

Evaluation of the Federal Customs Administration: strategic, task and resource management

Summary of a Report by the Parliamentary Control of the Administration for the Control Committee of the Council of States

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Summary

After various reports in the last few years, both in politics and the media, about problems occurring in the Federal Customs Administration (FCA) and, in particular, the Border Guards (BG), the Control Committees of both chambers of the Federal Parliament instructed the Parliamentary Control of the Administration (PCA) to conduct an evaluation of the FCA. This evaluation firstly appraises the strategic and operative management of the FCA. Secondly, it focuses on cooperation and interfaces between the FCA and the BG with other actors, notably the cantonal security authorities and the Armed Forces.

The present findings are based on an analysis of the relevant documents and records and also, in particular, on more than 50 interviews with senior staff in the Customs Administration, the Department of Finance and external partners. The PCA was supported in its work by a team from econcept AG headed by Ms Yvonne Kaufmann.

With over 4,000 employees, the FCA generates about one third of the Confederation's annual revenues. Besides the civilian customs service, which primarily fulfils tariff and economic tasks, the armed BG are also part of the FCA and combine customs functions with security police work. Besides the Customs Act, the FCA enforces provisions from about 150 further enactments and repeatedly has to take on new tasks.

Within this complex field of tasks, the FCA has coped with great changes in its environment (such as the implementation of the Schengen Treaty) as well as internal restructurings and personnel reductions without any major frictions in the last few years. The evaluation has demonstrated that the FCA has a conceptually complete steering model that satisfies the criteria of output- and outcome-oriented public management. The FCA and the BG cooperate closely with other actors in the field of internal security, particularly with the Armed Forces and the cantons. Cooperation between the BG and the cantons was discussed and contractually regulated in the context of the Schengen implementation.

The evaluation also showed, however, that there are still crucial weak points with regard to both steering and cooperation with other actors in the domain of security. Thus the existing management and steering model has an appropriate concept, but requirements that are necessary for output- and outcome-oriented steering are not fulfilled in the course of implementation. What is particularly critical here is the lack of links between tasks and resources, which is reflected both in the performance agreements and in reporting. The performance agreements do not stipulate the resources for individual tasks (target situation), nor is it known to what extent

resources are used for each task (actual situation). Thus fundamental information for output- and outcome-oriented steering is lacking, both for strategic steering by Parliament and Department and for the FCA's in-house task and resource management. Essentially, the FCA is still steered by means of traditional input control, i.e. human and financial resources are allocated to the organisational units rather than to the outputs (or outcomes) required.

The PCA has also noted, however, that the FCA's steering options are substantially limited by the stipulation of a BG minimum staff level in the federal resolution on Schengen. This parliamentary resolution has resulted in a situation whereby in comparison with the BG, the civilian arm of the FCA has had to make disproportionate job cuts in the past few years. The stipulation of the number of jobs in an individual unit of a federal authority is not consistent with the principles of outcome-oriented public management and must be regarded as oversteering.

It has further become apparent that cooperation in the domain of internal security – particularly between the BG and the cantons – basically works “in the field” but that responsibilities and tasks have not been fully resolved. In addition, it has become clear that the FCA and the BG increasingly support the cantons, or rather their police forces, in the latter's original tasks without receiving any compensation. Expenses thus incurred have not been recorded by the FCA and the BG so far, but estimates provided by interviewees in the Border Guard Regions show that they are not negligible. It is clear that cooperation between the BG and the cantons is preferable to non-cooperation, but it is also clear that the BG now discharges its (security-policing and customs) tasks behind the border to a greater extent, thus working in the same area as the cantonal police forces, which means that the BG's tasks cannot always be clearly separated from the tasks of the police. For this reason, duplications and delimitation problems are at least plausible. Thus, the fundamental question is, whether today's structures in the domain of internal security are still expedient.

However, the information about the FCA's costs and tasks and the services it provides for the cantons that is necessary for an answer to this question, but also for genuine output- and outcome-oriented steering, is not available at present. Only when these data have been made available can the tasks and the necessary personnel levels of individual organisations be discussed.

The full report is available in German and French, and the Italian version should be ready around February 2011: <http://www.parlament.ch>> Kommissionen> Parlamentarische Verwaltungskontrolle.