2016 discharge: European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Bart STAES (Greens/EFA, BE) on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) for the financial year 2016.

The committee called on the European Parliament to grant the Executive Director of the Agency discharge in respect of the implementation of the agency's budget for the financial year 2016.

Noting that the Court of Auditors stated that it had obtained reasonable assurance that the annual accounts of the Agency for the financial year 2016 were reliable and that the underlying transactions were legal and regular, Members called on Parliament to approve the closure of the Agency's accounts.

They made, however, a number of recommendations that needed to be taken into account when the discharge is granted, in addition to the general recommendations that appear in the draft resolution on performance, financial management and control of EU agencies:

- **Agency's financial statements**: the final budget of the Agency for the financial year 2016 was EUR 193 398 000, representing an increase of 4.30 % compared with 2015. EUR 36 370 000 of the budget of the Agency derives from the Union budget and EUR 95 926 000 is revenue from fees and charges.
- **Legality and regularity of transactions**: Members noted that, according to the Court's report, although in 2016 industry financed activities resulted in a deficit of EUR 7 600 000, budgetary results fluctuate over the years and the Agency has accumulated EUR 52 000 000 surplus from this category of activity. They recalled that the Agency's founding Regulation establishes that industry fees levied should be adequate to cover the Agency's cost for the related certification activities and thus does not foresee an accumulated surplus.
- Budget and financial management: budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2016 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99 %, representing an increase of 1 % compared to 2015. The payments appropriations execution rate was stable at 91 %. The commitments for other administrative expenditure increased by EUR 2 140 000 in absolute terms to EUR 24 060 000, representing 16.5 % of the overall percentage of the Agency's budget. This increase is largely due to the costs of the Agency's move to its new premises on 6 June 2016.
- **Commitments and carry-overs**: the budget implementation rate in relation to the execution of payments against amounts carried over to 2016 was above **96 % (compared to 97 % in 2015**), above the Commission target of 95%. Carry-overs are often justified and do not necessarily indicate weaknesses in budget planning and implementation.

Members also made a series of observations regarding procurement, staff policy, internal audits and controls and the prevention and management of conflicts of interests.

The report observed that in 2016 the Agency filled all available posts authorised in its establishment plan. Members appreciated the fact that the Agency did not receive any complaints, law-suits or reported cases linked to hiring or firing of staff in 2016. However, they regretted that the **gender imbalance** within the Agency management board members, with a ratio of 78 % to 22 %.

Members stressed that concerning the **seat of the Agency**, the headquarters agreement between the Agency and the host Member state has been finalised and came into effect on 17 August 2017. They also noted that a future decrease of the Agency's revenue resulting from the United Kingdom's decision to leave the Union is likely and might have a considerable impact on the Agency business plan. A working group should be established to look into this matter.

Members reiterated that the revision of Regulation (EC) No 216/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on common rules in the field of civil aviation and establishing a European Aviation Safety Agency envisages broadening the scope of competence of the Agency and that, accordingly, the role played by new technologies, such as **remotely piloted aircraft systems**, must be taken fully into consideration when new competences are assigned. They stressed the importance of allocating **adequate funding** to the Agency to ensure the successful uptake of these new responsibilities and adequate staffing with qualified personnel in order to fulfil additional tasks.

They also called for an acceleration of the entry into force of the European regulation on **drones**.

Lastly, the Commission and Member States are urged to provide necessary resources for the new and reinforced competences concerning, among others, risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones, environmental related topics and the certification and registration of unmanned aircraft.