Special report 5/2012 (2011 Discharge): The Common External Relations Information System (CRIS)

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Jean-Pierre AUDY (EPP, FR) on Special Report No 5/2012 (Discharge 2011) – "The Common External Relations Information System (CRIS)".

The CRIS: Members recall that the Common External Relations Information System (CRIS) has become a key component of the Commission's internal control system for the management of external actions. At its inception in 2000, CRIS was expected to provide instant financial information about projects and programmes in the external actions field and, in particular, give an accurate overview of the breakdown of commitments and payments between countries and sectors in various geographical regions. The CRIS also supplies the accrual-based accounting system of the Commission (ABAC) with financial data.

However, with the passage of time, CRIS has become inefficient and costly since the total budget requested for its development, maintenance and support had reached EUR 13 million by 2011.

The Court's recommendations: noting the CRIS's weaknesses, as described in the Court's Special Report (*please refer to the summary of the Court's Report dated 04/05/2012*), Members support the Court' s recommendations and call on the Commission to implement them as soon as possible. They consider that any change in the role and modification of CRIS should reflect the new challenges of the Union's external policy introduced by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and emphasise the need to adapt the reporting functions of CRIS to the competences of Parliament in the fields of external policy and budgetary control.

In terms of the recommendations to be implemented, Members call for the **intended role of CRIS as an information system to be set out, notably with regard to ABAC**. They consider that an improvement in data integrity between CRIS and ABAC is imperative in order to report on the Union's external activities in a coherent, transparent, updated and reliable manner.

Efficiency and effectiveness of CRIS: Members are concerned in regard to the Court's observations in respect of data transfer and the system's poor user-friendliness. Because of the weaknesses, the information provided to Parliament as discharge authority may be **unreliable**. They note furthermore, that the functionality of CRIS should be updated in order to provide aggregated information on beneficiary countries, policy areas and financial instruments.

Other observations: overall, Members regret the lack of information on the cost-effectiveness of CRIS and the long-term strategy establishing CRIS's objectives and functioning. They call for the CRIS to have a **standard mechanism for layering the confidentiality of data and users' access rights**. Lastly, they highlight the system's lack of security and call for a mechanism to be established in order to ensure adequate confidentiality and data integrity.