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COVER NOTE

from: Mr Vítor CALDEIRA, President of the Court of Auditors
date of receipt: 20 July 2009
to: Mr Carl BILDT, President of the Council of the European Union
Subject: Special report No. 9/2009 concerning the efficiency and effectiveness of the personnel selection activities carried out by the European Personnel Selection Office

Sir,

I enclose a copy, in each of the official languages of the European Communities, of special report No. 9/2009 concerning the efficiency and effectiveness of the personnel selection activities carried out by the European Personnel Selection Office

The special report, which is shortly to be published, was adopted by the Court at its meeting on 11 June 2009 and is accompanied by the replies from EPSO, which was notified of the preliminary findings on 12 March 2008.

(Complimentary close).

(s.) Vítor CALDEIRA

Encl.: Special report No. 9/2009 concerning the efficiency and effectiveness of the personnel selection activities carried out by the European Personnel Selection Office

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Special Report No 9/2009

(pursuant to Article 248(4), second subparagraph, EC)

The efficiency and effectiveness of the personnel selection activities carried out
by the **European Personnel Selection Office**

together with EPSO's replies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Executive Summary	I-V
Introduction	1-7
Audit scope and audit approach	8-12
Observations	13-68
Increase in the number of competitions was managed effectively	13-14
Lack of timely and consistent information on the Institutions' staffing needs	15-21
The personnel selection process took too long	22-29
Delays during the competition phase	24-29
The yield from competitions did not meet targeted numbers and did not achieve the broadest possible geographical balance	30-57
Targeted numbers were not always attained	30-53
The selection process did not achieve the broadest possible geographical balance	54-57
Shortcomings in management information	58-68
Insufficient information available on costs	58-62
Weaknesses in EPSO's databases	63-68
Conclusions and recommendations	69-70
Annex I - Duration of competitions	
Annex II - Yield of competitions	
Annex III - Breakdown of second language selected by participants in tests	

Annex IVa - Geographical balance of competition results – EU 15

Annex IVb - Geographical balance of competition results – EU 12

EPSO's replies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- I. The European Communities' Institutions employ staff with a wide variety of professional backgrounds and geographical origins, mostly selected through open competitions which since 2003 have been managed by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO).
- II. The audit objective was to determine whether the personnel selection activities managed by EPSO were efficient and effective. As far as it was relevant to the audit scope, the EPSO Development Programme (EDP), adopted in September 2008, was taken into account.
- III. The audit concluded that EPSO had successfully managed the increase in the number of competitions needed for the enlargement of the European Union, but that:
- (a) staffing needs of the Institutions were not communicated to EPSO in a timely manner or based on a consistent methodology;
 - (b) the duration of the personnel selection process was too long, both in relation to EPSO's own standards and international best practice;
 - (c) competitions only produced, on average, two-thirds of the targeted number of laureates (successful candidates who have been placed on the reserve list). This resulted from withdrawals caused by the long duration of the process; undue emphasis on specific language requirements; suboptimal communication of competitions; and pre-selection tests which eliminated more candidates than necessary to meet targets. Furthermore, the selection process did not achieve the broadest possible geographical balance amongst laureates;
 - (d) management information was not consistently reliable or comprehensive. Information on the costs incurred to place a candidate on the reserve list was not sufficient; the potential additional costs and future benefits

resulting from the EDP were not quantified in detail; and information contained in EPSO's databases was not consistently reliable.

IV. The EDP aims to reduce the duration of competitions to a maximum of 9 months and to increase their yield. It envisages *inter alia* a shift towards strategic human resource planning; more robust pre-selection; widespread use of computer-based testing (CBT); and professionalised selection boards. It is planned that the new procedures will be operational from the first quarter of 2010.

V. Taking into account the major change planned in the organisation of selection procedures through the EDP, the Court's main recommendations are:

- (a) EPSO should be provided with sufficiently timely and reliable information on the Institutions' staffing needs based on a common approach to assessing such needs.
- (b) The Institutions should second to EPSO a sufficient number of officials on a full-time basis and encourage their staff to act as qualified assessors.
- (c) EPSO should strive to improve its communication strategy in coordination with the Institutions; exercise better quality control over competition notices; ensure an appropriate number of suitable candidates at all stages of the selection process, for example through adapting the specific language requirements; and take steps to improve geographical balance.
- (d) EPSO should improve its management information. In particular, it should monitor the full cost of placing a laureate on the reserve list, and quantify the additional costs and assess the future benefits resulting from the EDP so as to facilitate decision-making by the Budgetary Authority.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Institutions of the European Communities employed over 36 500 officials as at June 2007. In accordance with the Staff Regulations, recruitment is directed to securing the services of officials of the highest standard of ability, efficiency and integrity, recruited on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of the Member States of the Communities¹.
2. Officials are normally recruited from reserve lists established following open competitions². Since 2003, such competitions have been managed by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO), the inter-institutional body responsible for selecting officials and other servants of the European Communities. Since its inception, EPSO has accommodated significant increases in recruitment due to EU enlargement.
3. EPSO was created by a joint decision³ to obtain economies of scale in the organisation of selection procedures, in particular open competitions for officials. This joint decision gives EPSO the sole responsibility for drawing up reserve lists from among candidates in open competitions in line with the needs indicated by each Institution, the decisions to recruit successful candidates (hereinafter referred to as "laureates") being taken by each Institution. Further duties have been allocated to EPSO, in particular the task to give assistance with internal competitions and the selection of other servants. EPSO's activities are supervised by a management board made up of representatives of each Institution.

¹ Article 27 of the Staff Regulations.

² Pursuant to Article 29 and Annex III of the Staff Regulations such competitions are open to all candidates who meet the admission conditions.

³ Decision 2002/620/EC of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Ombudsman of 25 July 2002 establishing a European Communities Personnel Selection Office (OJ L 197, 26.7.2002, p. 53)

4. The personnel selection procedure comprises:
 - (a) planning of the competition as based on staffing needs expressed by the Institutions;
 - (b) drawing up and publication of the notice of competition;
 - (c) appointment of the members of the Selection Board to be chosen from officials of the Institutions;
 - (d) drawing up the list of candidates who meet the requirements set out in the notice of competition, where necessary following a pre-selection through admission tests;
 - (e) carrying out of the competition stages (written and oral tests);
 - (f) drawing up the list of suitable candidates together with a reasoned report;
 - (g) publication of the reserve list of laureates;
 - (h) administering and checking the use of the reserve lists.

5. In 2008, EPSO's management undertook a review of its organisation and operations, backed up by research of existing best practices. This review, which revealed weaknesses (such as the unduly long duration of competitions), led the management to design the EPSO Development Programme (EDP).

6. On 10 September 2008, the Management Board of EPSO adopted the EDP, which aims to reduce the duration of competitions to a maximum of 9 months and to increase their yield. It envisages *inter alia* a shift towards strategic human resource planning in order to decrease the time between the identification of needs and the launch of a selection procedure; more robust pre-selection; widespread use of computer-based testing (CBT) in the pre-selection phase; and professionalised selection boards.

7. The major change introduced by the programme will be the organisation of general competitions on an annual cycle basis⁴. Written and oral tests will be done in “assessment centres”, introduced in order to assess candidates by applying selection methods that focus on key competences required. It is foreseen that this new approach will be operational in the first quarter of 2010.

AUDIT SCOPE AND AUDIT APPROACH

8. The objective of the audit was to determine whether the competitions system managed by EPSO was efficient and effective. In particular, the audit focused on whether EPSO:

- coped with the large increase in the number of competitions due to enlargement;
- received information about the staffing needs of the Institutions on a timely and consistent basis;
- provided reserve lists of laureates in a timely manner;
- ensured the required number and geographical balance of laureates;
- had reliable and comprehensive management information to achieve its objectives.

9. The audit focused on competitions for officials, due to their large number and long-term impact. It was based on:

- an in-depth examination of a sample of 16 competitions of different types (specialists and generalists, heads of unit and entry level grades, administrators and assistants); and

⁴ Every year three cycles of general competitions (for administrators, assistants and linguists) will be launched, with each planned to be completed within a maximum of nine months. In addition, there will be competitions for specialist profiles if and when necessary.

- an analysis of EPSO's database, comprising all data concerning 176 competitions launched from 2003 to 2006 and completed by early 2008.

10. The audit encompassed all stages of personnel selection involving EPSO, from the communication of staffing needs by the Institutions to EPSO up until the publication of reserve lists of laureates but excluding an assessment of the profiles and competences of the individuals selected from the audit scope. Nor did the audit cover the procedures for the detailed identification of needs by the Institutions and the recruitment of laureates from reserve lists by the Institutions, as these are not within EPSO's area of responsibility.

11. The audit, started in summer 2007, covered competitions launched and finalized during the period from January 2003 (start of EPSO's activities) to December 2007. It examined EPSO's planning and management and its evaluation of its staff selection activity.

12. As far as it was relevant to the audit scope, the EDP adopted in September 2008 was also taken into consideration, with particular reference to determining whether all important aspects of personnel selection activities were addressed.

OBSERVATIONS

Increase in the number of competitions was managed effectively

13. Since its inception in 2003, EPSO witnessed a large increase in demand by the Institutions as regards competitions to be held, due to enlargement. There was thus a significant risk that EPSO could not launch and manage all competitions required.

14. The audit found that EPSO effectively managed the increase in the number of competitions, as no instances were identified where the launch of competitions was delayed because EPSO had reached its maximum capacity.

Lack of timely and consistent information on the Institutions' staffing needs

15. Staffing needs should be identified and communicated to EPSO by the Institutions in a timely manner and based on a consistent methodology, so that competitions can be planned in an efficient manner.

16. In 2002, the Secretaries-General of the Institutions agreed that each Institution should inform EPSO of its recruitment needs for the next three years in order to allow EPSO to draw up a rolling three-year forward programme, to be updated at least every six months, with a view to meeting the needs of the Institutions in the best way possible.

17. The three-year forward programme was not implemented; for the period audited EPSO's rolling forward programme covered only 18 months as the Institutions failed to communicate their longer-term needs to EPSO.

18. Furthermore, no common basis or methods for assessing needs had been established by EPSO and the Institutions. There was, for example, uncertainty as to how the requirement laid down in the Staff Regulations that lists of suitable candidates established by the selection boards shall wherever possible contain at least twice as many names as the number of posts to be filled⁵, should be implemented.

19. The lack of communication of timely and consistent information to EPSO by the Institutions regarding their staffing needs, and the lack of a common methodology for assessing such needs, resulted in inefficiencies and delays in the selection process. This was reflected at operational level in last-minute changes in priorities and needs in terms of the number of laureates required. It necessitated numerous corrigenda to notices of competitions already launched (see paragraph 43).

⁵ Article 5 of Annex III of the Staff Regulations.

20. In the framework of its development programme, EPSO proposed and started to implement a standardised three-year draft forward planning schedule.

21. The effectiveness of this forward planning schedule will depend on its obtaining, on a timely basis, sufficiently reliable information from the Institutions based on a common approach for assessing staffing needs. It should be borne in mind that late delivery of the statement of needs or significant shortcomings in the forecast human resources requirements may lead to a mismatch between posts available and the number of laureates produced.

The personnel selection process took too long

22. International best practice regarding the duration of a selection procedure in both the public and private sectors, as accepted by EPSO in the EDP, is five to nine months from expression of staffing needs until employment.

23. However, under EPSO's current pre-EDP planning system, the standard timeframe from the expression of staffing needs by an Institution until the formal offer of employment to laureates is 18 months⁶. This comprises 3 to 4 months for publication of the notice of competition; 11 to 12 months for the competition phase; and 2 months for the final interview and job offer.

Delays during the competition phase

24. The sample of 16 competitions examined in detail showed that the phase concerning publication of the notice of competition took on average 4 months (see ***Annex I***), in line with EPSO's own standards.

25. However, the average length of a competition - from the deadline for registration by candidates until the publication of the reserve list - was 16

⁶ This figure does not include a further six-month period required for the identification of needs by the Institutions.

months, with the duration of individual competitions ranging between 9 months and 2 years (see *Annex I*).

26. The main reason for delays was the time needed for marking the written tests and for performing the oral testing of candidates. The sample of competitions analysed by the Court showed that these two stages alone may take up to 13 months. The main underlying cause was that the EU officials acting as markers or as members of the selection boards were not made available full-time for an uninterrupted period to perform their duties.

27. Unduly long selection procedures result in the Institutions not being able to recruit candidates as and when required, and may deter good candidates, either at the outset or during the procedure. Furthermore, according to candidate satisfaction surveys carried out by EPSO in March/April 2008⁷, the respondents were least satisfied with the overall duration of the competitions, which had a negative impact on candidates' perception of the European Institutions as a potential employer.

28. In the framework of the new annual competition cycle foreseen in the EDP, EPSO plans to shorten the competition phase (from the publication of the notice of competition until the publication of the reserve list of laureates) to a maximum of 9 months. Key elements for achieving this objective are:

- (a) a reduction in the number of separate steps in the procedure, the successive written and oral tests being replaced by a single phase,

⁷ Almost 23 000 candidates from previous general administrator competitions (AD 5 level for all professional fields from 25 Member States) were asked for their opinion on different aspects of the selection procedure; almost 4 000 responses were received. A full summary of the results is published on EPSO's website http://europa.eu/epso/documents/Survey_Satisfaction_EN.pdf.

- (b) more reliance on efficient pre-selection through improved computer-based testing,
- (c) the introduction of assessment centres with professionalised selection boards.

29. Successful implementation of the annual competition cycle will crucially depend on the willingness of the Institutions to second to EPSO a sufficient number of qualified officials on a full-time basis⁸ and to encourage their staff to become part of the proposed pool of qualified assessors.

The yield from competitions did not meet targeted numbers and did not achieve the broadest possible geographical balance

Targeted numbers were not always attained

30. The number of laureates targeted in the notices of competitions should be attained, so as to ensure adequate permanent staffing levels of the Institutions without compromising the required quality standards of candidates selected.

31. During the audit, a comprehensive analysis was undertaken of all data concerning 176 competitions launched from 2003 to 2006 and completed by early 2008. The targeted number of names on the reserve lists for these competitions totalled 15 500.

32. On average, only two-thirds of the targeted number of laureates was attained⁹. Of some 208 000 applications registered for these competitions¹⁰,

⁸ The EDP envisages that qualified officials should be seconded for at least two and a maximum of four annual competition cycles.

⁹ An average yield of only two-thirds of the targeted numbers was also observed for competitions reserved for citizens from EU-12 Member States in the context of enlargement.

¹⁰ Since the inception of EPSO, registration for competitions has been made significantly easier by the introduction of on-line applications.

95 000 (46 %) actually attended tests. Of these, slightly more than 10 000 succeeded as laureates¹¹, a shortfall of almost 5 500 from the target (see *Annex II*).

33. The overall 46 % attendance rate included attendance at both traditional pre-selection tests (44 %) and at computer-based tests (54 %), which were introduced in 2006. The introduction of computer-based testing (CBT) has thus increased the attendance rate by 10 percentage points.

34. Of the candidates sitting the pre-selection tests, 28 % progressed to the subsequent written tests; 50 % of those sitting the written tests proceeded to the oral tests, while 74 % of those undertaking the oral tests were placed on the reserve list. Laureates thus comprised 10,7 % of those 95 000 who attended tests.

Specific language requirements may deter good candidates

35. There should be an appropriate balance between professional and language skills, so as to ensure the best qualified candidates are selected.

36. Article 28 of the Staff Regulations provides that an official may be appointed only on condition that he produces evidence of a thorough knowledge of one of the languages of the Communities and of a satisfactory knowledge of another language of the Communities to the extent necessary for the performance of his duties.

37. Prior to the establishment of EPSO, candidates could sit the competition tests in their mother tongue; knowledge of a second language was examined separately by a specific language test. EPSO started its activities at a time when the number of official languages rose from 11 to 23. EPSO considered

¹¹ These laureates are included in reserve lists from which vacant posts are filled. The number of laureates on the lists does not correspond to the number actually recruited by the Institutions which is necessarily lower for various reasons (e.g. laureates no longer available or declining job offers; no vacant posts available).

that, for practical reasons (increased risks of erroneous or imprecise translation of tests, longer duration of the procedures, higher costs, etc.), it was not possible to hold each general competition in 23 languages.

38. Since 2006, candidates for all competitions have been required to take most of the tests in a second (normally non-native) language, to be selected from English, French or German. As a consequence, a very good command of certain languages now plays a more important role in the selection process than was the case in the past. Exceptions to this language regime apply for competitions for interpreters or translators, where specific requirements apply; and for specific competitions. **Annex III** sets out the distribution of second languages among candidates who actually sat the tests; this shows that English is by far the most frequently chosen second language (64 % of candidates), followed by French (20 %) and German (10 %)¹².

39. The current EPSO requirement can lead to situations where candidates, who might have all the required specialised knowledge and skills, are excluded from the outset from taking part in a competition if they do not have the required linguistic profile. This is for example the case for candidates who have English, French or German as a first language but an EU language other than one of these three as a second language.

40. A decision has been made in principle to hold at least part of the pre-selection tests in all 23 languages from 2011.

Communication regarding competitions was suboptimal

41. Competition notices should be drafted and announced in a clear and precise way to attract a maximum number of appropriate candidates and allow

¹² It should be kept in mind that in many of the 176 competitions for which the data have been analysed by the Court, the choice of the candidates was limited to these three languages.

potential candidates to determine without ambiguity whether they meet the conditions to apply for a competition.

42. Competition notices are drawn up by EPSO¹³ after consultation of a consultative joint committee (COPARCO). The notice is then published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (Official Journal). In addition to publishing the notice of competitions in the Official Journal, EPSO uses two other means to inform potential candidates: its website, on a systematic basis, and advertisements in newspapers, on a case by case basis. The website is the main source of information for potential applicants.

43. Of the 16 competitions reviewed in detail, 11 were modified by corrigenda; of the 11, 4 had to be modified twice. These corrigenda were needed to clarify the admission conditions, change the targeted number of laureates or correct errors.

44. As for advertising, the EPSO website was initially available in only three languages (English, French and German). In 2008, a 23-language opening page was introduced. EPSO also foresees the translation of all permanent parts of the website into 23 languages.

45. As a rule, notices of open competitions were only published in the English, French and German versions of the Official Journal. On 9 May 2007, Spain brought legal action against the Commission to order the publication of all notices of competitions to fill posts in the European Civil Service in the Official Journal in all languages. The case¹⁴ is pending.

46. Lack of clear information as to the requirements of competitions gives a poor image of the EU as an employer. It may deter good candidates from

¹³ The Institutions have delegated their related powers to EPSO (Article 2 of Decision 2002/621/EC of 25 July 2002 on the organisation and operation of the European Communities Personnel Selection Office (OJ L 197, 26.7.2002, p. 56)).

¹⁴ T-156/07.

applying and has led dissatisfied candidates to take legal action against EPSO¹⁵.

47. In order to attract a greater number of qualified candidates, the EDP foresees the introduction of an enhanced communication strategy, including an improved website and more focused targeting of potential candidates.

Pre-selection tests eliminated more candidates than was necessary to meet targets

48. Pre-selection is an admission procedure for further testing; only the best-performing candidates are admitted to the written stage of the competition. Once admitted, the candidates are judged only on the basis of their performance during the written and oral exams. Pre-selection tests should be such as to ensure that a sufficient number of suitably qualified candidates proceeds to the next stage of the competition. EPSO's EDP establishes that the ratio between the number of candidates invited to the assessment centre and the laureates on the reserve list should be 3 : 1.

49. The pre-selection tests¹⁶ for the 176 competitions included in EPSO's database eliminated 70 000 of the 95 000 candidates. As a result, the number of people who were able to take the subsequent tests was too low to meet the target of 15 500 laureates.

50. This shortfall was aggravated by the fact that some 4 000 candidates who had successfully passed the pre-selection tests did not participate in further stages of the selection procedure. In many cases, the reason for not participating was that they did not meet all the eligibility requirements stipulated

¹⁵ See for example case F-25/05 where the Civil Service Tribunal annulled the decisions of the selection board of 6 and 7 September 2004 not to admit the applicants to the tests for Competition EPSO/C/11/03.

¹⁶ Or the written tests where no preselection tests took place.

in the notice of competitions; compliance with these requirements was only verified after the pre-selection tests had taken place.

51. To remedy the situation where there were not enough candidates who could take the written test, since January 2008, EPSO has reintroduced a procedure (the “repêchage”¹⁷ of candidates) to fill the gaps left by those candidates who are successful in pre-selection tests but do not participate in further stages of the selection procedure.

52. Shortfalls in the number of laureates lead to the Institutions’ human resources needs not being met by permanent staff, and to increased reliance on temporary and contractual staff. This increases the risk of loss of institutionalised knowledge.

53. The EDP views pre-selection as an effective step to reduce the number of candidates to a manageable level where necessary. It discusses the option of excluding only the least performing candidates who have achieved a pass mark in each of the pre-selection tests, as well as all those who have failed any of these tests, from participating in the next stage of the competition, rather than selecting only the best performing for further testing. However, no decision has been made as yet.

The selection process did not achieve the broadest possible geographical balance

54. The Staff Regulations require that the Institutions recruit staff on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of the Member States. This is only possible if the distribution of laureates on the reserve lists reflects such a geographical basis.

¹⁷ The “repêchage” occurs between the pre-selection and written tests. Where the number of candidates who have been successful in the pre-selection tests and who have fulfilled the eligibility criteria is insufficient, the shortfall is made up by

55. In view of the enlargements of the European Union which took place in 2004 and 2007, priority was given to candidates from the new Member States and a number of competitions organised by EPSO were open to candidates from these countries only. As the Court's analysis of EPSO's database (see paragraph 31) shows, out of the total number of 10 151 laureates, almost two-thirds (6 416) were from EU-12 (i.e. new) Member States (see ***Annex IVb***).

56. This analysis also shows that candidates from Member States with a relatively high proportion of the EU population tended to be under-represented amongst laureates. As the data in ***Annex IVa*** and ***IVb*** show, this applied not only to Member States like the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain within the EU-15 group, but also to Poland and Romania within the EU-12 group. On the other hand, with the exception of Austria and Bulgaria, candidates from smaller Member States tended to be over-represented compared to their countries' proportion of the EU-population. This was in particular the case for candidates from Belgium.

57. As there may be several factors that affect the geographical balance, an in-depth analysis would be required to identify reasons for the imbalances observed. The EDP neither analyses nor addresses the geographical imbalances in detail.

Shortcomings in management information

Insufficient information available on costs

58. The cost of placing a laureate on a reserve list should be calculated by EPSO, so that it can ensure that an appropriate level of investment, in line with similar organisations, is made in the personnel selection process. Such an

inviting the next-highest-placed eligible candidates from the pre-selection tests to the written tests.

assessment is important, given the fact that the EU Institutions offer life-time careers.

59. There is not sufficient information available on costs, whether actual costs, standard costs or benchmarks derived from similar international public sector organisations. EPSO does not calculate or monitor the cost incurred for a laureate to be placed on a reserve list. It has service-level agreements with European Regulatory Agencies for the provision of personnel selection services, for which EPSO charges 6 000 euro per laureate for open competitions.

60. The Court estimates that, based on budgetary execution, the cost incurred by EPSO was about 7 100 euro per laureate; this comprises 4 590 euro in direct costs and 2 510 in indirect costs. Furthermore, in order to determine the full cost to the EU budget, the cost incurred by the Institutions (staff participating in selection boards, marking, invigilation etc.) must also be included, which would increase the aforementioned amount.

61. The EDP does not address the cost per laureate, and does not identify targets or standards in this regard.

62. Furthermore, the EDP envisages a range of measures (e.g. assessment centres) which would require additional financing during the implementation phase. However, it does not contain any precise indication with regard to the potential additional costs and future benefits as a consequence of the implementation of the EDP. Quantification of costs and assessment of future benefits would facilitate decision-making by the Budgetary Authority regarding the financing of this plan.

Weaknesses in EPSO's databases

63. Databases should have appropriate built-in controls and contain information that is correct and timely, so as to help ensure an efficient process.

64. Candidates must introduce personal data via the Internet in order to submit their application. Later in the process, test results, data provided by juries and lists of laureates are also stored in the databases.

65. The audit revealed weaknesses in EPSO's databases:

- (a) the system did not reliably reject multiple applications from one and the same person, which are expressly prohibited by competition rules;
- (b) coding of information input to the system was inconsistent;
- (c) certain data input to the system contained inaccurate or impossible elements;
- (d) up-to-date information was not provided on the availability of laureates.

66. Multiple applications presented by the same person can be detected electronically only if a unique and unequivocal identifier is used, which is not currently the case. Furthermore, the same codes are not used consistently to record the same information about a specific stage of the competition (e.g. codes for candidates who are successful at pre-selection, written tests, etc.), resulting in a lack of harmonised data for analytical purposes.

67. Acceptance of multiple applications by the system entails the risk of unequal treatment of candidates. A lack of reliable, useful and timely management information at competition level and at a global level makes it difficult for EPSO's management to identify patterns, emerging trends or exceptions to established norms.

68. EPSO foresees the introduction of a new database in 2010. It is important that the weaknesses identified above are appropriately addressed in this new database.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

69. Overall, the audit concluded that EPSO had successfully managed the increase in the number of open competitions required in the context of enlargement. However, the following shortcomings affected EPSO's efficiency and effectiveness:

- (i) staffing needs of the Institutions were not communicated to EPSO in a timely manner or based on a consistent methodology;
- (ii) the duration of the personnel selection process was too long, both in relation to EPSO's own standards and international best practice; the testing phase experienced delays, mainly due to the fact that members of the selection boards were not made available on a full-time basis;
- (iii) competitions only produced on average two-thirds of the targeted number of laureates. This resulted from withdrawals caused by the long duration of the process, undue emphasis on specific language requirements; unclear communication of competitions; and pre-selection tests which eliminated more candidates than was necessary to meet targets. Furthermore, the selection process did not achieve the broadest possible geographical balance amongst laureates.
- (iv) management information was not consistently reliable or comprehensive. Information on the costs incurred to place a laureate on the reserve list was not sufficient; the potential additional costs and future benefits resulting from the EPSO Development Programme (EDP) were not quantified; and information contained in EPSO's databases was not consistently reliable.

70. The EDP, adopted in September 2008, aims to reduce the duration of competitions to a maximum of nine months and to increase their yield. It envisages *inter alia* a shift towards strategic human resource planning; more robust pre-selection; widespread use of CBT; and professionalised selection

boards. It is planned that the new procedures will be operational from the first quarter of 2010. Taking into account the major change planned in the organisation of selection procedures through the EDP, the Court's main recommendations are:

Recommendation concerning human resource planning

Recommendation No1: Communicating needs in a timely and consistent manner

The representatives of the Institutions on the EPSO Management Board should ensure that the Institutions provide EPSO with sufficiently timely and reliable information concerning their staffing needs, on the basis of a common approach for assessing such needs in the context of a three-year rolling forward plan.

Recommendation concerning the duration of the personnel selection process

Recommendation No 2: Ensuring support by the Institutions for professionalised selection boards and qualified assessors

In order to achieve the reduction in duration foreseen in the EPSO Development Programme (EDP), the representatives of the Institutions on the EPSO Management Board should ensure that the Institutions support EPSO by seconding to the latter a sufficient number of qualified officials on a full-time basis and by encouraging their staff to become part of the proposed pool of qualified assessors. If such support is not forthcoming, other measures should be adopted to ensure the foreseen reduction in duration is achieved.

Recommendations concerning the yield and geographical balance of competitions

Recommendation No 3: Adapting the specific language requirements

In order to place more importance on professional rather than language skills, the option to carry out pre-selection in all 23 languages should be adopted. The requirement of specific language profiles should be reconsidered; and more emphasis should be put on testing candidates' ability to learn languages quickly in line with the new competency-based approach to selection procedures.

Recommendation No 4: Improving the quality of competition notices

EPSO should apply strict quality control mechanisms to ensure the publication of accurate and clear competition notices.

Recommendation No 5: Ensuring an appropriate number of candidates at each stage of the selection process

- (a) Concerted action by Institutions for the development and financing of a common communication strategy to attract qualified candidates should be taken under the coordination of EPSO.
- (b) In order to attain the required number of laureates EPSO should, at each stage of the competition, strive to ensure that an appropriate number of suitable candidates is invited for further testing.

Recommendation No 6: Improving geographical balance

EPSO should identify in detail the extent of geographical imbalance, analyse the reasons thereof, and make proposals on how to improve geographical balance.

Recommendations concerning management information**Recommendation No 7: Determining costs of competitions**

- (a) EPSO should identify the full cost to the EU budget of placing a laureate on a reserve list, and compare the results with similar international public sector organisations, so as to ensure that an appropriate level of investment is made in the personnel selection process.
- (b) EPSO should also quantify the potential additional costs and assess the future benefits arising from the implementation of the EDP, in order to facilitate decision-making by the Budgetary Authority to finance this plan.

Recommendation No 8: Introducing a new database for the management of competitions

EPSO should take steps to ensure that the new database for managing competitions is designed to avoid entry of irregular multiple applications, is used consistently for all competitions and produces reliable, useful and timely management information at competition level and at a global level.

This Report was adopted by the Court of Auditors in Luxembourg at its meeting of 11 June 2009.

For the Court of Auditors

Vítor Manuel da Silva Caldeira
President

DURATION OF COMPETITIONS

	Competition code	Profile	Approval of competition notice by the EPSO Board	Examination of competition notice by COPARCO(*)	Publication in the Official Journal	Deadline for registration	Sitting of written tests	Completion of oral tests	Publication of reserve list	Duration of competition
			(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8) = (7) - (4)
1	EPSO/LA/10/03	Head of linguistic division/Legal specialist LA3	10.12.2002	28.2.2003	15.4.2003	23.5.2003	19.3.2004	7.7.2004	7.7.2004	13 months and 14 days
2	EPSO/A/2/03	Czech citizens Assistant administrator AD8	10.12.2002	29.4.2003	22.5.2003	24.6.2003	12.12.2003	28.6.2004	22.7.2004	13 months
3	EPSO/A/8/03	Polish citizens Assistant administrator AD8	10.12.2002	29.4.2003	22.5.2003	24.6.2003	12.12.2003	28.7.2004	30.7.2004	13 months and 6 days
4	EPSO/C/4/03	Hungarian citizens Secretaries C5/C4	10.12.2002	29.4.2003	22.5.2003	24.6.2003	28.11.2003	2.7.2004	7.12.2004	17 months and 13 days
5	EPSO/C/9/03	Slovenians citizens Secretaries C5/C4	10.12.2002	29.4.2003	22.5.2003	24.6.2003	28.11.2003	4.6.2004	4.6.2004	11 months and 10 days
6	EPSO/LA/11/03	Assistant translators LA 8	10.12.2002	29.4.2003	22.5.2003	24.6.2003	27.11.2003	14.7.2004	1.9.2004	14 months and 7 days
7	EPSO/LA/12/03	Lawyer-Linguists LA7 / LA6	10.12.2002	29.4.2003	6.6.2003	11.7.2003	24.1.2004	7.4.2004	7.4.2004	9 months
8	EPSO/C/11/03	English-language secretaries (C5 / C4)	5.12.2003	7.10.2003	6.11.2003	8.12.2003	30.4.2004	14.3.2005	15.3.2005	15 months and 7 days
9	EPSO/A/17/04	Administrators A7/A6 research	5.12.2003	20.10.2003	31.3.2004	30.4.2004	15.4.2005	23.3.2006	28.4.2006	24 months
10	EPSO/A/18/04	Administrators A7/A6 food safety	5.12.2003	29.1.2004	21.4.2004	24.5.2004	28.1.2005	21.10.2005	21.10.2005	17 months
11	EPSO/AST/3/04	Information Technology B*3	11.11.2004	10.11.2004	22.12.2004	3.2.2005	15.7.2005	23.5.2006	23.5.2006	15 months and 19 days
12	EPSO/AD/25/05	Administrators AD5 Public administrator	7.4.2005	22.6.2005	20.7.2005	29.9.2005	29.3.2006	21.3.2007	2.4.2007	19 months and 4 days
13	EPSO/AD/26/05	Administrators AD5 Law	7.4.2005	22.6.2005	20.7.2005	29.9.2005	31.3.2006	7.5.2007	7.5.2007	20 months and 8 days
14	EPSO/AD/29/05	Administrators AD5 Economic/Statistic	7.4.2005	22.6.2005	20.7.2005	29.9.2005	31.3.2006	28.2.2007	8.3.2007	17 months and 9 days
15	EPSO/AD/37/05	Linguistic administrators AD5 (DE)	20.10.2005	18.10.2005	23.11.2005	21.12.2005	29.9.2006	30.3.2007	19.4.2007	16 months
16	EPSO/AST/7/05	Assistants AST 3 financial manager	7.4.2005	22.6.2005	20.7.2005	29.9.2005	31.3.2006	24.3.2007	24.3.2007	17 months and 24 days
			Average duration from approval of competition notice to publication in the Official Journal: 4 months			Average duration from deadline for registration to publication of reserve lists: 16 months				

Source : European Court of Auditors on the basis of EPSO, COPARCO and OJ data.

(*) Common Joint Committee/Commission Paritaire Commune.

Annex II**YIELD OF COMPETITIONS**

	Competition code	Profile	Expected number of laureates as per competition notice	Actual number of laureates	Yield
			(1)	(2)	(3)=(2)/(1)
1	EPSO/LA/10/03	Head of linguistic division/Legal specialist LA3	108	20	19%
2	EPSO/A/2/03	Czech citizens Assistant administrator AD8	245	180	73%
3	EPSO/A/8/03	Polish citizens Assistant administrator AD8	305	252	83%
4	EPSO/C/4/03	Hungarian citizens Secretaries C5/C4	240	242	101%
5	EPSO/C/9/03	Slovenians citizens Secretaries C5/C4	95	50	53%
6	EPSO/LA/11/03	Assistant translators LA 8	1.215	549	45%
7	EPSO/LA/12/03	Lawyer-Linguists LA7 / LA6	360	216	60%
8	EPSO/C/11/03	English-language secretaries (C5 / C4)	350	351	100%
9	EPSO/A/17/04	Administrators A7/A6 research	180	107	59%
10	EPSO/A/18/04	Administrators A7/A6 food safety	350	274	78%
11	EPSO/AST/3/04	Information Technology B*3	230	70	30%
12	EPSO/AD/25/05	Administrators AD5 Public administrator	210	213	101%
13	EPSO/AD/26/05	Administrators AD5 Law	180	174	97%
14	EPSO/AD/29/05	Administrators AD5 Economic/Statistic	135	137	101%
15	EPSO/AD/37/05	Linguistic administrators AD5 (DE)	35	37	106%
16	EPSO/AST/7/05	Assistants AST 3 financial manager	310	217	70%
Yield of a sample of 16 competitions			4.548	3.089	68%
Yield of 176 competitions launched between 2003 and 2006			15.500	10.151	65%

Source : European Court of Auditors on the basis of EPSO and OJ data.

BREAKDOWN OF SECOND LANGUAGE SELECTED BY PARTICIPANTS IN TESTS

Member States	Number of participants in tests	English (EN)	French (FR)	German (DE)	Other Languages
Belgium	9.496	5.947	1.537	127	1.885
Bulgaria	6.260	3.580	1.553	1.115	12
Czech Republic	4.728	3.032	777	882	37
Denmark	845	613	127	32	73
Germany	4.464	3.210	651	487	116
Estonia	1.431	1.132	107	162	30
Ireland	519	115	328	25	51
Greece	3.166	2.149	491	104	422
Spain	3.675	1.908	952	55	760
France	7.595	5.727	669	413	786
Italy	9.393	5.370	2.478	387	1.158
Cyprus	756	655	73	12	16
Latvia	1.452	1.123	144	169	16
Lithuania	2.454	1.789	338	293	34
Luxembourg	160	55	40	51	14
Hungary	6.367	3.927	1.000	1.378	62
Malta	735	650	36	4	45
Netherlands	881	608	99	34	140
Austria	1.032	806	102	96	28
Poland	10.919	6.508	2.541	1.768	102
Portugal	2.229	1.276	640	24	289
Romania	7.278	4.557	2.272	432	17
Slovenia	1.813	1.404	140	247	22
Slovakia	3.971	2.564	581	801	25
Finland	1.008	779	81	21	127
Sweden	1.160	936	133	16	75
United Kingdom	1.164	84	820	97	163
Total	94.951	60.504	18.710	9.232	6.505
Percentage	100%	64%	20%	10%	6%

Source : European Court of Auditors on the basis of EPSO data.

GEOGRAPHICAL BALANCE OF COMPETITION RESULTS - EU 15

EU-15 Member States	Population on 1 January 2006 (in 1 000)	Percentage of EU-15 population	Number of candidates	Percentage of candidates	Number of participants in tests	Percentage of participants	Number of laureates	Percentage of laureates
Belgium	10.511,4	2,7%	20.105	18,2%	9.496	20,3%	820	22,0%
Denmark	5.427,5	1,4%	2.093	1,9%	845	1,8%	127	3,4%
Germany	82.438,0	21,2%	9.480	8,6%	4.464	9,5%	467	12,5%
Ireland	4.209,0	1,1%	1.456	1,3%	519	1,1%	97	2,6%
Greece	11.125,2	2,9%	7.655	6,9%	3.166	6,8%	163	4,4%
Spain	43.758,3	11,2%	8.966	8,1%	3.675	7,9%	272	7,3%
France	62.886,2	16,1%	16.438	14,9%	7.595	16,2%	582	15,6%
Italy	58.751,7	15,1%	25.024	22,7%	9.393	20,1%	424	11,4%
Luxembourg	459,5	0,1%	354	0,3%	160	0,3%	16	0,4%
Netherlands	16.334,2	4,2%	1.889	1,7%	881	1,9%	91	2,4%
Austria	8.265,9	2,1%	2.717	2,5%	1.032	2,2%	72	1,9%
Portugal	10.569,6	2,7%	6.088	5,5%	2.229	4,8%	148	4,0%
Finland	5.255,6	1,3%	2.160	2,0%	1.008	2,2%	149	4,0%
Sweden	9.047,8	2,3%	2.860	2,6%	1.160	2,5%	99	2,7%
United Kingdom	60.393,1	15,5%	3.006	2,7%	1.164	2,5%	208	5,6%
Total	389.433,0	100,0%	110.291	100,0%	46.787	100,0%	3.735	100,0%

Source : European Court of Auditors on the basis of EUROSTAT, EPSO and OJ data.

GEOGRAPHICAL BALANCE OF COMPETITION RESULTS - EU 12

EU-12 Member States	Population on 1 January 2006 (in 1 000)	Percentage of EU-12 population	Number of candidates	Percentage of candidates	Number of participants in tests	Percentage of participants	Number of laureates	Percentage of laureates
Bulgaria	7.718,8	7,5%	10.276	10,5%	6.260	13,0%	387	6,0%
Czech Republic	10.251,1	9,9%	9.338	9,5%	4.728	9,8%	814	12,7%
Estonia	1.344,7	1,3%	2.882	2,9%	1.431	3,0%	379	5,9%
Cyprus	766,4	0,7%	2.133	2,2%	756	1,6%	130	2,0%
Latvia	2.294,6	2,2%	2.751	2,8%	1.452	3,0%	281	4,4%
Lithuania	3.403,3	3,3%	5.290	5,4%	2.454	5,1%	397	6,2%
Hungary	10.076,6	9,7%	13.196	13,4%	6.367	13,2%	971	15,1%
Malta	404,3	0,4%	1.687	1,7%	735	1,5%	209	3,3%
Poland	38.157,1	36,9%	22.957	23,4%	10.919	22,7%	1.465	22,8%
Romania	21.610,2	20,9%	15.627	15,9%	7.278	15,1%	531	8,3%
Slovenia	2.003,4	1,9%	3.868	3,9%	1.813	3,8%	339	5,3%
Slovakia	5.389,2	5,2%	8.151	8,3%	3.971	8,2%	513	8,0%
Total	103.419,7	100,0%	98.156	100,0%	48.164	100,0%	6.416	100,0%

Source : European Court of Auditors on the basis of EUROSTAT, EPSO and OJ data.



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 30.6.2009
SEC(2009)919

REPLIES TO THE SPECIAL REPORT BY THE COURT OF AUDITORS

**“THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PERSONNEL SELECTION
ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE EUROPEAN PERSONNEL SELECTION
OFFICE”**

REPLIES TO THE SPECIAL REPORT BY THE COURT OF AUDITORS

“THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PERSONNEL SELECTION ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE EUROPEAN PERSONNEL SELECTION OFFICE”

1. SUMMARY

I. EPSO welcomes the Court of Auditors report at a time when the methods and policies used for the selection of personnel for the European institutions are undergoing a complete overhaul.

III.

(a) Under the EPSO Development Programme (EDP) approved by the Management Board, it was decided to establish a three-year rolling plan and to define a methodology so that the institutions could communicate their needs in a uniform manner. This common methodology is in the process of being applied.

Adapting planning to ensure strategic management of human resources requirements is one of the pillars of the overhaul of selection procedures currently under way under the EDP.

(b) Having launched an effort to identify best current practice in a number of international organisations and national administrations at the end of 2007, the Office clearly identified the problem concerning the duration of competitions. In the EDP, EPSO made specific proposals to remedy this. Under the EDP and the annual competition cycle, the duration of competitions from publication of the notice to publication of the reserve list will be between 5 and 9 months (depending on the number of candidates).

(c) In the absence of strategic planning, the numbers of successful candidates sought by the institutions on an ad hoc basis have always included some margin, in particular for the profiles where candidates are in shortest supply.

The current system yielded almost 11 000 successful candidates, and just over 7 000 were actually recruited by the institutions. This strongly suggests that the failure to attain the total number of successful candidates initially sought had only a limited impact and shows that the system did, in fact, work.

There was a shortfall for certain profiles (EUR10 translators, for example), reflecting a lack of qualified candidates in these sectors of the labour market rather than a defect in strategic planning (repeat competitions confirmed the initial shortfall).

The objective of the EDP is precisely to tackle these difficulties, in particular through the combined implementation of the new strategic plan and a communication strategy aimed at attracting sufficient numbers of candidates best qualified for the profiles sought; this includes targeting deficit profiles/countries and establishing closer partnerships with the Member States in order to relay information.

Systematically including a ‘repêchage’ clause in competition notices will also make it possible to limit any loss of candidates during the admission procedure.

(d) Introduction of the EDP is intended to meet the goal of increasing value added and improving cost-effectiveness (‘value for money’). The EDP aims to improve the quality of selection procedures and so to increase the likelihood of obtaining suitable successful candidates for work in the institutions. In terms of financial impact, then, the focus has to be recruitment rather than selection. The proposed budget for 2010 details the additional appropriations necessary during the start-up phase.

A new computerised management system for competitions is currently under development and is due to come on stream in 2010. In the meantime, EPSO has set up sound mechanisms to ensure the reliability of the information contained in the existing databases.

V.

(a) Under the EDP approved by the Management Board in September 2008, a three-year strategic plan is under development on the basis of a common standard for the communication of requirements by the institutions.

(b) Under the EDP, this is due to be implemented from 2010.

(c) Several measures are already in place in response to the Court’s comments:

- quality control has been improved, both internally (creation of a specific quality control function) and externally (more thorough linguistic checking by the DGT and the Publications Office);

- competition notices have been simplified and rationalised and are now available in 23 languages;

- the website has been revamped, with stable information now available in all 23 languages;

- new language arrangements are gradually being brought in, both for communication and for the tests so as to rebalance those in the second language and those in the main language in terms of their relative weight;

- tests are being more closely geared to the needs of the institutions in terms of the competences sought.

Diversity and attractiveness constitute the third pillar of the EDP. In this connection, various measures are planned to increase EPSO’s and the institutions’ ability to attract the best qualified candidates, in particular by focusing communication strategy on a more targeted and variable-geometry approach for Member States and/or profiles where a particular shortage has been identified, and through a complete makeover of the institutions’ image as employers to match the expectations of younger generations.

(d) EPSO will improve its management information under the EDP.

As pointed out earlier, the fundamental aim of the EDP is to increase value added and cost-effectiveness (‘value for money’) for each successful candidate.

The proposed budget for 2010 details the additional appropriations necessary during the start-up phase.

2. OBSERVATIONS

14. EPSO welcomes the Court's recognition that it managed the increase in the number of competitions effectively. This demonstrates that the institutions have coped successfully with enlargement.

17. (a) Under the development programme (EDP) approved by the Management Board, it was decided to establish a three-year rolling plan and to define a methodology so that the institutions could communicate their needs in a uniform manner. This common methodology is in the process of being applied.

Adapting planning to ensure strategic management of human resources requirements is one of the pillars of the overhaul of selection procedures currently under way under the EDP.

18. The institutions agreed that always selecting at least twice as many candidates as the number of the jobs to be filled was not a practicable approach. A permanent mismatch between the number of successful candidates and the number eventually recruited would entail additional costs and have a negative impact in terms of image. In this context of enhanced forecasting and anticipation of the institutions' needs, the three-year strategic plan and the introduction of annual cycles of competitions already mean, in practice, that the institutions allow a smaller margin under the current ad hoc system for fixing the number of successful candidates sought (on average, it is currently about 20% above actual requirements).

23. Having launched an effort to identify best current practice in a number of international organisations and national administrations at the end of 2007, the Office clearly identified that the duration of competitions was a problem. In the EDP, EPSO made specific proposals to remedy this. Under the EDP and the annual competition cycle, the duration of competitions — from publication of the notice to publication of the reserve list — will be between 5 and 9 months (depending on the number of candidates).

26. The EDP takes account of the key factor in the delays, namely the timely designation of selection board members and their availability, and offers a remedy by providing for the long-term secondment of selection board members.

32. The substantial shortfalls observed in the case of certain lists have been remedied by relaunching competitions where necessary. In addition, in January 2008 EPSO introduced a 'repêchage' clause into every competition notice to ensure that a sufficient number of candidates satisfying the eligibility criteria can be invited to the stages following the computer-based tests.

40. The language arrangements for competitions are approved and adapted annually by EPSO'S Management Board, on which all the institutions are represented. At its meeting on 13 November 2008, the Board approved the Office's proposals for implementation in two stages: firstly, the introduction from 2010 of tests in the main language in monolingual specific competitions only and secondly, from 2011, general use of 23 languages for most admission tests (in particular verbal and numerical reasoning).

The choice of language arrangements is dictated not only by practical logistical considerations but also by the institutions' imperative need to be able to recruit successful candidates capable of working in the languages that they (the institutions) use most widely.

41-42. Under the EDP, competition notices have recently been simplified and rationalised to include the former guide for candidates in a standard section of the competition notice plus a shorter section specific to each competition, so reducing the risk of errors. The competition notices are also now available in the 23 languages of the EU. The logical structure of competition notices has been improved to facilitate management and make the information clearer for candidates as well as to improve the institutions' image, since the competition notice is often a citizen's first contact with the institutions.

As regards disseminating information about competition notices, a number of reforms have already been introduced under the EDP, notably the conclusion of a new contract for publicity in the media, wider use of new media to match the expectations and habits of younger generations (for example, a video clip on Community careers has been on YouTube since March 2009), the development of a communication strategy centred around a new brand image for the institutions as employers, the launch of a new website, and lastly a strategy of closer cooperation with the Member States to ensure better dissemination of information (improved relations with the Permanent Representatives in Brussels, contacts with national authorities on the ground, increased use of EPSO's network of recruitment experts in national administrations).

43. The strategic plan and the annual cycle of competitions will make it possible to limit the number of corrigenda due to changes in the number of the successful candidates sought.

Similarly, quality control has been tightened at EPSO's initiative for both translation in the DGT and linguistic checking in the Publications Office.

45. Since 4 March 2009 competition notices have been published in 23 languages.

46. The institutions are very aware of the need to improve their image as employers, and this is one of the EDP's goals.

50. Under the EDP, steps have been taken to keep the number of candidates who do not satisfy the admission conditions/eligibility criteria to a minimum:

- a new, more detailed and intuitive on-line application form has been introduced. Candidates have to declare on their honour that the information given in their on-line application is correct;

- there is more scope for self-evaluation to allow candidates to assess beforehand whether they will be able to pass the selection tests;

- admission will involve two stages: initial screening on the basis of the information given by candidates on-line and subsequent screening at a later stage later in the procedure.

The time savings are estimated at almost three months compared with the current selection procedure.

53. The principle of 'sifting in' candidates has already been approved under the EDP. The practicalities will be decided as part of the first annual cycle.

57. There is a limit to what EPSO can do in this area, since the geographical imbalances are mainly due to external factors over which it has no control, such as the state of the economy in the Member States, public perception of the European Union, and relative wage levels. Nevertheless, Chapter 3 of the EDP answers the need to target certain candidate populations, in particular those from specific Member States. An analysis of geographical balance has been carried out.

58. The cost of placing a successful candidate on a reserve list, taking particular account of similar costs incurred by each institution before an inter-institutional body responsible for selection procedures was set up, has been calculated by the Office when it was created. However, what is needed is not to evaluate the cost of a successful candidate as such, but to compare it with the potential cost of a poor recruitment decision in the context of lifelong employment.

59. An analysis of the reference costs in order to compare the costs determined with those of national administrations will be carried out through EPSO's network of national recruitment experts and should be available in the second half of 2009.

61. The analysis of reference costs will enable EPSO to formulate appropriate standards and objectives in line with progress in implementing the EDP.

62. The EDP is intended to impart added value to the selection process. An even more highly professional selection service, which is the principal goal of the EDP, will yield a substantial return by attracting and selecting the right candidates to enable the institutions to achieve their major strategic objectives.

The proposed budget for 2010 details the additional appropriations necessary during the start-up phase. The costs, and the expected gains, will be refined once the cost of the various factors deployed under the new system are known in detail following the award of contracts under the current calls for tenders concerning evaluation centres and the new contents of the tests.

65.

(a) EPSO has introduced a series of systematic automated and manual controls to prevent candidates from making multiple applications for one or more competitions. First, the existence of a single EPSO file in which candidates have to be registered before they can take part in competitions is designed to prevent multiple applications or detect them later. Then there are two subsequent levels of control to detect multiple files from the same candidate. Lastly, possible deception is also detected at the computer-based test stage, when candidates are required to prove their identity, or before their admission to the following stages of the selection process. The introduction of a more complete application form in March 2009 containing, in particular, the candidate's academic profile, professional experience, and reasons for applying has served to make multiple applications by one and the same candidate even more difficult; in addition, candidates now have to certify that the information given in their application form is true.

(b) The problems concerning the coding of input information and some of the data input into the system have already been taken into account in the design of the new system (the structure of a competition will have to include standard elements and it will be possible to add specific stages) and a larger range of validation rules will be applied at the time of input. The new system will become operational in 2010.

(d) The institutions are responsible for the recruitment of successful candidates. They are also required to inform EPSO in good time of any events affecting the status of successful candidates so that it can update the database. EPSO considers that the system functions well and that it has improved considerably now that successful candidates can check their status in real time.

66. The existence of a unique identifier would prevent attempted multiple applications. However, there is no unique identifier across the entire European Union.

67. EPSO believes it has set up a sound and cost-effective series of controls offering a proportionate response to the potential risks as regards equal treatment. As the Court noted in point 70, EPSO is developing its systems under the EDP in order to improve its management information.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

69. The objective of the EDP is precisely to remedy the principal weaknesses identified in the current selection system.

(i) Adapting planning towards strategic management of human resources requirements is one of the pillars of the overhaul of selection procedures currently under way under the EDP approved by the Management Board in September 2008. The establishment of a three-year rolling plan and the definition of common standards for clear and consistent methods by which the institutions can communicate their needs have now been decided and are in the process of being introduced.

(ii) EPSO has clearly identified the problem concerning the duration of competitions and has made appropriate proposals under the EDP to remedy this. Under the future annual cycle, the duration of a competition from publication of the notice to publication of the reserve list will amount to between 5 and 9 months. The issue of selection board members' availability is also addressed by the EDP.

(iii) Competitions produced more successful candidates than the institutions recruited from the available reserve lists. Both the new language arrangements approved by the Management Board and the measures included in the EDP tackle the various observations made by the Court. Lastly, the scope for action to ensure the broadest possible geographical balance is limited owing to a number of external factors that are beyond the control of either EPSO or the institutions.

(iv) EPSO will improve its management information under the EDP.

The fundamental aim of the EDP is to increase value added and cost-effectiveness ('value for money') for each successful candidate.

A new database will be operational in 2010 and will take account of the issues identified by the Court.

70. The measures planned under the EDP offer a response to all the weaknesses identified in the current Community selection procedures, which explains its unanimous adoption by all the institutions.

Recommendation 1: Communicating needs in a timely and consistent manner

This recommendation is accepted and is already being implemented. Under the EDP approved by the Management Board in September 2008, the establishment of a three-year rolling plan and the definition of common standards for the institutions to communicate their needs have been decided and the strategic plan for 2009–2011 is being put in place (recommendation 1 of the EDP). The needs of the institutions for the next three years were received in March 2009. Adapting planning towards strategic management of human resources requirements is one of the pillars of the EDP.

Recommendation 2: Securing the institutions' support for 'professional' selection boards and qualified assessors

This recommendation is accepted and is already being implemented through two action points provided for in the EDP (recommendations 14 and 15): in connection with the establishment of the evaluation centres, 'professional' selection boards based on secondment of staff from the institutions to EPSO for a fixed period of up to 4 years and the constitution of a pool of markers. Discussions with the institutions based on proposals from the Office, in particular on the precise arrangements for secondment of selection board members, are in their final stages. These measures will be implemented in 2010.

The duration of selection procedures will also be reduced with the introduction of the annual cycles (recommendation 2 of the EDP) and all the related measures taken in this connection.

Recommendation 3: Adapting the specific language requirements

This recommendation is accepted. At its meeting on 13 November 2008, the Board approved the Office's proposals for implementation in two stages: (1) the introduction from 2010 of tests in the candidates' main language, in monolingual specific competitions only, in order to test the database containing the new language versions of the questions and (2) from 2011 the use of 23 languages as a general rule for most admission tests (in particular verbal and numerical reasoning). The future behavioural tests will continue to be in the three working languages (candidates' second language).

The choice of language arrangements is dictated not only by practical logistical considerations but also by the institutions' imperative need to be able to recruit successful candidates capable of working in the languages that they (the institutions) use most widely.

Recommendation 4: Improving the quality of competition notices

This recommendation is accepted and is already being implemented. As part of the Office's reorganisation, an internal quality control function has been set up. Similarly, external quality control has been strengthened at the Office's initiative for both translation in the DGT and linguistic checking in the Publications Office, and the number of corrigenda due to errors has fallen. More broadly, competition notices have recently been simplified and rationalised under the EDP, with a standard section in 23 languages and a shorter section specific to each competition (also in 23 languages¹ for EUR27 competitions), which will reduce the risk of errors. The logical structure of competition notices has thus been improved

¹ OJ C 47 A of 26.2.2009.

to facilitate management, improve communication, and enhance the image of the institutions, as the competition notice is often a citizen's first contact with the institutions.

Recommendation 5: Ensuring a suitable number of candidates at each stage in the selection procedure

(a) This recommendation is accepted and is already being implemented. Under the EDP and the new communication strategy, a revamped website has been in place since the beginning of March 2009. In addition, regular meetings and contacts are held on EPSO's initiative with the network of experts on selection and recruitment in the Member States, and the subject of making EU careers appealing to candidates is regularly discussed.

(b) This recommendation is accepted is already being implemented. In addition, in January 2008 EPSO introduced a 'repêchage' clause into every competition notice to ensure that a sufficient number of candidates satisfying the eligibility criteria can be invited to the stages following the computer-based tests. Because of the costs involved in organising tests in the evaluation centres, the number of candidates invited by EPSO will not be more than three times the final number required for entry on the reserve lists. These principles are in line with the practice on the ground.

Recommendation 6: Improving geographical balance

This recommendation is accepted. The geographical imbalances are mainly due to external factors over which EPSO has no control, such as the state of the economy in the Member States, public perception of the European Union, and relative wage levels. The Office is fully aware of the statutory obligation for the institutions to recruit on a broad geographical basis. Together with the institutions, EPSO constantly monitors the geographical make-up of competitions and takes the necessary steps when the number of applications is considered suboptimal in view of the size of a Member State's population. In particular this involves increased, targeted publicity in those Member States and awareness-raising campaigns aimed at potential candidates.

Recommendation 7: Determining the costs of competitions

(a) That part of the recommendation to do with determining the total cost to the Community budget of placing a successful candidate on a reserve list is accepted. The cost of placing a successful candidate on a reserve list, taking particular account of similar costs incurred by each institution before an inter-institutional body responsible for selection procedures was set up, has been calculated by the Office when it was created.

An analysis of the reference costs in order to compare the costs determined with those of national administrations will be carried out through EPSO's network of national recruitment experts and should be available in the second half of 2009.

However, what is needed is not to evaluate the cost of a successful candidate as such, but to compare it with the potential cost of a poor recruitment decision in the context of lifelong employment.

(b) This recommendation is accepted and is already being implemented. The EDP is intended to impart added value to the selection process. A more highly professional selection service, which is the principal goal of the EDP, will yield a substantial return by attracting and

selecting the right candidates to enable the institutions to achieve their major strategic objectives.

Recommendation 8: Introducing a new database for the management of competitions

This recommendation is accepted and is already being implemented. All the issues raised are included in the list of requirements for the new system. A more detailed analysis is under way to remedy the problem of multiple applications, taking into account every possible type of action (procedural, legal, or technical).