

AUDIT

Audit of the telecommunications surveillance key ICT project

General Secretariat of the Federal Department of Justice and Police

KEY FACTS

The programme to expand and operate the processing system for telecommunications surveillance and federal police information systems (TS programme) was launched in 2016 and will be completed in mid-2024. It involves the sustainable modernisation of the systems of the Post and Telecommunications Surveillance Service (PTSS) and the Federal Office of Police (fedpol). Total expenses for the programme amount to around CHF 150 million. The solutions are mainly used by the cantonal and federal prosecution authorities.

In this fourth audit¹, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) focused on the programme completion phase, in which the systems built in the programme are handed over to the PTSS and fedpol. These bodies must ensure that the applications continue to be operated, maintained and updated to reflect new technologies, legal frameworks and user requirements in the future. The audit's aim was to assess the programme's status and risks in view of its impending completion.

The audit revealed that the programme has achieved its objectives and will be completed on schedule in mid-2024. The handover for productive operation has taken place. However, the further development of the systems in the PTSS over the medium to long term should be ensured. The fedpol project turned out to be more expensive than planned. Moreover, disagreements with the system integrator have given rise to operational and financial risks.

Project objectives met, now the focus turns to building on what has been achieved

The objectives of all projects in the programme have been met and the planned functionalities have been implemented. The only exception is access to electronic files, which still needs to be pursued by the PTSS. The project teams made the basic functionalities available to the end users and then continued to upgrade the software with additional functionalities. The users and stakeholders, namely the federal and cantonal prosecution authorities, were closely involved in the projects. The end users expressed satisfaction with the PTSS systems, but see room for improvement as regards the fedpol applications.

fedpol decided against the planned procurement of individual functionalities in connection with some surveillance software – mainly due to cost/benefit considerations. The users would like to see supplementary procurements by fedpol, in order to close the gaps.

By mid-2024, all applications will have been handed over to the responsible organisations for productive operation.

Reorganisation of the PTSS – work is ongoing and needs to be expanded

The PTSS wants to handle operation, support and development itself in the future; to this end, it will need to reorganise and retrain. Since the beginning of 2023, the programme organisation and the individual projects have been working towards and preparing for the handover to the PTSS. The PTSS has undertaken preparatory and expansion work, but will not be able to complete this before the end of the programme.

¹ The three audit reports (audit mandate 16315, audit mandate 18290 and audit mandate 20376), which were published between 2016 and 2021, are available on the SFAO website.

Operation is not in jeopardy; however, work to ensure further development has only just begun. If these activities are not rapidly and consistently continued and completed, the further development and maintenance of the investments made to date are at risk.

In the medium and long term, the PTSS will have to define a strategy and organise itself so that it can assume global control of the individual systems and develop them efficiently. This needs to happen fast, as the framework contracts with the suppliers have expiry dates. Requirements in terms of resources, processes and rules of procedure are currently being discussed, and some have already been established.

More expensive fedpol solution, risks for further development

The standard investigation software procured by fedpol was unable to include the desired functionalities in the standard package. This was discovered late, resulting in unplanned software developments and additional costs of over CHF 2.3 million. Nonetheless, the project remains within the bounds of the approved guarantee credits.

The amount and content of the invoiced additional goods/services led to disagreements between fedpol and the software integrator. The maintenance services and costs for the additionally developed software components are likewise disputed. This gives rise to operational and financial risks for fedpol. Management is conducting conciliation talks. fedpol needs to protect the investments made and reduce the risks.

Continue the dialogue between stakeholders

In order to promote cooperation between the federal bodies and the cantonal prosecution authorities, the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) set up three committees, using an ordinance issued in 2017. However, instead of the dialogue taking place in these committees, it has been conducted exclusively within the programme organisation. As a result, there is a risk that it will end with the completion of the programme.

Political, strategic and operational topics should be discussed and developed at the appropriate level even after the end of the programme. As a fixed 75% of costs has been passed on to the cantons since January 2024, they are insisting on being more closely involved in the further development of the systems. The fact that the FDJP's General Secretariat considers that it is responsible for ensuring continuing exchanges, and clarifying any questions that arise, is to be welcomed. This should help to address the prosecution authorities' wish to be involved in further developments at an early stage.