

## **Report to the federal Parliament**

### **The Royal museums of fine arts of Belgium and the Royal museums of art and history Collections knowledge and conservation**

27 October 2009 – The Court of audit transmitted to the federal Parliament its audit report on the collections managed by the Royal museums of fine arts of Belgium (KMSKB/MRBAB) and the Royal museums of art and history (KMKG/MRAH).

The objective was to examine how the museums keep the collections' inventory, which pieces the collections contain and how the museums manage the loans, acquisitions and deposits granted to public authorities. The Court of audit also analyzed if the museums take the appropriate measures to guarantee the conservation and the safety of that patrimony. Finally it evaluated the follow-up of these missions and support by the supervising authorities.

#### **Royal museums of fine arts of Belgium**

The Court of audit considers that the KMSKB/MRBAB carry out these missions properly. The shortcomings are mainly a question of methodology.

The Court of audit makes several recommendations to apply a stricter procedure in order to verify the presence of the items in the collections, to improve the follow-up of the loans and to apply the rules for purchases, gifts or legacies more strictly.

Concerning the conservation and safety policies, the Court of audit is of the opinion that they should be more formalized. However, it is clear that safety is a priority for the KMSKB/MRBAB.

The general director of the KMSKB/MRBAB agreed with the analysis mentioned in the report and specified that measures would be taken to meet these findings.

#### **Royal museums of art and history**

According to the Court of audit, the inventory and the management of the KMKG/MRAH's collections as well as the circumstances of the collections conservation are worrying.

In spite of the efforts which these museums have already made to improve the situation on these different points, the Court of audit considers that the situation has not basically evolved.

It reminds that making the inventory of the collections and conserving them are priority missions which are part of the conservator's basic responsibilities and are at the base of all activities of a museum. The current situation requires a strategic reflection on the KMKG/MRAH's collections management, in consultation with the supervising authorities.

The Court of audit makes various recommendations in order to improve the control of the activities and the internal control, as well as the inventories, the physical checking of the works of art, the conditions for loans or deposits, the acquisitions and the conservation of the items. To ensure the safety of the works and the renewal of the reserves, the museums should recruit an engineer who would be responsible for the management of the buildings and the safety.

The KMKG/MRAH's general director agreed with the Court's findings and announced, while underlining the lack of personnel, that measures were and would be taken.

## **Supervising authority**

As federal scientific establishments, the KMKG/MRAH and the KMSKB/MRBAB depend on the minister in charge of science policy.

The Court of audit is of the opinion that the regulation in force gives the museums managers and the actors of the supervising authority the competences and means necessary to ensure a good collections management. Practically, however, those competences are not exercised in a satisfactory manner.

The Court recommends to re-examine the regulation in order to keep only one managing tool, namely the management plan, while taking into account the competences entrusted to the management bodies and the ministers.

Moreover the set of rules governing the collections management are insufficient and obsolete. The support offered by the Belgian federal department of science policy with regard to the management of the KMKG/MRAH and the KMSKB/MRBAB collections could be reinforced in the field of the real estate management, safety of the goods and the people, and the legal support.

The minister in charge of science policy said that the audit report confirmed the need for the reforms which were started in order to optimize the management of the federal scientific establishments, and in particular concerning the cultural patrimony and its valorisation. The minister added that additional measures would be taken to meet the recommendations mentioned in the report.