

ECA Criticizes Delays in Building Up Modernized Customs IT Systems

Thomas Wahl



News

In its [Special Report 26/2018](#), the European Court of Auditors (ECA) looked into the EU's progress in establishing the necessary customs IT systems within the current Customs 2020 Programme.

The Customs 2020 Programme was designed to finance the Union components of a modern, improved customs IT system after reform of the EU's customs legislation. Member States are required to develop the corresponding national (non-EU) components and pay the associated costs.

According to the report, the implementation of the new IT systems for the Customs Union suffered a series of delays. As a result, some of the key systems will not be available by the envisaged 2020 deadline. The auditors caution that the rescheduled deadline is also at risk of not being met.

Several reasons have been identified as the cause for the delays, for instance:

- Changing project scope, which increased complexity;
- Insufficient resources allocated by the EU and Member States;
- Lengthy decision-making process due to the multi-layered governance structure.

Furthermore, the auditors found that the monitoring mechanism in the Customs 2020 Programme was insufficient.

The audit was also carried out in view of improving the upcoming Customs Programme, slated to start by 2021, with a possible budget of €950 million. The auditors call on the Commission to learn from the lessons of the previous programme and recommend the following:

- Gear the next Customs Programme expressly towards IT implementation, with precise and measurable objectives;
- Improve time, resource, and scope estimates for each IT project;
- Facilitate cooperative IT development with and between Member States;
- Streamline governance by ensuring more efficient and swifter communication;
- Inform stakeholders about implementation and spending in a timely and transparent manner.

The ECA's recommendations in the reports are put into practice regularly, although they are not binding for the EU authorities.

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