

Note by the evaluation unit

Evaluation of the Country Strategy in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – ref. 951608

The unit is broadly satisfied with the quality of the report, which contains a number of pertinent recommendations. We note that the report was prepared using more limited resources than would normally be dedicated to a country strategy evaluation. The security situation in the country made it impossible to organize a field mission and also limited the availability for interview of important national interlocutors. In addition, the evaluator stated on several occasions that he faced difficulties in obtaining relevant documentation. Nevertheless, we follow normal practice in publishing the report (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.

Despite detailed comments from the Commission services at the time of the draft final report, we remain concerned that a number of clarifications were not made in the final report, and that this undermines some of the conclusions drawn. In a number of cases, vague, subjective or "judgemental" remarks are made, without necessary support in fact. In others, there are weaknesses in drawing appropriate recommendations from the material which has been assessed.

Findings

- Annual programming process (paragraph 10 of executive summary): *"relatively little consultation with other stakeholders"*: this conclusion is not fully sustained, given the statements which were made to the consultants describing the consultation undertaken in 1999 and increasingly in 2000 and 2001 with the donor community and the beneficiary.

- Future programming (paragraph 14 of executive summary): *"it is not clear to the evaluators if, or how, the Commission intends to consult with stakeholders in the preparation of the new strategy"*; again, this statement ignores the amount of consultation with Member States, other donors, the Delegation and the FYROM authorities on the CSP.

- Commission implementation capacity (paragraph 40 of executive summary): *"implementation does not seem to have improved with the creation of a separate implementation DG (EuropeAid-previously SCR)." This statement is not supported by any factual material. In addition, EuropeAid was only nine months old at the time of completion of the evaluation. A firm conclusion about the effect of the new office on implementation cannot be drawn after such a short period.*

- Paragraph 41 (of executive summary): *"the creation of EuropeAid has introduced some disruptions in programme implementation.... While transparency in the management of the programmes appears to be limited"*: This assertion is unsupported by concrete evidence. The disruption and transparency problems have not been clearly identified.

Recommendations

- Explaining the impact of the EC programmes (page 22 of report): *"very poor centralised implementation management"*: this is not adequately proven or explained, and brings no constructive information with which to identify weaknesses, and no recommendations on how to solve them.
- Commission implementation capacity (page 29 of report): *"insufficient clarity over responsibilities"*: it is not clear which responsibilities this refers to, and why there is not "sufficient clarity". No recommendations are made as to how these problems should be solved.
- Changes in Commission Headquarters (page 38 of report, point 20): this brings no constructive information with which to identify possible weaknesses, and no recommendations on how to solve them.
- Accountability and service standards (page 38, point 22): this section appears to refer to binding commitments which officials in the different services would make to each other. The expression "service standards" is not really explained, and the content and management of these commitments is not explained.