2011 discharge: European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

2012/2196(DEC) - 21/03/2013 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Gerben-Jan GERBRANDY (ADLE, NL) on discharge to be granted to the Executive Director of the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for the financial year 2011.

Noting that the Court of Auditors stated that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the annual accounts of EFSA for the financial year 2011 are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular, Members approve the closure of EFSA's accounts. However, they make a number of recommendations that need to be taken into account when the discharge is granted, in addition to the general recommendations that appear in the draft resolution on performance, financial management and control of EU agencies:

- **Financing, budget and financial management**: EFSA's 2011 budget amounted to EUR 77.31 million, compared to EUR 74.7 million in the previous year which represents an increase of 3.49 %;
- **Implementation rate of appropriations and carryovers**: Members note that the payment appropriations execution rate was 82.05%, which represents a minor decrease in comparison to the previous year (83.51%). They remind the Authority to respect in an improved way the principle of annuality even if they consider 2011 as a special year, due to the movement to the new headquarters and the delayed settlement of payments in this respect;
- **Conflicts of interest:** Members note with concern that according to the findings of the Court of Auditors, the Authority did not adequately manage conflict of interest situations, even if, in the meantime, EFSA had already developed advanced policies for managing conflicts of interest, because these policies have not oled to the desired results. EFSA was criticised for a lack of transparency with respect to the publication of annual declarations of interest and the absence of training on conflicts of interest. They urge EFSA to keep conflicts of interest high on the priority list in order to protect its credibility and to safeguard the public's trust in food safety. They call on it to start a structured dialogue with civil society on matters relating to conflicts of interest and to invite those organisations concerned to openly discuss matters of common interest. They strongly suggest that, in order to prevent its staff from moving directly from their position to work in a similar post in industry or related lobby-agency, or vice versa, an adequate cooling off period should be established and respected for the specific areas of work.

Lastly, Members made a series of observations as regards EFSA's buildings policy, its budgetary transfers and internal audit procedures.