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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

On: 12 April 2018

To: Delegations

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Subject: European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 1/2018: "Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) - time for better targeting"
- Council conclusions (12 April 2018)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on "Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) - time for better targeting", adopted by the Council at its 3611th meeting held on 12 April 2018.

Council conclusions on Special Report No 1/2018
by the European Court of Auditors:
"Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) -
time for better targeting"

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- (1) WELCOMES the Special Report from the European Court of Auditors (hereinafter referred to as "the Court") and the Commission's replies;
- (2) ACKNOWLEDGES the role of JASPERS in providing technical assistance to Member States and in supporting them to obtain the full benefits of EU cohesion policy;
- (3) TAKES NOTE of the following Court's findings, in particular:
 - a) The weaknesses in the definition of JASPERS's main objectives, roles and responsibilities;
 - b) The positive impact of JASPERS on quicker project approval and on the overall quality of the projects, while no impact on absorption could be evidenced;
 - c) JASPERS's efforts to improve administrative capacity, while the Court found no evidence to confirm whether this improvement in administrative capacity had actually materialised;
 - d) The shortcomings in JASPERS's planning, monitoring and evaluation activities;
- (4) RECOGNISES the added-value of JASPERS and its impact on the project preparatory phase, the horizontal support received by policy-makers under the initiative, and WELCOMES the cost-savings implications of JASPERS's involvement in project development as well as the observation that JASPERS-assisted projects were less error-prone than non-assisted ones;

- (5) **ACKNOWLEDGES** the positive assessment of the contribution of the initiative to the development of quality EU co-financed projects by the Member States that significantly benefited from JASPERS's support; **CONSIDERS**, however, that some elements of the initiative may require better targeting in the future;
- (6) **HIGHLIGHTS** that the Commission has partly or totally accepted the Court's recommendations and **WELCOMES** the fact that the Commission has already taken some measures in this respect, in particular by enhancing the Independent Quality Review (IQR) processes and mitigating the risks of lack of impartiality in relation to JASPERS's advisory functions;
- (7) **STRESSES** the importance of involving the EIB for the successful implementation of the Court's recommendations; and **CALLS** on the EIB to cooperate fully in future audits;
- (8) In light of the above, and without prejudice to the outcome of the negotiations on the next EU Multi-annual Financial Framework, **CALLS** on the Commission to:
- a) strengthen its coordination and controlling role over JASPERS while clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders to strengthen transparency and accountability;
 - b) adjust its overall strategic planning of JASPERS operations based on the particular needs of Member States and in line with EU cohesion policy objectives;
 - c) continue the efforts to ensure and maintain independence between the IQR processes and advisory functions performed by JASPERS;
 - d) introduce comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems over JASPERS's activities and objectives;
 - e) take action to optimise JASPERS's focus, efficiency and effectiveness, while ensuring that JASPERS's costs are reasonable, these reflect the actual costs incurred and are compared with the achieved outputs and results;

- f) examine the take up of JASPERS's assistance in other thematic areas or sectors in line with the particular needs of Member States while maintaining the focus on large-scale projects;
 - g) explore mechanisms to increase the transfer of know-how from JASPERS to the concerned national and regional administrations and thus contributing to the development of administrative capacity at Member State and regional level.
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