2013 discharge: performance, financial management and control of EU agencies

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Ryszard CZARNECKI (ECR, PL) on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union agencies for the financial year 2013: performance, financial management and control.

Members began by recalling that there had been a substantial increase in the number of agencies over the last decade, from three in 2000 to 32 in 2013. They reiterated the importance of the tasks performed by agencies and their direct impact on the daily lives of Union citizens, and acknowledged the role of the agencies in supporting Union policies.

They recognised the high number of agencies that had been set up in the area of freedom, security and justice but reiterated that all the new agencies responded to a specific need.

Increasing budget: Members noted that the agencies' 2013 budget amounted to some **EUR 2 billion**, representing an increase of 25 % compared to 2012 and about 1.4 % of the Union's general budget. The agencies employed around 6 500 permanent and temporary officials.

Members recalled that the reputational risk related to the agencies is high for the Union, as they had significant influence on policy and decision making.

Common approach and Commission roadmap: the committee recalled that in July 2012, Parliament, the Council and the Commission adopted a Common Approach on decentralised agencies, a political agreement concerning the future management and reform of the agencies. It welcomed the Commission's 'Roadmap on the follow-up to the Common Approach on EU decentralised agencies' containing a detailed plan of how to perform the follow-up to the Common Approach, its agenda for 2013 and beyond, as well as the efforts made jointly by the Commission and the decentralised agencies (in terms of internal audits and controls and the fight against fraud).

The completion rate of the agency-relevant roadmap actions was 96 %.

Members observed, however, that 10 agencies still did not have a headquarter agreement. They exhorted these agencies to tackle the issue effectively. They also wanted a serious assessment to evaluate the possibility of merging agencies, not only to **avoid wasting resources** but also to create a critical mass that made the agencies truly effective. They welcomed the services offered by the Commission to rationalise the functioning of the agencies and avoid pointless expenditure.

Other recommendations: Members made a series of recommendations on technical issues regarding:

- management of budgetary resources, stressing the principle of annuality and regretting the high level of commitments carried over by most of the agencies (24 out of 32);

- cooperation among agencies and shared services and synergies, expressing doubts about the geographical locations of agencies, many of which were located far away from the other European institutions, which damages their efficiency. Members welcomed increasing synergies and shared services;

- performance, welcoming positive developments that stressed effectiveness and results achieved;

- management of human resources, pointing to the recurring problems on recruitment procedures, where improvements must be made;

- conflicts of interests and transparency, welcoming the “Guidelines on the prevention and management of conflicts of interest in EU decentralised agencies" but regretting the lack of guidelines for seconded national experts, and external and interim staff;

- the lack of visibility and democratic accountability of the agencies, as they were seen to be **vulnerable in respect of external influences from specialist lobbyists**, in particular from those representing big business. Members also referred to the issues of multilingualism, noting that few applied multilingual policies apart from the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union;

- internal controls, with certain agencies not applying the rules fully.

Lastly, Members stressed that a solution must be found to the problem of **budgetary surpluses, and the possibility of re-allocating the money to the Union budget should be explored.**