

The virtual courtroom under the CBA's scrutiny

From 17 April 2019 to 17 January 2020, the Division of Control Procedure of the Regional Office of the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau in Poznań conducted an inspection at the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship. The inspection covered the financial support of the project titled "Strengthening of the competitiveness of the Law Firm of Attorneys-at-Law and Legal Advisers P. J. Sowisło & Topolewski limited joint-stock partnership by implementing innovative IT technologies in the process of providing legal services." The application for the financial support was submitted to the contest implemented under the Wielkopolskie Regional Operational Programme for the years 2014-2020, which was intended to support highly innovative projects. The Law Firm was awarded a grant of PLN 4,999,999.00 from the European budget. Its own contribution was PLN 6,111,111.12.

The money was to be used for the deployment of new legal services – using an immersive (virtual) courtroom and an immersive (virtual) relaxation method. As part of the latter, chromotherapy (colour therapy) and hortitherapy (garden therapy) were to be used. The users were supposed to experience a stay in a soothing environment (forest, beach, other natural environments).

One of the annexes submitted by the Law Firm, together with the application for funding, was the opinion on its innovation. It clearly stated that a 6-storey building with a garage of the total area of 3,912 m², amounting to over PLN 12 million, was not necessary to provide the innovative legal service (virtual courtroom with the use of VR headsets), as envisaged in the Law Firm's project, but the area of merely 20 m² was sufficient.

In the course of the inspection, an expert was appointed to deliver an opinion on the innovation of the project subject-matter, and to determine the merits of the grant awarded.

In their opinion, the expert stated that the vast majority of expenditure was not eligible for the financial support as they were inefficient, irrational, and unnecessary for the implementation of the project.

The opinion stated that the construction of the office building, its full furnishing and equipment (e.g. the purchase of office furniture, printers, scanners) as well as its computerisation (e.g. the purchase of computers and law firm management software) were not necessary for the implementation of the innovative legal service described in the project, and thus the expenditure related to the above could not be considered rational, efficient, or economical. The expert confirmed the findings of the auditors that the expenditure directly related to the implementation of the project represented only 2.25% of the costs incurred, i.e. PLN 250,000 net.

In the course of the inspection, it was established that the Management Board of the Wielkopolskie Voivodship awarded PLN 4,999,999.00 from the budget of European Union for the implementation of the abovementioned project although it did not meet all the formal and substantive criteria and therefore did not qualify for the grant.

Public Relations Division of the CBA



foto.
©bluebay2014/Photogenica