2014 discharge: European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

2015/2176(DEC) - 28/04/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 415 votes to 216, with 9 abstentions, to grant discharge to the Executive Director of the European Food Safety Authority in respect of the implementation of the Authority's budget for the financial year 2014. The vote on the decision on discharge covers the closure of the accounts (in accordance with Annex V, Article 5 (1)(a) to Parliament's Rules of Procedure.

Noting that the Court of Auditors has stated that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the Authority's annual accounts for the financial year 2014 are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular, Parliament adopted by 472 votes to 162 with 9 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of recommendations, which form an integral part of the decision on discharge and which add to the general recommendations set out in the resolution on performance, financial management and control of EU agencies:

- **Authority's financial statements**: Parliament noted its final budget for the financial year 2014 was EUR 79 701 222, representing an increase of 2.11 % compared to 2013.
- **Budget and financial management**: Parliament noted that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2014 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99.69 %, representing an increase of 0.86 % compared with 2013.

Parliament also made a series of observations regarding contract award, recruitment and internal audit and control procedures.

On the issue of conflicts of interest, Parliament noted that the Authority launched a project to modify the way it screens and processes the annual declarations of interest in order to ensure **better coherence and overall compliance** with its rules on declarations of interest. Furthermore, it noted that this new system, scheduled to be completed in the course of 2016, foresees centralised screening of the annual declarations of interest and transfer of responsibility from the Authority's scientific departments to its legal and regulatory department.

It noted with concern that in order to attain both working with the top academics in the industry and having the most effective conflicts of interest policy possible, the Authority uses a system **to assess the experts' interests which takes into account the role of the experts** and the mandate of the scientific working group or panel of which the expert would be a member against a number of different criteria.

It observed that, during 2014, the Authority received a number of contributions on independence-related issues from stakeholders and non-governmental organisations and that these contributed to the **review of implementing rules for the independence policy**. Members favour a holistic approach to the question of conflicts of interest in the Authority.

Parliament reminded the Authority of the European Ombudsman's ruling stating that the Authority should revise its conflict of interest rules to ensure that those experts who work for academia declare all relevant information to the Authority. It is of the opinion that if this would affect around one third of the experts as stated by the Authority, then the Authority should dedicate special attention to the issue and work on specific measures together with the concerned academic institutions to safeguard the integrity of both institutions.

Cooling-off period: Parliament reiterated its call on the Authority to apply a **two-year cooling-off period.** It does not accept the Authority's justification for its refusal to implement the discharge authority's repeated demands of establishing such a two-year cooling-off period on all material interests related to the companies it regulates.

Parliament pointed out that, in 2013, of the 29 statutory staff members that left the employment at the Authority, three went to the chemical/pharmaceutical sector with a range of restrictions put in place for these individuals. It acknowledged that the Authority considers that a clear legal and governance framework on **revolving doors** is already in place.

Lastly, it noted with satisfaction that the Authority no longer accepts anonymised interests and has withdrawn this option for experts when completing their declaration of interests.