However, the legal framework was used only at later stage.

Project-based audit requires following the life cycle of a project, of course. Widely used project management criteria for partnership assessment, dissemination activities, evaluation were applied. A new concept, the so-called RDI cycle or research-development-implementation cycle was developed together with the group of experts in order to identify the sustainability potential of project outputs and European added value.

Probably the most complicated issue to solve was how to measure the sustainability of project results. We considered that the results of a public health action should outlive the project and should be effective. It is often argued that these actions bring social, health, even economic or political outcomes only in the long-term perspective. It was evident to us that the HP actions under PHP, with their limited duration and limited resources, cannot cover the full cycle of health promotion actions, from setting up an evidence base to developing and implementing a public intervention and creating a sustainable health impact. But they should have a sustainability plan for their achieved project outputs and results. We found that many projects did not set out from the beginning how to disseminate their results to others. In addition, not all projects fitted the cycle. 13 networks developed several activities at the same time and their projects did not always develop an innovative output, let's say a new type of intervention among schoolchildren to fight obesity. Their hidden, but still important, objective was to sustain a community of scientists or NGOs and to provide a forum for debate (or for an exchange of good practices).

The same categorisation of projects were used for the identification of European added value (EVR), normally a very disputed concept which we interpreted in accordance with RTD programmes on public health as "the value resulting from EU support for public health activities which is additional

4 <http://ws5.e-vision.nl/system3/images/Annexe%2010%20EQUIHP.pdf>

to the value that would have resulted from public health activities funded at regional and national levels by both public authorities and private sector." In the end, we detected the EAV in the networks. The lowest probability of EAV was exhibited by the full-scale implementation projects.

What were the challenges encountered during the audit?

Challenges are inherent in every audit. The initial phase of specifying robust audit criteria was a major challenge for the audit. How to understand and apply the SMART criteria? At which level of objectives? At the general, immediate or operational level? How to verify the European added value? How to measure the success of an action? And how should an ideal public health project or action look like? And should we prioritise one qualitative method over the other? Should a survey with overly positive results be still scrutinised or taken as such? How to assess the utility of such a small and diverse programme as the PHP which dispersed its funds into so many actions?

It took a long time to finish this special report. The Preliminary Study was commissioned already in 2004 within DAS, first on efficiency and later on effectiveness. Audit Group II did not approve the PS, nevertheless, it was decided to undertake a pilot PS and examine the area closely. This led to an APM which was conditionally approved in February 2007 because ADAR had serious objections to the audit evidence collection plan. Then we recruited four experts via a tendering procedure and prepared a new evidence collection plan which after discussions with ADAR was approved in October 2007. The audit field work could finally start and took 8 months – from November 2007 to June 2008. In July 2008 we sent one SPF to DG SANCO. The rest went smoothly and the special report was published in July 2009. Therefore, the main challenge among the audit milestones was the preliminary study stage which on the other hand helped the audit criteria to mature and the audit to proceed without disruptions.

Our audit team consisted of two auditors fully assigned to this task who divided the work into two equal parts. Usually both auditors, for some only one, took part in all missions to the Member States and to the Commission. Knowledge therefore stayed within the audit team and we reaped all the benefits. We managed to respect all deadlines and underspend the allocated budget.

What is coming next?

The Court will most probably undertake a follow-up audit when the Commission will come up with a new Programme proposal in 2011. The Court could also assess and comment on the accompanying impact assessment. This option is still to be discussed.



IX Séminaire sur la Cour des Comptes européenne et le contrôle des fonds communautaires pour les auditeurs des Organes de Contrôle externe espagnols.



Les 26 et 27 novembre 2009, 42 auditeurs des Organes de Contrôle externe espagnols ont assisté au Séminaire sur la Cour des Comptes européenne et le contrôle des fonds communautaires. L'idée de ce séminaire est de renforcer les liens entre la Cour et les organes de contrôle externe (Cours des comptes nationale et régionales espagnoles) à travers un échange d'information et des méthodes de travail, contribuant ainsi à une plus grande prise de conscience des auditeurs sur l'importance qu'occupent les fonds européens et leur contrôle.

Le jeudi 26 novembre, dans son allocution de bienvenue, Mme Sabine Hiernaux, Chef de cabinet de M. Juan Ramallo, Membre de la Cour, a souligné l'importance des relations entre la Cour des Comptes européenne d'une part et les Cours Nationale et Régionales d'autre part, dans le contexte d'une gestion par les administrations des États membres d'une part importante du budget communautaire.

Le séminaire a ensuite débuté avec une présentation général de notre Institution par de M. Eduardo Ruiz García, Secrétaire Général, et Mme Belén Martínez, Chef adjoint de notre cabinet. Celle-ci a été suivie par une présentation sur le contrôle et la gestion des fonds de l'agriculture et des ressources naturelles par M. Rogelio Abarquero et Mme Aurelia Petliza, Auditeurs au Groupe I.

Après la pause déjeuner, les auditeurs ont assisté à la présentation de M. Ignacio Calleja (Auditeur à ADAR) sur l'audit informatique, présentation que nous avons ajoutée au programme de cette année.

Le reste de l'après midi a été consacré au cas pratique relatif à l'audit sur la légalité et la régularité des programmes cofinancés par le Fond Social Européen. L'atelier de travail organisé et supervisé par Daniel Costa de Magalhaes (Auditeur), Fabrice Mercade (Chef de cabinet de M. Heikensten) et Juan Ignacio González Bastero (Chef de cabinet de M. Noack) a suscité un vif intérêt de la part des assistants.

La matinée du vendredi 27 novembre a été consacrée à l'exposé de M. Joaquim González, Chef d'Unité de l'OLAF, sur le travail de l'OLAF, suivi par Emilio Camba Barbolla, Auditeur Interne de la Commission pour une présentation sur le Service d'Audit Interne de la Commission.

Enfin, Mme Carmen Jiménez (Auditeur) et MM. Juan Ignacio González Bastero et Jorge Guevarra (Auditeur) ont présenté « Le contrôle des politiques de cohésion, transport, recherche et énergie ».

L'après-midi, M. Miguel Martínez Gimeno, Référendaire au sein du Cabinet de Mme Silva de Lapuerta, Juge de la Cour de Justice de l'UE, a exposé le système juridictionnel de l'UE. M. François Osete (Chef de cabinet de M. Kazamias) et M. Martínez Gimeno se sont ensuite concentrés plus en détail sur le cas ISMERI en expliquant le contexte d'audit ayant donné matière à ce cas, les arguments juridiques de la sentence et des conclusions de l'Avocat général avec les implications pour la Cour des comptes Européenne.

Dans son discours de clôture, M. Juan Ramallo, Membre de la Cour, a remercié nos collègues auditeurs pour l'intérêt suscité par ce séminaire.

L'enquête de satisfaction que nous faisons circuler en fin de session a démontré que ce séminaire continue d'intéresser nos collègues auditeurs espagnols, et leur degré de satisfaction quant au contenu des présentations et au professionnalisme de nos collègues auditeurs à la Cour.

Notre cabinet profite donc de cette occasion pour remercier tous les intervenants dans ce séminaire pour leurs efforts et la qualité de leurs présentations en cette période de fin d'année où la charge de travail est importante et durant laquelle ils se sont montrés disponibles et professionnels.

The Chairman Professor Bonnici, Member of the European Court of Auditors opened the proceedings with the adoption of the agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting of the Working Group held on 8-9 October 2009 .

It was also the first get-together after the meeting of the Contact Committee of the Supreme Audit Institutions of the EU in Budapest, November 31- December 1 of last year, where the different competencies of the national EU SAIs and ECA were discussed. The Working Group saw it therefore as a very important task to concentrate in this meeting on the formulation of an information note encompassing all the work done in the last three years in the field of compliance and performance audit and focusing on the audit experiences of SAIs and ECA.

The scope of the Working Group has changed in line with the developments in the last years. The elaboration of the Exposure Drafts of the ISSAIs 3000 and 4000 had the consequence of establishing the general principles, while application and other explanatory material are still being developed. As auditing standards already exist, the time has come to clarify the audit objectives of SAIs and ECA in the context of the EU and analyse the ISSAIs again. It is an objective of the Working Group to give indications on how to apply standards in the EU context.

It is therefore important to elaborate further the mapping exercise, analysing how SAIs carry out audits in the context of EU funds. The final text of the Working Group should not aim at giving guidelines but contain an exchange of experiences and information.

The next meeting of the Working Group will be held on 3-4 May 2010, by when the participants are expected to have handed in their last case studies describing best practices in their country.

**EU, CHINA, JAPAN, THE UNITED STATES:
COMPARISON OF SELECTED MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS, 2008**



A selection of data by Alina Milasiute

EU, China, Japan, the United States: Comparison of Selected Macroeconomic Indicators, 2008.

Gross domestic product, 2008, constant prices, annual percent change 1/

Euro area	0,72
European Union	1,02
China	9,01
Japan	-0,71
United States	0,44

Source: Worldbank, World Development Indicators Database.

1/ Annual percentages of constant price GDP are year-on-year changes; the base year is country-specific.

EU-27 Imports, 2008, millions of euros

China	247 916
Japan	75 159
United States	186 886

Source: Eurostat.

EU-27 Exports, 2008, millions of euros

China	78 430
Japan	42 243
United States	249 959

Source: Eurostat.

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