

RESOLUTION (EU) 2019/1468 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**of 26 March 2019****with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Environment Agency for the financial year 2017**

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

- having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Environment Agency for the financial year 2017;
 - having regard to Rule 94 of and Annex IV to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control and the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A8-0127/2019);
- A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure ⁽¹⁾, the final budget of the European Environmental Agency ('the Agency') for the financial year 2017 was EUR 70 430 306, representing a significant increase of 39,44 % compared to 2016; whereas the increase was related to the future role of the Agency and the new tasks allocated to it; whereas the Agency's budget derives mainly from the Union budget (59,19 %) and the contributions under specific agreements, namely the Copernicus and European Human Biomonitoring Programmes (40,80 %);
- B. whereas the Court of Auditors ('the Court'), in its report on the annual accounts of the European Environmental Agency for the financial year 2017 ('the Court's report'), has stated that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the Agency's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular;

Budget and financial management

1. Notes with satisfaction that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2017 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99,97 %, representing the same rate as in 2016; notes that the payment appropriations execution rate was 89,04 %, representing a slight decrease of 0,78 % compared to the previous year;

Cancellations of carry-overs

2. Regrets the high level of cancellations of carry-overs from 2016 to 2017, amounting to EUR 443 566 and representing 10,55 % of the total amount carried over, showing a considerable increase of 5,16 % in comparison to 2016;

Performance

3. Notes that the Agency uses certain key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the added value provided by its activities, and that in 2017 the Agency improved its quality management by developing an overarching structure for performance management setting out KPIs for the period 2019-2021; notes furthermore that the Agency makes use of a balanced scoreboard to measure its improvements in budget management;
4. Acknowledges that, according to its management board, the Agency achieved satisfactory results with regard to the targets set out in the annual work programme for 2017; notes, however, that certain activities could not be fully delivered due to a number of circumstances such as limited staff resources or the late delivery of input data; acknowledges that the Agency continued effective cooperation with its European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet), and furthermore continued to be involved inter alia in the Environmental Knowledge Community, the Joint EEA-Scientific Committee seminars on EEA priority areas and the EEAcademy; insists that the Agency's capacity to respond to policy developments will depend on the future level of allocated resources or on the discontinuation of present tasks;
5. Notes with concern that the Agency does not share resources on overlapping tasks with other agencies with similar activities; takes note however from the Agency that it is constantly engaging with the Commission to identify and agree on a division of tasks with the relevant Commission services (e.g. DG Environment, DG CLIMA, Joint Research Centre and Eurostat); calls on the Agency to report to the discharge authority on the developments in this regard;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 360, 24.10.2017, p. 1.

6. Takes note that in 2016, the Commission started an external evaluation of the Agency and the Eionet; calls on the Agency to report to the discharge authority on the results of this evaluation;
7. Commends the quality of the outputs of the Agency released in 2017, such as the report on 'climate change, impacts and vulnerability in Europe', the European Air Quality Index and the Environmental indicator report 2017;

Staff policy

8. Acknowledges that, on 31 December 2017, the establishment plan was 99,21 % filled, with 126 officials or temporary agents appointed out of 127 posts authorised under the Union budget (130 authorised posts in 2016); notes that in addition 66 contract agents and 20 seconded national experts have been working for the Agency in 2017;
9. Regrets deeply the gender imbalance within the Agency's senior management, with 7 out of 8 being male, 1 being female; asks the Agency to take measures ensuring better gender balance within its senior management;
10. Notes that the Agency has adopted a policy on protecting the dignity of the person and preventing harassment; acknowledges that it offers e-learning courses and called for expressions of interest among members of staff as regards becoming confidential counsellors;
11. Notes with concern from the Court's report that several weaknesses were pointed out in the recruitment procedures organised by the Agency leading to a lack of transparency and potential unequal treatment of candidates; notes from the Agency's reply that it plans to develop its recruitment procedures in light of the weaknesses identified; calls on the Agency to report to the discharge authority on the developments in this regard;
12. Welcomes the suggestion of the Court to publish vacancy notices also on the website of the European Personnel Selection Office in order to increase publicity; understands the Agency's reply concerning the translation costs; furthermore acknowledges from the Agency its intention to publish all its vacancies on the interagency job board developed by the Agencies Network;

Procurement

13. Notes with concern from the Court's report that some weaknesses were identified in several public procurement procedures, including the fact that tender specifications used by the Agency for different calls for tenders did not specify any minimum requirements for the selection criteria with respect to economic and financial capacity; notes from the Agency's reply that these requirements were modified in 2017;
14. Notes from the Court's report that by the end of 2017 the Agency was not yet using all of the tools launched by the Commission aimed at introducing a single solution for the electronic exchange of information with third parties participating in public procurement procedures (e-procurement); notes from the Agency's reply that the Agency has introduced e-invoicing and e-tendering for certain procedures and is in the process of extending them to all its procedures; calls on the Agency to introduce all of the necessary tools to manage procurement procedures and report to the discharge authority on the progress made in that field;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interests and transparency

15. Acknowledges the Agency's existing measures and ongoing efforts to secure transparency, prevention, management of conflicts of interests, and whistleblower protection;
16. Notes from the Court's report that there is a need to strengthen the accounting officer's independence by making him directly responsible to the Agency's executive director and management board; notes from the Agency's reply that it considers that the functional independence of the accounting officer is already guaranteed;

Internal controls

17. Takes note that, according to the Commission's Internal Audit Service's audit in 2015, of which some recommendations still remain open, the Agency should implement a data and information management framework in the daily operation of the Agency, and update and implement the IT strategy, which should be in line with new IT technologies and the new multiannual work programme; calls on the Agency to report to the discharge authority on the measures taken in this regard;

18. Notes that the management board started a review of the two governance bodies of the Agency, expected to be concluded by the end of 2018;

Other comments

19. Notes that the Agency's management board agrees with the proposed future role of the Agency and the Eionet in relation to 'Energy Union Governance', 'Monitoring and reporting of CO₂ emissions from Heavy Duty Vehicles', and the Commission's 'Actions to Streamline Environmental Reporting', and welcomes the proposal of the Commission to grant additional resources in the form of contract agents and funds to the Agency for its proposed new tasks;
20. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 26 March 2019 ⁽²⁾ on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0254 (see page 361 of this Official Journal).