

RESOLUTION (EU) 2018/1407 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**of 18 April 2018****with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Training Foundation for the financial year 2016**

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

- having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Training Foundation for the financial year 2016,
 - 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 Employment and Social Affairs (A8-0080/2018),
- A. whereas in the context of the discharge procedure, the discharge authority stresses the particular importance of further strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the Union institutions by improving transparency and accountability, and implementing the concept of the performance based budgeting and good governance of human resources;
- B. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure⁽¹⁾, the final budget of the European Training Foundation (the 'Foundation') for the financial year 2016 was EUR 20 900 849,11, representing a decrease of 0,63 % compared to 2015; whereas the budget of the Foundation derives mainly from the Union budget;
- C. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the Foundation's annual accounts for the financial year 2016 (the 'Court's report'), states that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the Foundation's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular;

Follow-up of 2013, 2014 and 2015 discharges

1. Notes from the Court's report that the note about the funds amounting to EUR 7 500 000 deposited at a single bank with a low credit rating made in the Court's 2013 report, and marked as 'ongoing' in the Court's 2014 and 2015 reports, is now marked as 'completed';

Budget and financial management

2. Notes with appreciation that budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2016 resulted in a high budget implementation rate of 99,99 %, indicating that commitments were made in a timely manner, and that the payment appropriations execution rate was at 97,66 %;

Commitments and carryovers

3. Notes that the overall carry-overs in Titles I and II decreased from 3,3 % in the period 2015 to 2016 to 3,1 % in the period 2016 to 2017, which is an indication of the improved alignment of the Foundations' administrative activities and their payments to its annual cycle; notes that in Title I, EUR 1 55 186 (1,2 %) was carried forward which represents an improvement compared to 2015 (EUR 180 398 (1,4 %)); notes that in Title II, EUR 313 450 (18,4 %) was carried forward which represents a continuation of the performance of 2015 (EUR 316 442 (16,1 %)), and in Title III, the RAL (*reste à liquider*) decreased from 36,4 % in 2015 to 30,3 % in 2016, mainly due to an increased attention to the payments, a reduction of open mission claims and through better planning of activities;
4. Points out that the carry-overs are often partly or fully justified by the multiannual nature of the agencies' operational programmes, and do not necessarily indicate weaknesses in budget planning and implementation nor are they always at odds with the budgetary principle of annularity, in particular if they are planned in advance by the agencies and communicated to the Court;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 12, 13.1.2017, p. 1.

Transfers

5. Notes that the Foundation performed seven budgetary transfers in 2016, compared to nine in 2015 and that the overall amount transferred was less than in previous year (6,1 % in 2016 compared to 8,2 % in 2015); acknowledges from the Foundation that this can be attributed to an efficiency measure that was introduced to maintain a reserve list of activities, arising from the planning exercises; notes with satisfaction that the level and nature of transfers in 2016 remained within the limits of the financial rules;

Staff policy

6. Observes that, according to the establishment plan, 89 posts were occupied on 31 December 2016, compared to 90 in 2015; regrets that by the number of posts occupied on 31 December 2016 gender balance was not achieved, since the ratio was over two to one: 67,94 % female to 32,06 % male staff; recommends that this imbalance be addressed as a matter of urgency;
7. Stresses that the work-life balance should be part of the staff policy of the Foundation; stresses that the budget spent per staff on well-being activities amounts to EUR 883 and two staff away days were organised in 2016; regrets that the average number of sick leave per staff is 15 days (11,5 days without medical part-time), which is one of the highest number among the Union agencies; recommends that this should be examined to establish the reason, particularly whether it is related to workplace stress;
8. Notes that the decision on preventing psychological and sexual harassment was adopted already in 2010; supports the training and information sessions organised to increase the awareness of the staff;
9. Notes with satisfaction the fact that the Foundation did not receive any complaints, law-suits or reported cases linked to hiring or dismissal of staff in 2016;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interests, transparency and democracy

10. Acknowledges that the Foundation has been proactive in requesting declarations of conflict of interest of all its Governing Board (GB) members in line with Article 11 of Council Regulation (EEC) No 1360/90⁽¹⁾; calls on the Foundation to report to the discharge authority on the progress made in that field; notes with satisfaction that the CVs are now freely accessible;
11. Notes that the transparency register is not applicable to the work of the Foundation;
12. Notes with satisfaction that the Foundation adopted its policy on whistleblowing in December 2015; stresses that there was one whistleblower case in 2016, which was not submitted to the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) as all clarifications were received;
13. Expresses the need to establish an independent disclosure, advice and referral body with sufficient budgetary resources, in order to help whistleblowers use the right channels to disclose their information on possible irregularities affecting the financial interests of the Union, while protecting their confidentiality and offering needed support and advice;
14. Notes that an e-learning and awareness-raising exercise on fraud and conflict of interests for all staff was carried out at the beginning of 2017;

Main achievements

15. Welcomes the three main achievements identified by the Foundation in 2016, namely that it:
 - met targets for achieving all Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in 2016;
 - managed 105 requests for assistance from the Commission and Commission delegations, covering 52 % of partner countries; notes that the satisfaction with services provided by the Foundation was 100 % positive with regard to the Foundation quality of work, usefulness and timeliness of support;
 - supported policy analysis and development in 25 of its partner countries through the Torino process;
16. Welcomes the high achievement rate of its planned activities in 2016 (94 %), but notes that it slightly decreased in comparison to 2015 (96 %); notes the considerable improvement in the time delivery rate (90 %) compared to years before 2016 (83 %);

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation (EEC) No 1360/90 of 7 May 1990 establishing a European Training Foundation (OJ L 131, 23.5.1990, p. 1).

17. Regrets, however, that the Foundation does not use the activity or output indicators to improve the use of the KPIs and recommends that this policy should change;

Anti-fraud strategy

18. Welcomes the fact that the Foundation has developed its anti-fraud strategy as provided for in the Commission's overall anti-fraud strategy; notes with satisfaction the development of an e-training module to maintain awareness on anti-fraud prevention for all staff, which will be provided and regularly repeated from 2017;

Internal control

19. Notes that in 2016, the Foundation took key measures to improve the efficiency of its internal control systems (ICS) in the area of leadership (ICS 1 Mission and Values; ICS 2 Ethical and Organisational Values; ICS 7 Operational Structure), people management (ICS 3 Staff Allocation and Mobility; ICS 4 Staff Evaluation and Development), strategy, planning and stakeholder cooperation (ICS 5 Objectives and Performance indicators and ICS 6), risk management and processes (ICS11 Document Management and ICS 12 Information and Communication);

Internal audit

20. Notes that the Foundation is audited by the Commission's Internal audit service (IAS) and that it has not received any critical recommendations from controlling body in 2016;

Performance

21. Notes from the Court's report that an external evaluation of the Foundation was carried out on behalf of the Commission in 2016 as the first step in a cross cutting evaluation of the four agencies working in the area of employment, social affairs and inclusion; notes, moreover, that the evaluation concluded that the considerable re-organisation of the Foundation since 2011 had no significant negative effects and has been viewed mainly positively by internal and external stakeholders, especially in terms of strategy and effectiveness; notes with appreciation that the governance of the Foundation was viewed as efficient and effective; notes that the evaluation also highlights that the Foundation has continued to enhance its monitoring capacity since 2011 but that there is still scope to present a clearer picture of its activities and achievements; observes that the Foundation prepared a plan to implement the evaluators' recommendations;
22. Notes that, according to the Court's report, in its 2011 report the Court already highlighted the unsatisfactory situation regarding the Foundation's premises and the fact that this risked disrupting the Foundation's activities; regrets that the situation remains at a standstill since the Consortium that managed and occupied part of the complex went into liquidation in 2011 and left part of the complex empty; stresses that there is an urgent need for the host country to find a solution to this matter; recalls that, under the host agreement, appropriate facilities are guaranteed until 2027; calls on the Foundation to report to the discharge authority on any measures taken regarding this matter;
23. Acknowledges the work of the Foundation to support the Union's partner countries to harness their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the Union's external relations policy; welcomes the Foundation's activities regarding the development of skills and the facilitation of lifelong learning to support partner countries to improve the employability and employment prospects of their citizens;
24. Welcomes strongly the support from the Foundation to the candidate countries with the implementation of the Riga Conclusions 2015 in areas such as work-based learning, continuing professional development of VET teachers and entrepreneurial learning;
25. Welcomes the Foundation's cooperation with other Union agencies — in particularly Eurofound and Cedefop — on Union policies that contribute to development of human capital;
26. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 18 April 2018⁽¹⁾ on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0133 (see page 393 of this Official Journal).