2012 discharge: European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

2013/2220(DEC) - 03/04/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a decision concerning the discharge to be granted to the Executive Director of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in respect of the implementation of the Authority's budget for the financial year 2012. The vote on the discharge decision approved the closure of the accounts (in accordance with Annex VI, Article 5(1) of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament.

Noting that the Court of Auditors stated that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the annual accounts of the Authority for the financial year 2012 are reliable, and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular, Parliament adopted by 510 votes to 70, with 14 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of recommendations that form an integral part of the discharge decision and as well as the general recommendations that appear in the draft resolution on performance, financial management and control of EU agencies.

These recommendations are summarised as follows:

- **Reliability of the accounts**: Parliament noted that the Court of Auditors found, in its annual audit report for 2012, that the validation of the accounting systems by the Authority's accounting officer covers the central ABAC and SAP systems, but **not the local systems and the reliability of data exchanges between central and local systems**, which represents a risk as to the reliability of accounting data. It acknowledged that the risk did not materialise in the use of inaccurate data by the Authority's accounting officer; expects the Authority, however, to integrate its local systems in the validation process by its accounting officer.
- **Budget and financial management**: Parliament noted that budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2012 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99.30% and that the payment appropriations execution rate was 88%. It acknowledged that the relocation of the Authority to its new premises generated savings amounting to EUR 3.94 million and that that amount was reallocated to operational activities.
- **Commitments and carryovers**: Parliament noted that carryovers were high. It acknowledged that a high amount of carry-overs were made for reasons beyond the Authority's control. They recalled that the Authority should respect the principle of annuality.
- **Prevention and management of conflicts of interests and transparency**: Parliament believed that the procedure for assessing possible conflicts of interest at the Authority, where declarations of interest are screened by Heads of Unit and are generally assessed on a case by case basis, is burdensome and is subject to criticism, raising questions about its credibility and effectiveness. It called on the Authority to come up with a simplified procedure with less uncertainty which would validate and streamline the process and save both human resources and money without, however, jeopardising the newly set standards for the detection and prevention of conflicts of interests. It also noted with concern that the Authority applies a less stringent conflicts of interest policy to experts from food safety organisations (FSOs), as the list which the Authority uses to indicate these FSOs includes institutes that are nominated by Member States and cofinanced by private or undisclosed partners, creating a possible loophole. Parliament considered that the **Authority should apply a two-year cooling-off period to all material interests related to the commercial agrifood sector**, including research funding, consultancy contracts and decision-making positions in industry-captured organisations. The Authority should ask experts to declare whether their interests were remunerated or not. Current practice of experts anonymising their interests, for instance by using the

expression “private company”, should not be accepted by the Authority. It stated that the current declarations of interests forms could be further improved. In addition, it believed that that list should be revised by excluding organisations which receive more than 50% of their funding from sources other than public sources, in order to **avoid undue influence**.

- **Performance**: Parliament requested that the Authority communicate the results and impact its work has on European citizens in an accessible way, mainly through its website.

Lastly, Parliament also made a series of observations on transfers, procurement and recruitment procedures as well as comments on internal controls.