The key audits of NIK - part 3

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How did Poland manage the effects of the flood of 2010? Has the condition of river dikes and storage reservoirs improved ever since? Why do communes subsidise hotels, restaurants and property development companies? What is going on at the Wrocław sobering up station where as many as six people died last year?

One of the most important audits conducted by NIK last year concerns the way the public administration managed the consequences of the last flood. "We are doing well in crisis situations. The other side of the coin is how we get ready for them" - Mr. Piotr Miklis, Director of the Wrocław Branch of the Supreme Audit Office, comments on the NIK’s findings.

About PLN 570 million was spent to support the flood victims in the audited provinces. Nearly PLN 111 million of that amount was paid in the form of social benefits to satisfy basic needs of the areas’ inhabitants. PLN 382 million was allocated to repair more than 14 thousand buildings. According to the Supreme Audit Office, the government and local government units smoothly effected all means of support. On the other hand, the tragedy of 1997 or 2010 may still repeat in the basin of Odra river. The Program for Odra 2006 is carried out with considerable delays. The already built or modernised infrastructure does not provide sufficient protection from floods. The condition of 1/3 of river dikes is disastrous. Not much has changed since the previous audit. The investments being crucial for the improvement of safety have not been started yet, like e.g. the construction of Racibórz reservoir. "This important investment still remains on paper. The date for workers to enter the construction site is systematically postponed" - complains the Head of the NIK Branch in Wrocław.

The audit of business activity conducted by the communes brought unexpected results. In each of five cities in Dolny Śląsk area there were active communal companies which did not perform public tasks. The companies managed by the communes carry the risk of monopolistic practices and also unfair competition. Particularly when they deal with clearly commercial services, e.g. related to property development or - as in Polkowice - hotels and restaurants (by the way, they generated the loss of nearly PLN 1.5 million which had to be paid by the inhabitants at the end of the day). "As a result of our audit, a debate started in Poland on how far a local government unit may go in conducting business activity oriented exclusively on making profits" - says Mr. Piotr Miklis.

The case of the municipal sobering-up station is still widely talked about in Wrocław. Last year as many as 6 persons died there. "These cases are being investigated by the Prosecutor’s Office. NIK had a closer look at the local safety system" - explains Mr. Miklis. The NIK audit revealed a range of omissions and deviations from adopted standards. The persons transported to the sobering-up station could not count on fully secure conditions”. With this audit NIK is joining a hot debate which has been going on in the city for several months now. The debate subject is whether in a democratic country there is room for a sobering-up station functioning in that way" - Mr. Piotr Miklis summarises the NIK’s findings.