



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 5.9.2011
COM(2011) 537 final

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Midterm evaluation of the Customs 2013 programme

1. CONTEXT

The Customs 2013 programme was established by Decision 624/2007/EC¹ as a multiannual action programme for customs in the Community to support and complement action undertaken by Member States in ensuring the effective functioning of the internal market in the customs field. It builds upon four previous programmes (Matthaeus, Customs 2000, Customs 2002 and Customs 2007).

The primary beneficiaries of the programme are the customs administrations of the Member States; further beneficiaries are other participating countries' administrations and traders. Currently, the programme is open to EU Member States, candidate countries and potential candidates, and countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy. In addition to 27 EU Member States, four other countries take part in the programme: Turkey and Croatia (both joined the previous programme), Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (which joined the current programme in 2009). The current programme covers the period from 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2013.

To achieve its objectives, the programme relies primarily on:

- Joint Actions, including seminars and workshops, project groups and steering groups, working visits, training activities, monitoring actions, benchmarking and other actions.
- Provision of IT systems, including trans-European systems and common customs applications.

Under Article 22 (1) of the Customs 2013 Decision, the programme is subject to a midterm evaluation carried out by the Commission based on input from the Member States. In order to ensure consistent methodology and coherent approach, this evaluation was contracted out to an external consultant with specific expertise in carrying out evaluations, "The Evaluation Partnership". Commission services and participating countries have guided and supported this external contractor through a steering group which met repeatedly throughout the course of the project.

This report adopted by the Commission meets the obligation to communicate the results of the midterm evaluation to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions. The final evaluation report by the external consultant is available for download at the Europa website of DG TAXUD.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The midterm evaluation assessed the impact of activities carried out under the programme from 2008 until March 2011. It examined the progress made so far in the programming period and the extent to which the objectives of the programme were achieved (the effectiveness of the programme) at a reasonable cost (the programme's efficiency). It also analysed whether the objectives correspond to the needs in the customs area (assessing the relevance) and the

¹ Decision No 624/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 May 2007 establishing an action programme for customs in the Community (Customs 2013).

extent to which the programme provides EU added value, i.e. whether the programme's objectives can be better achieved through a Community programme than by Member States. In addition, it assessed the use of funding and the progress of follow-up and implementation in particular regarding the management of the programme.

The objective of this midterm evaluation is to evaluate both the desirability of continuing the programme, and whether adjustments to the programme for the remaining years in terms of activity planning may be required. The results of the evaluation will also feed into the ongoing impact assessment on the future Customs 2020 programme². However, the conclusions drawn in this communication are without prejudice to the future decisions that the Commission may take in that context.

3. METHODOLOGY

The external consultants worked with a detailed methodology and based their answers on thorough analysis and findings stemming from several data collection methods, as shown in the table below (interviews, surveys, quantitative data collection tools, etc.). The data was analysed using a comprehensive set of evaluation and judgment criteria which was developed with the assistance of the Steering Group for the evaluation project³. The validity of the findings was again discussed in meetings with the Steering Group. Overall, the evaluation benefitted from high response rates to the surveys distributed among customs officials in the Member States and the active cooperation of the national Customs 2013 coordinators.

Table — Data sources for main evaluation questions

| Tools EQ | Questionnaire for national customs administrations | Survey of action participants | Interviews with programme managers | Case studies | Desk research |
|----------------|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Effectiveness | ✓ | ✓ | (✓) | ✓ | (✓) |
| Management | (✓) | (✓) | ✓ | | (✓) |
| Efficiency | (✓) | (✓) | | (✓) | ✓ |
| Relevance | ✓ | (✓) | (✓) | | ✓ |
| EU added value | ✓ | (✓) | ✓ | (✓) | ✓ |

Brackets indicate that the evidence gathered through this collection method is only partially relevant to answer the evaluation questions in the related category.

4. ASSESSMENT

The external consultant submitted a final evaluation report that presents a systematic and comprehensive overview of the Customs programme. A detailed summary of the activities and actions carried out since 2008 provides a sound foundation for the findings and conclusions, which show a noticeably high satisfaction level among stakeholders and beneficiaries.

² *Communication from the Commission. A Budget for Europe 2020 - Part II - Policy Fiches*, COM (2011) 500/II of 29 June 2011.

³ The Steering Group consisted of Commission officials and participants from the national customs administrations.

Findings

The evaluation shows that the programme is closely aligned with the needs and problems of the beneficiaries. The findings reported by the external consultants prove that the programme is a good vehicle for support with the implementation of customs policy. In addition, the evaluation provides strong and clear evidence that the programme's outputs achieved the desired effects. The programme's generally high efficiency and effectiveness is also partly explained by its professional management which has been evaluated as very positive.

The evaluation also shows that activities financed by Customs 2013 helped to harmonise the working methods of national customs administrations. In addition, the flexibility built into the programme has been highlighted as a positive aspect of its implementation. For example, this allowed project groups to draw on the experience of national customs administrations to address particular problems and develop solutions. The report also concluded that the programme provides significant EU added value.

The Commission acknowledges the very positive assessment of the programme by all stakeholders. The programme manages to reach the objectives set for it by providing national customs administrations with a platform for collaboration, additional tools, common or interoperable IT systems, common training, and opportunities for coordination. This demonstrates clearly the EU added value of the programme. National administrators in the customs area expressed remarkably high levels of appreciation of Customs 2013. The Commission thus concludes that continuing the programme is generally desirable.

Recommendations for the remaining programming period

The recommendations for further improvements are based on a thorough methodology, extensive research and analysis of survey data and direct interviews with all stakeholders. The detailed recommendations are presented in the evaluation. The main suggestions for even greater success in the remaining years until 2013 are the following:

- (1) Address external issues which slow down the progress of trade facilitation.
- (2) Support full implementation of the Modernised Customs Code Implementing Provisions (MCCIP) and risk management and the uniform application of key new rules, processes, and concepts.
- (3) Communicate the results of project groups developing and implementing the Future Customs Initiative to a wider audience.
- (4) Establish mechanisms to assist customs authorities in preventing, investigating and fighting illegal operations.
- (5) Carefully consider human resources implications of new Customs 2013 activities, and avoid increasing the overall burden on Member States and European Commission staff in the present economic climate.
- (6) Encourage participation of trade associations in Customs 2013 activities, wherever relevant and appropriate, and ensure transparency in selecting and inviting representatives of individual companies to participate in joint actions.

- (7) Closely monitor the uptake of common training tools and provide additional support, if necessary.
- (8) Expand support to candidate countries and potential candidates (including non-participating countries).
- (9) Address external issues that limit the effectiveness of trans-European and common customs IT systems.
- (10) Improve the proceedings of and interactions between some of Customs 2013 bodies.
- (11) Improve the way ART2⁴ reflects the links between activities and Customs 2013 objectives / priorities.

The Commission generally endorses the recommendations. As a follow up to the project, the Commission will draw up an action plan that will respond to each of the recommendations outlined in the evaluation report and clarify the extent to which they can be implemented for the remaining years of activity planning.

For example, the Commission is aware of the importance attached to the full implementation of the Modernised Customs Code Implementing Provisions (MCCIP). Work is progressing in this area through the current programme and this progress will be reinforced under the future programme. The human resource implications of Customs 2013 activities will be duly reflected upon and this recommendation will feed into the design of the successor programme which will aim to introduce more structured and efficient ways of cooperation.

Likewise, the Commission also aims to monitor the uptake of common training tools, already under the current programme and this will also be taken into close consideration in the impact assessment for the future programme. The Commission will also examine the Customs 2013 governance scheme and the functioning of the Committee and Steering Groups. It agrees with the suggestion by the consultants that improvements are possible.

⁴ The second version of the Activity Reporting Tool launched through Customs 2013.