

0221 Summary of the audit made on discharging the solid waste management duties of the local governments of settlements

Implementing faster headway in the field of the country's solid waste management is important not only for the gradual improvement of the environmental state of Hungary, but it is an especially significant precondition for accession to the European Union. The EU report made about Hungary has also urged to gradually correct the shortcomings and problems existing in the field of discharging these activities.

Based on its audit plan for 2001, the State Audit Office examined, under the authorisation of Act LXV of 1990 on the local governments, the question of how the local governments of settlements had met their duties, within the field of their public service activities, related to solid waste management (collection, transport, disposal, utilisation) and to public sanitation.

In the settlements of Hungary some headway was made toward meeting the requirements of the EU in the field of the collection and treatment of solid wastes. The quantity of the collected solid wastes increased by an annual 3 to 4 percent. Based on technical calculations, in the course of 2000 some 22,756 thousand cubic metres of solid waste were produced, of which 90% was collected, transported and disposed of. 65% of the waste was generated by the population, while 35% originated from different institutions and plants.

The ratio of settlements included in the collection of solid wastes reached 81%; however, 604 settlements, 93% of which have less than 2000 residents, are still not covered by the system. According to national data, the proportion of homes covered by regular solid waste collection in the year 2000 was 83%, while the proportion of the people living in the homes covered by waste collection was 84%.

In the framework of public services 701 solid waste dumping grounds operated, of which 10% can be considered modern dumping grounds according to the qualification made by the competent National Public Health and Medical Officer Services (ÁNTSZ) and the Ministry of Environment (MEn). The rest of the dumping grounds not satisfying the requirements, the number of which is estimated at around 2000, will be gradually eliminated, with about 100 to 150 ceasing to exist annually. This process is the result of the fact that since 1991 several new, primarily regional dumping grounds were or are being constructed.

One-third of the audited solid waste dumping grounds already served more than ten settlements. About 28 to 30% of the waste dumps meet the system of requirements specified in the environmental guidelines of the EU. Some 85 to 90% of the collected solid wastes are disposed of by dumping, some 5 to 7% is burned and hardly 1 to 2% is recycled. The quantity of the selectively collected solid wastes does not even reach 1% of the produced total quantity of annual wastes.

In the audited period, no considerable improvement could be experienced in the field of public sanitation; the total area with regular public sanitation grew by a mere 5.4% nationally. In the year 2000, the total area with public sanitation was 66,267 thousand sq metres, of which the proportion of the area regularly sanitised by machine was 82% nationally. In the year 2000, the number of settlements with regular public sanitation was 372.

In the years from 1995 through 2000, the local governments of the settlements spent some HUF 20 billion on development with respect to discharging their public service duties related to solid waste management (including public sanitation).

Despite the progress achieved, we fall considerably behind the EU average; we are close to the level of EU countries with medium-developed economies.

According to calculations, in the period between 2001 and 2008, some HUF 135 to 140 billion will be absolutely necessary to establish and modernise waste collection, to gradually introduce a system of selective waste collection, for recycling, for the composting of organic wastes, to modernise municipal incinerators, to establish regional waste dumping grounds and to reclaim the old dumping areas.

The rules regulating the discharge of obligations has, through the gradual enactment of several laws, slowly developed over the past decade into what is now a practically unified and unambiguous system , .

Although according to the Act on the local governments it is the task of the local government to ensure public sanitation and the cleanliness of the settlements by locally provided public services, the Act did not include these activities among the duties to be discharged in an obligatory manner. Even the indication of the duty of public sanitation was only included in the text of the Act in 1994. In addition to the Act on the local governments, other legal acts (e.g. the Act on the spheres of authority) also contain regulations of the duties of the local governments of settlements to keep the public areas clean.

Substantive moves in the field of regulating the obligations in the form of acts and decrees took place in the period following 1995. This is the period when the Act on environmental protection (providing for the preparation of programmes on environmental protection), the Act providing for the obligatory use of certain local public services became operative, and it was in 1997 that the Act on the health service was enacted. The legal basis of the audit made by the SAO was established primarily by these regulations.

In its decisions, the Constitutional Court dealt with the relevant bylaws of the local governments on a number of occasions. Before 1995, it annulled the rules related to the obligatory use of public services included in the local regulations, while following 1995 it objected to the way the local government fees were set.

The comprehensive regulation, taking also into account the obligations related to legal alignment in relation to our intentions to join the European Union, was established by the Act on waste management passed in the year 2000, which entered into force as of 1 January 2000. Several deadlines specified in the new Act set later dates and their implementation could not be brought under the operation of the audit, and, furthermore the majority of the nearly 40 governmental and departmental decrees were issued after the closing of the fieldwork.

Favourable processes could hardly be felt in waste management, which means that no endeavour was made either on the part of households or that of the production to minimise the amount of waste production. The large volume of organic wastes could be used, but there is no demand for the product produced (e.g. compost). Signs of utilisation could be experienced in the case of paper, plastic and metal wastes, but only in cases where they were collected selectively, selecting plants were in operation and possibilities for sale existed.

Up until now, the legal regulations did not fully create all the conditions required to the discharge of duties by the local governments and to creating local bylaws, that is, the co-ordination of tasks in time, the obligation to set up selective collection of wastes and the financial background required to the discharge of duties. Thus, further regulations are required in this field.

The tasks related to public sanitation and solid waste treatment was not integrated into the practice of every audited local government; all in all, 25% of the audited local governments considered the discharge of duties as a compulsory public service obligation in creating regulations. Nevertheless, there was not a single local government among those audited that had not regulated this activity in a bylaw.

The level of service-provision substantially differed between public sanitation and solid waste collection.

With respect to the audited local governments, the proportion of sanitised are remained practically stable between 1995 and 2000. The proportion of sanitised public area to the total area of public area reached 80% only in the case of four local governments; in the case 30% of them it was below 20% at the end of the audited period. Although the bylaws defined the frequency of sanitation in exact terms, no check was made on whether the obligation was discharged. Consequently, the observations stating that the public areas are not sanitised appropriately are justified. In this respect, however, the improvement of the environmentally sound behaviour of the population is one of the basic requirements.

The situation of solid waste collection is more favourable. As a result of the obligatory use of the public service, the number of homes covered by regular waste collection grew by 5.6% and the number of residents covered by the collection grew by 3.3% for the audited local governments. In the case of twenty-four local governments, the area coverage of waste collection exceeded 80% (with four of them it was 100%). The quantity of transported solid wastes originating with the population grew by 18.5% from 1995 to 2000.

Similarly favourable is the process in the field of solid waste dumping and disposal that the delivery of solid wastes to each dumping ground took place from an increasing number of settlements (20-30, 40-60) and that the practice of using one dumping ground by one local government shows a decreasing tendency.

However, in the field of selective waste collection no considerable progress was made in the audited period; only experimental runs were made, which are still in operation in a few settlements today. Due to the lack of financial resources of the local governments, the technological and technical conditions of selective collection have not been developed, and neither did the attitude of the population promote the broader introduction of selective waste collection.

The dumping of collected solid wastes in dumping grounds also showed shortcomings. Only 53% of the dumps covered by the audit had final operation permits, weighing of the delivered waste was made only in the case of 47% of the grounds, despite the existing legal obligation, and the composition and origin of the wastes were examined only in these cases. At 90% of the sites, solid wastes were dumped in compacted state. Subsequent selection and composting of the wastes were carried out at 25% of the dumping sites.

The obligation to create bylaws related to the tariffs of the public service of settlement waste management (collection, transport and safe dumping) specified in the Act and the Government Decree was met by 76% of the audited local governments.

The most frequent application method of the service tariffs, that complied with the decisions of the Constitutional Court and with the regulation of Government Decree No. 242/200. (XII. 23.) Korm. in force since 1 January 2001, was based on fixing the tariffs by taking into account the cubic capacity of the rubbish-bin and the number of times it was emptied. The extreme values of the tariffs on the waste management public service were HUF 36 and HUF 208 in the year 2000, projected to emptying, considering the 110 litre rubbish-bin used in most of the settlements.

As of 1993 some HUF 7 billion labelled and targeted subsidy was made available for development purposes through application, which could be used for constructing waste dumping sites. As of 2001, subsidies from the labelled appropriation could also be requested for constructing regional refuse furnaces and building regional solid waste management sites with a total cost of more than HUF 1 billion. This was supplemented by the chapter-managed and decentralised subsidies. In 2001 and 2002, the centralised appropriation extends support to creating the technological and technical conditions of waste management to the sum of HUF 2 billion a year. To organise waste collection (including selective collection) the local governments did not receive any subsidies tied to the task.

43% of the audited local governments constructed or took part in the construction of waste dumping sites; one-third of the created establishments are regional dumps serving more than one settlement.

As a result of the developments realised by the audited local governments, there was an increase of 20,053 thousand cubic metres of waste dumping capacity, of which 43.5% was realised on the property of the Capital (Pusztazámor, Dunakeszi). The developments resulted in a considerable improvement of the environmental conditions of the settlements concerned, and had a favourable influence upon the living conditions of the population living there.

The ratio of proceeds and expenses accounted in connection with the obligatory professional task in comparison to the total amounts of income and expenditure are very low both nationally and in the case of the audited local governments: it is between 0.46 and 2.04% in the period between 1995 and 2000.

The financial information system used by the local governments is not suitable for taking full stock of the public sanitation and waste management activity. The expenses accounted by disregarding the stipulations related to the special task system did not show a true picture; in substance, they reflected the expenditures of public sanitation; the expenditures related to solid waste management appeared mostly in the accounting system of the companies performing the activity. Nationally totalled data with respect to performing the activity were not available.

The value of waste collection, transport and disposal, disclosed by the service providers, was between HUF 133 and HUF 3288 per cubic metre, as computed from their actual data for the year 2000.

The audit has established that only 20% of the local governments checked and documented the state of public areas; 80% of them did not deal comprehensively with, and did not evalu

ate the condition of public sanitation of the settlement in the framework of a separate agenda item.

The practice of taking stock of the quantity of the originating wastes is not well founded at present. This finding, which can be made for both the local and the central supply of information, was due to differences in the applied unit values, to not performing mass measuring, and, furthermore, to the difficulties of conversion between loose and compacted cubic metres. As a result, the data supplied to the Central Statistical Office on the quantity of waste production and disposal are based on technical estimates.

The keeping of public areas sanitised and the collection and treatment of wastes are not the tasks and obligations of only the local governments; an environmentally sound behaviour of the population, the formation of public awareness through education and by the public media, and the deepening of a feeling of civic responsibility also have a basic role to play in this field.

The proposals formulated in the SAO field work report for the local governments dealt with the question of keeping records of the illegal waste dumps and with their elimination, and, furthermore, with the requirements of specifying in unambiguous terms the tasks and the practice of task fulfilment in the various regulations issued by the local governments (e.g. concerning sanitation and fixing the frequency of waste transportation) as well as of making the locally provided recording, financial, accounting and statistical data more accurate.

Based on experience and the conclusions of the audit, and for promoting the necessary steps to be taken, we have submitted proposals to the competent ministers that they should initiate the elaboration of the method and system of stimulating selective waste collection, as well as the development of a system of providing natural and financial data on waste management in a manner which conforms to EU standards, with annual regularity, verified by the local government. They should pay attention to ensuring coverage for the operation costs of waste collection by continuously maintaining the real value of the 'Settlement, administrative, communal and sport tasks' norm. They should organise the introduction of the social and environmental requirements of public sanitation and solid waste management by the media and at various levels of education, improving thereby the environmental culture and behaviour of the population.
