

Customs 2013: action programme for customs in the Community

2006/0075(COD) - 05/09/2011 - Follow-up document

In accordance with Article 22 (1) of Decision 624/2007/EC (the Customs 2013 Decision) the Commission presents a midterm evaluation of the Customs 2013 programme based on input from Member States.

Objective: the midterm evaluation aims to evaluate the desirability of continuing the programme, and assess 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 programme.

The midterm evaluation assessed (i) the impact of activities carried out under the programme from 2008 until March 2011; (ii) 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); (iii) whether the objectives correspond to the needs in the customs area (assessing the relevance); (iv) the 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; (v) the use of funding and the progress of follow-up and implementation in particular regarding the management of the programme.

Findings: the evaluation shows that the programme is closely aligned with the needs and problems of the beneficiaries, and is a good vehicle for supporting the implementation of customs policy. In addition, it provides strong 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 concludes that continuing the programme is generally desirable.

Recommendations for the remaining programming period: the main suggestions for even greater success in the remaining years until 2013 are the following:

- address external issues which slow down the progress of trade facilitation;
- 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;
- communicate the results of project groups developing and implementing the Future Customs Initiative to a wider audience;
- establish mechanisms to assist customs authorities in preventing, investigating and fighting illegal operations;
- carefully consider human resources implications of new Customs 2013 activities, and avoid increasing the overall burden on Member States and Commission staff in the present economic climate;
- 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;
- monitor the uptake of common training tools and provide additional support, if necessary;
- expand support to candidate countries and potential candidates (including non participating countries);
- address external issues that limit the effectiveness of trans-European and common customs IT systems;
- improve the proceedings of and interactions between some of Customs 2013 bodies;
- improve the way ART2 (the second version of the Activity Reporting Tool launched through Customs 2013) reflects the links between activities and Customs 2013 objectives / priorities.

The Commission generally endorses the recommendations, and 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 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 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.

Similarly, the Commission also aims to monitor the uptake of common training tools under the current programme and this will also be taken into close consideration in the impact assessment for the future programme. It will 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.