2012 discharge: European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

2013/2245(DEC) - 10/09/2013 - Court of Auditors: opinion, report

PURPOSE: presentation of the EU Court of Auditors' report on the annual accounts of the European Asylum Support Office for the year 2012, together with the Office's reply.

CONTENT: in accordance with the tasks conferred on the Court of Auditors by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Court presents to the European Parliament and to the Council, in the context of the discharge procedure, a Statement of Assurance as to the reliability of the annual accounts of each institution, body or agency of the EU, and the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying them, on the basis of an independent external audit.

This audit concerned, amongst others, the annual accounts of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

In the Court's opinion, the European Asylum Support Office's **Annual Accounts fairly present, in all material respects, its financial position as of 31 December 2012** and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended, in accordance with the provisions of its Financial Regulation and the accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer.

The Court also considers that the **transactions underlying the annual accounts** of the Office for the financial year ended 31 December 2012 are, in all material respects, **legal and regular.**

The report confirms that EASO's 2012 budget amounted to EUR 10 million.

The report also makes a series of observations on the budgetary and financial management of EASO, accompanied by the latter's response. The main observations may be summarised as follows:

The Court's observations:

- irregularities: a carry-over of EUR 200 000 was not covered by a legal commitment and was therefore irregular. Furthermore, fifty payments, representing about 20 % of the total amount of payments, were made after the deadlines set by the Financial Regulation;

- financial management: the budgetary needs for 2012 were considerably over-estimated: only EUR 4.8 million out of the EUR 7 million transferred upon receiving financial autonomy were committed;

- EASO's seat: to host EASO, the Maltese Government offered the building and the lease agreement stipulates that the premises are being transferred in a finished state with essential service points being provided. For the building to become functional, however, it needed to be adapted at an estimated cost of EUR 4.3 million, of which EUR 3.8 million was to be covered by the Commission. Furthermore EASO will pay rent amounting to some EUR 3.7 million over a nine-year period. The Commission had informed the European Parliament and Council about the host arrangements and the fact that the building required some adaptation to be financed by the Maltese Government and the Commission. Although the budgetary authorities were informed about the project, there is no evidence that they were aware of the expected costs and the EU's share thereof.

EASO's reply:

- financial management: during the start-up phase of EASO and prior to financial independence, several provisional commitments were established to cover different type of expenditures. Before financial independence, it was decided not to de-commit them. At the end of 2012, it was decided to carry forward the commitments to 2013, in order to ensure that (possible outstanding) 2012 related payment requests were covered by a budgetary commitment. Currently, EASO continuously monitors the consumption of budgetary commitments. This will ensure a regular carrying forward to 2014 ;

- seat: the Commission awarded a de facto grant to the Maltese Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs on the basis of the annual financing decision of DG JLS/HOME for agencies, where the aim was to carry out the necessary fitting-out and installation of security equipment in the EASO building provided by the Maltese Government.

Lastly, the Court of Auditors' report contains **a summary of the Institute's activities in 2012**. This is focused on the following:

- permanent support: EASO developed a quality assessment methodology, organised 16 COI meetings with Working parties and the Task Force, published two COI reports on Afghanistan, organised three workshops for practical cooperation and arranged four expert meetings on unaccompanied minors ;
- special support: EASO launched special support for Sweden and presented its evaluation report on relocation projects to the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament ;
- Emergency support: EASO gave emergency support to Greece for a full year, and to Luxembourg in February 2012 ;
- information and analysis support: EASO published its annual report on the state of asylum in the EU in 2011.