

Customs 2013: action programme for customs in the Community

2006/0075(COD) - 20/02/2015 - Follow-up document

The Commission presented its final evaluation of the Customs 2013 programme established by Decision 624/2007/EC as a multiannual action programme for customs in the European Union to support and complement action undertaken by Member States in ensuring the effective functioning of the internal market in the customs field.

Customs 2013 ran from the 1st of January 2008 until the 31st of December 2013. Participation in the programme was open to the Member States, the candidate countries benefiting from a pre-accession strategy, as well as potential candidate and certain partner countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The financial envelope was set at EUR 323.8 million. However, examination of the budget commitments showed that the real cost of the programme was about 15% lower, amounting to about EUR 272 million. Out of this, the IT systems accounted for EUR 225 million and the remaining EUR 47 million was dedicated to joint actions.

The present report is based on the findings and conclusions presented in the external evaluation report:

Programmes added-value: the evaluation identified a strong case for the European added value of the programme, particularly regarding its role in supporting the implementation of EU customs legislation at national level:

- at a general level, the IT systems funded through the programme were highly complementary to national initiatives;
- the programme helped to implement EU legislation more quickly and at a lower cost than would be possible without support from the programme.
- the joint actions enabled direct collaboration between officials from different countries;
- there was still considerable diversity in the execution of customs processes related to import around the EU. The time to import a standard container of goods can vary from 5 days to 19 days across the 28 members of the Union; however, while this diversity still persists, the evaluators found that it was significantly reduced during the programming period;
- the evaluation concluded that Member States would find it difficult to continue to use the IT systems past the medium-term, given the considerable running and maintenance costs the IT systems;

Efficiency: the Commission accepted the conclusions reached by the external consultant, albeit with some reservations concerning the absence of quantitative data to support the conclusions and the unmeasured and general nature of the conclusions reached on the effectiveness and efficiency of the project.

The main conclusions of the evaluation as drawn up by the external consultant, with which the Commission agrees, are summed up below:

- the Customs 2013 programme made a significant contribution towards enhanced safety and security, the protection of the EUs financial interest and the facilitation of trade ;
- the correct application of EU customs tariffs and more generally customs legislation would not have been possible without the programme, and the mix of actions has contributed to this;
- the trans-European systems allowed for burden sharing between the European Union and participating countries (in the short-term there remains considerable room for improving the interoperability between existing national systems and those funded through the programme);
- the enhanced effectiveness of risk management systems has contributed not only to the enhanced control of dangerous goods, but also to the effective identification and collection of customs duties;
- the entirely paperless environment that now exists for handling customs declarations has allowed the Customs Union to become more secure while carrying out fewer of the manual controls that slow down the flow of trade ;
- the networking fostered through the joint actions was also considered crucial for several reasons, including ensuring the consistent application of customs legislation, spreading best practices and building the trust needed for administrations to act as if they were one administration.

Recommendations: the evaluators put forward several recommendations with the view to improving the programmes operations. The recommendations are summarised below :

- develop specific and measurable goals that can be achieved during the life of the programme;
- develop a comprehensive monitoring framework to track performance and to identify issues of concern in a timely manner;
- streamline the platforms used for sharing documents and facilitating communication between the Commission and Member States;
- take an active approach toward the achievement of policies aimed at centralised customs clearance;
- ensure joint actions are flexible and adaptable as well as more goal-oriented and accountable;
- develop a more systematic mechanism to review longstanding joint actions periodically;
- communicate more with national administrations on the outcomes of joint actions;
- address technical issues and user problems of specific IT systems that inhibit their contribution to key customs processes;
- enhance the integration of EU and national IT systems;
- use potential efficiency gains to make the case for further harmonisation and integration of IT systems. The various costs and benefits of centralised IT systems at EU and national levels should be examined in greater depth.

The Commission will undertake a dedicated exercise to address the recommendations and draw up an action plan for their implementation and follow-up :

- the operational findings, such as improvements to the IT systems and applications or broader dissemination of the programmes results, will be directly addressed in the course of the current programme [Customs 2020](#);

- others relating to enhancing the integration of EU and national IT systems will support future discussions on the scope and design of the post-2020 iteration of the programme.