Implementation of the directive on urban waste water

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The Commission presented its **Seventh Report on the Implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive** (91/271/EEC).

This 7th Report on the implementation of the Directive describes the **progress made up to the end of 2009/2010**. The Report also includes trends in compliance and presents the new approach for "compliance promotion" and its steps towards public information and reporting.

Implementation of this Directive has been challenging mainly because of the financial and planning aspects related to major infrastructure investment such as sewerage systems and treatment facilities.

The implementation efforts of the Member States have already led to significant improvements in waste water treatment. However, implementation is far from being completed and pollution problems persist.

The main conclusions of the report are as follows:

Compliance rate: nearly 20 years after the adoption of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, **significant progress towards full implementation was achieved by 2010**.

(1) For the EU-15, average compliance rates are 88% for secondary treatment and higher for collection systems and more stringent treatment (97 and 90% respectively). The frontrunners Austria, Germany and the Netherlands have largely implemented the Directive with several others being very close to it. For them, the priority will be to maintain and renew the existing infrastructure.

Moreover, since 2010, further investments took place in those EU-15 Member States with delayed compliance, also as a result of the Commission’s infringement actions. To date, approximately **20 horizontal grouped cases** against 10 of the EU-15 Member States **are still open**. With continued efforts over the coming years, it is possible to complete implementation successfully in those 15 Member States **by 2015 or 2016**.

(2) EU-12, the picture is different for those Member States which joined the EU in 2004 and later. **Their distance to target is still considerable** with average compliance of 72% for collecting systems and 39% and 14% respectively for secondary and more advanced treatment. Without increasing efforts at all levels, expected delays can be similar or longer than those for EU-15 which would bring the laggards in implementation in line with the Directive **as late as 2028**.

Big cities: there are 585 big cities identified in this Report, which each produce waste water equivalent (or higher) to a population of 150 000. The pollution load that is produced by these big cities alone is 45% of the total load collected. **Out of these 585 big cities, approximately 91% of the pollution load receives more stringent treatment** (best available treatment). This is an improvement in comparison to the previous report where only 77% of the relevant pollution load received such treatment. However, the degree of compliance varies significantly amongst big cities/big dischargers.

A main area of concern is the **lack of compliance in a significant number of "big cities".** E.g. only eleven of the 27 EU capitals have a collecting system and treatment in place which is complying with technical standards of more than 20 years ago. Given the high pollution load of these big discharges, this causes still considerable environmental pollution.

Compliance assessment: this 7th Implementation Report includes, for the first time, a detailed assessment of compliance for 27 Member States. **The reporting infrastructure established within the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) is working well**. The report covers almost 24 000 towns and cities of more than 2000 inhabitants (generating pollution corresponding to a population of 615 million, so called population-equivalents).

Almost 18 000 towns and cities (or 81% of the pollution load) are in the 15 Member States which joined the EU before 2004 (EU-15). The remaining are in the 12 Member States which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 (EU-12).

The **process has been improved** and the timelines for data processing and assessment significantly shortened. However, in some Member States further improvements in the monitoring and reporting system are still possible.

New approach for reaching compliance: taking into account the current crisis and the increasing constraints of national budgets, the Commission has identified this Directive as a candidate to launch a pilot initiative for a "new approach" in promoting compliance and implementation.

This "new approach" is set out in the proposed 7th Environmental Action Programme (EAP) and the "Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources".

In December 2012, the Commission services started these "new approach" activities with the aim of encouraging Member States to **establish or revise implementation plans at the latest by 2014**.