

Note by the Evaluation Unit

Evaluation of EC Country Strategy in Albania 1996-2001 – ref. 951607

The unit is broadly satisfied with the quality of the report, which contains a number of valuable recommendations. We follow normal practice in publishing it (together with the subsequent response of the Commission services to the main recommendations). As usual, the contents of the report do not commit the European Commission.

However, there are two features of the report on which we wish to record our disagreement with the approach taken by the consultants:

1. Coverage of issues relating to audit/regularity of expenditure

The Terms of Reference for this evaluation included a request for the consultants to examine the efficiency of expenditure. This was stated in more detail as referring to the "efficiency with which the activities have been undertaken or the resources available transformed through the programme's activities into the expected results".

This did not present the consultants, in our view, with a mandate to comment on the findings of past audit reports or on the possible existence of irregularities in the programmes under review. It goes without saying that such matters should be treated very seriously, but in the interests of equity and correct administrative procedure, control of expenditure should be undertaken by suitably qualified professionals, and at the request of those departments of the Commission or other institutions charged with responsibility in this field.

For this reason, we were concerned at references (in connection with civil works contracts in the road sector and for border crossings) to "financial and control irregularities" on page 28, and "financial and contractual irregularities", "irregular practices" and "serious irregularities in the payment of claims" on page 49. Scrutiny of the internal reports upon which these statements are based has not been completed. In their current form, these statements could be taken out of context to imply that the evaluation itself provides a judgement on these issues, when it cannot and should not do so.

2. Unfounded remarks

In a number of cases, vague, subjective or judgmental remarks are made without necessary support in fact. There are a number of examples:

Page v – "The performance of Commission Headquarters has been poor...Co-operation with the delegation is particularly poor": this brings little constructive information with which to identify the weakness in implementation.

Page 2 – "expectations of state employees are low: they are expected to act either in self-interest or in the interest of their own social group": such a generalisation is highly subjective, implying a prejudiced attitude, and has no source in proven fact.

Page 7 "an agriculture system that looks more African than European" – a subjective judgement based upon two generalisations.

Page 26 "The police are...often brutal or corrupt" – such a statement requires a more considered factual basis.

Page 30: "extremely slow actions on the part of the Commission services" – it is not clear what actions this concerns and against what timescale they are being compared.

Page 53: "The quality of service currently provided by the Commission services is extremely poor" – since the Commission is not a utility or a private sector company, the reference to "quality of service" is misleading. Criticisms of the Commission may well be justified in a number of areas, but must be specific, based upon sound findings, and subject to clear recommendations.