

2014 discharge: European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

2015/2194(DEC) - 08/09/2015 - Court of Auditors: opinion, report

PURPOSE: presentation of the EU Court of Auditors' report on the annual accounts of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) for the year 2014, 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).

Statement of Assurance: pursuant to the provisions of Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the Court has audited:

- the annual accounts of the Foundation, which comprise the financial statements and the reports on the implementation of the budget for the financial year ended 31 December 2014;
- the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying those accounts.

Opinion on the reliability of the accounts: in the Court's opinion, the Office's annual accounts present fairly, in all material respects, its financial position as at 31 December 2014 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.

Opinion on the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts: the Court considers that the transactions underlying the annual accounts for the year ended 31 December 2014 are legal and regular in all material respects. However, it stresses that the Office, in its budget management system (ABAC) for the year 2014, carried over budgetary commitments amounting to some EUR 1.3 million which were not covered by legal commitments. This is in contradiction to the Financial Regulation. Following the Court's audit, the Office decided to correct the irregular carry-overs. However, the 2014 financial period was already closed, and correction in the system was no longer possible. The Court specifies that needs to be done in the 2015 financial period.

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

The Court's observations:

- **internal control:** the Court notes that the Office made 1 062 (28.6 %) payments after the time limits set in the Financial Regulation. The average delay for late payments was 24 days.
- **budgetary management:** the Court notes the large sums of committed appropriations cancelled in 2014, which indicates weaknesses in the Agency's budget planning and is at odds with the budgetary principle of annuality. It also notes the high level of carry-overs for administrative expenditure to 2015.

- **recruitment:** the Court notes that the Office has a high staff turnover, which causes a considerable risk to the achievement of the objectives set in the annual and multiannual work programmes.

The Office's replies:

- **budgetary management:** the EASO recognises that the percentage of late payments is too large and is addressing the root causes of this situation. In the second half of 2015, specific measures shall be put in place for substantially reducing the current rate of late payments by the closing of the financial year. EASO will review its annual budget at least twice a year, starting in the second quarter of 2015, in order to improve its budget planning and implementation process and reduce any disproportionate carry-overs at the end of the financial year. Through these combined measures, EASO expects to achieve much improved results for its budget implementation in 2015;
- **recruitment:** the Office indicates that it has recruited replacements for the staff that left last year and all posts are occupied or recruitment procedures are currently being done. Staff is recognised to be the most valued asset of the Office and human resources activities to support this approach will be put in place.

Lastly, the Court of Auditors' report contains **a summary of the Office's activities in 2014**. This is focused on the following:

Budget: EUR 15.664 million.

Activities: the Office's activities cover five main areas: (i) permanent support; (ii) special support; (iii) emergency support; (iv) information and analysis support; (v) third-country support.

- **Permanent support:** organisation of train-the trainer sessions; work on quality of asylum processes and decisions (thematic mapping of access to procedure, identification of persons with special needs...); practical cooperation conference on unaccompanied minors; country of origin information (COI), with four new COI specific networks on Iran, Iraq, Russia and Afghanistan and two COI reports (on Somalia and on Chechnya) and a publication on 'Tools and tips for online COI research.
- **Special support:** special support was provided to Italy, completing the implementation of the special support plan, which started in 2013, and, as from June 2014, to Cyprus. EASO, in collaboration with other stakeholders, implemented eight actions within the framework of the Task Force Mediterranean.
- **Emergency support:** EASO provided emergency support to Greece and to Bulgaria
- **Information and analysis support:** EASO published its Annual Report on the state of asylum in the EU in 2013 as well as other technical reports.
- **Third country support:** EASO started the implementation of its EASO external dimension strategy, particularly through the implementation of a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) project with Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco.

With regard to **organisation and cooperation with stakeholders**, EASO organised three Management Board meetings, signed a working arrangement with eu-LISA, and consulted civil society on various topics.