



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on Special Report No. 5/2007 concerning the Commission's Management of the CARDS programme

*2842nd ENVIRONMENT Council meeting
Brussels, 20 December 2007*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL

1. WELCOMES the Special Report by the Court of Auditors of 28 June 2007 on the Management of the Commission of the CARDS programme.
2. RECALLS that the overall objective of the CARDS programme was to contribute to the recipients' participation in the Stabilisation and Association Process with a view to bring the region closer to the European Union.
3. NOTES WITH SATISFACTION that the Commission was successful in ensuring that aid was delivered quickly although this was sometimes at the expense of the capacity of the recipient countries to benefit from the aid. The two main management approaches used by the Commission – devolved Delegations and the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) – were mostly effective and appropriate. However, while recipient country ownership was considered a priority by the Commission, there was no consistent approach to achieving this aim and the management approaches used did not encourage such ownership.

4. AGREES with the conclusion of the Court of Auditors that the Commission's management of the CARDS programme was largely successful in contributing to stability and reconstruction in the recipient countries. However, the aid was less effective in improving administrative capacities, due to low concentration on institution building and insufficient recipient country's absorption capacity. The Commission's strategic guidance to the management of the programme was very general. This was adequate for the reconstruction phase but not for the more challenging institution building objectives.

5. HIGHLIGHTING the need for better coordination and efficient management of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, WELCOMES the set of recommendations of the Court for implementation of this instrument. In this context, the Commission is invited to ensure that the strategic guidance for implementing the IPA should give sufficient attention to individual areas of intervention to ensure an appropriate focus of aid, a systematic approach to key areas and an appropriate basis for prioritising and selecting projects. Focus on rapid implementation of aid should be maintained, with attention to the ability of beneficiaries to fully absorb the assistance provided. An effective strategy for ensuring recipient country ownership should be established. Finally, best practice as well as monitoring and evaluation practices should be harmonised.

6. NOTING the responses of the Commission, WELCOMES that the Commission has taken and will continue to take the Court's recommendations fully into account in the context of IPA.

7. STRESSES the need for Member States to continue to be closely involved, in the context of IPA instruments, at an early stage in the programming phases."
