

REPORT**on the annual accounts of the European Police Office for the financial year 2016, together with the Office's reply**

(2017/C 417/36)

INTRODUCTION

1. The European Police Office (hereinafter 'the Office', aka 'Europol'), which is located in The Hague, was established by Council Decision (2009/371/JHA) ⁽¹⁾. The objective of the Office is to support and strengthen action by the Member States' police authorities and other law enforcement services and their mutual cooperation in preventing and combating serious crime affecting two or more Member States, terrorism and forms of crime which affect a common interest covered by Union policy.

2. The *table* presents key figures for the Office ⁽²⁾.

Table
Key figures for the Office

	2015	2016
Budget (million euro)	95	104
Total staff as at 31 December ⁽¹⁾	666	737

⁽¹⁾ Staff includes officials, temporary and contract staff and seconded national experts.

Source: data provided by the Office.

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF THE STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

3. The audit approach taken by the Court comprises analytical audit procedures, direct testing of transactions and an assessment of key controls of the Office's supervisory and control systems. This is supplemented by evidence provided by the work of other auditors and an analysis of management representations.

OPINION

4. We have audited:

(a) the accounts of the Office which comprise the financial statements ⁽³⁾ and the reports on the implementation of the budget ⁽⁴⁾ for the financial year ended 31 December 2016; and

(b) the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying those accounts;

as required by Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 121, 15.5.2009, p. 37.

⁽²⁾ More information on the Office's competences and activities is available on its website: www.europol.europa.eu

⁽³⁾ The financial statements comprise the balance sheet, the statement of financial performance, the cash flow statement, the statement of changes in net assets and a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory notes.

⁽⁴⁾ The reports on implementation of the budget comprise the reports which aggregate all budgetary operations and the explanatory notes.

Reliability of the accounts*Opinion on the reliability of the accounts*

5. In our opinion, the accounts of the Office for the year ended 31 December 2016 present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Office at 31 December 2016, the results of its operations, its cash flows, and the changes in net assets for the year then ended, in accordance with its Financial Regulation and with accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer. These are based on internationally accepted accounting standards for the public sector.

Legality and regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts**Revenue***Opinion on the legality and regularity of revenue underlying the accounts*

6. In our opinion, revenue underlying the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2016 is legal and regular in all material respects.

Payments*Opinion on the legality and regularity of payments underlying the accounts*

7. In our opinion, payments underlying the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2016 are legal and regular in all material respects.

Responsibilities of management and those charged with governance

8. In accordance with Articles 310 to 325 of the TFEU and the Office's Financial Regulation, management is responsible for the preparation and presentation of the accounts on the basis of internationally accepted accounting standards for the public sector and for the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying them. This responsibility includes the design, implementation and maintenance of internal controls relevant to the preparation and presentation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error. Management is also responsible for ensuring that the activities, financial transactions and information reflected in the financial statements are in compliance with the authorities which govern them. The Office's management bears the ultimate responsibility for the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts.

9. In preparing the accounts, management is responsible for assessing the Office's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting.

10. Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the entity's financial reporting process.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts and underlying transactions

11. Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the accounts of the Office are free from material misstatement and the transactions underlying them are legal and regular and to provide, on the basis of our audit, the European Parliament and the Council or other respective discharge authorities with a statement of assurance as to the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying them. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit will always detect a material misstatement or non-compliance when it exists. These can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these accounts.

12. An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the accounts and the legality and the regularity of the transactions underlying them. The procedures selected depend on the auditor's judgment, including an assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the accounts and of material non-compliance of the underlying transactions with the requirements of the legal framework of the European Union, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, internal controls relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of the accounts and legality and regularity of underlying transactions, are considered in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal controls. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates made by the management, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the accounts.

13. For revenue, we verify the subsidy received from the Commission and assess the Office's procedures for collecting fees and other income, if any.

14. For expenditure, we examine payment transactions when expenditure has been incurred, recorded and accepted. This examination covers all categories of payments other than advances at the point they are made. Advance payments are examined when the recipient of funds provides justification for their proper use and the Office accepts the justification by clearing the advance payment, whether in the same year or later.

15. In preparing this report and Statement of Assurance, we considered the audit work of the independent external auditor performed on the Office's accounts as stipulated in Article 208(4) of the EU Financial Regulation ⁽¹⁾.

16. The comments which follow do not call the Court's opinion into question.

COMMENTS ON BUDGETARY MANAGEMENT

17. As in previous years carry-overs of committed appropriations have been high for Title II (administrative expenditure) at 3,5 million euro, i.e. 39 % (2015: 4,2 million euro, i.e. 41 %). They mainly concern 2016 expenditure for the Office's headquarters which will only be invoiced by the Host State in 2017 (2 million euro).

FOLLOW-UP OF PREVIOUS YEARS' COMMENTS

18. An overview of the corrective action taken in response to the Court's comments from previous years is provided in the *Annex*.

This Report was adopted by Chamber IV, headed by Mr Baudilio TOMÉ MUGURUZA, Member of the Court of Auditors, in Luxembourg at its meeting of 19 September 2017.

For the Court of Auditors

Klaus-Heiner LEHNE

President

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1).

ANNEX

Follow-up of previous years' comments

Year	Court's comments	Status of corrective action (Completed / Ongoing / Outstanding / N/A)
2011	Exceptions and deviations were recorded for 7 % of 2011 payments.	Completed
2015	Carry-overs of committed appropriations are high for Title II (administrative expenditure) at 4,2 million euro, i.e. 41 % (2014: 1,9 million euro, i.e. 27 %). They mainly concern building-related works, such as functional and technical improvements of the operational rooms at the Office headquarters (1,5 million euro) or preventive/corrective maintenance and additional works (0,8 million euro). These works were still ongoing or invoices had not been received by the end of 2015.	N/A

EUROPOL'S REPLY

18. Europol takes note of the ECA's comment and will continue its efforts to ensure efficient and compliant budget implementation, especially concerning carry-forwards in relation to administrative expenditure. Due to the work regarding Europol's headquarters being performed under the authority of the Host State as an external party, the handling of building-related costs is expected to spread across financial years also in future. This is due to the inherent administrative set-up, for Europol to receive the related invoices after the Host State has liaised with respective contractors at national level.
