2016 discharge: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL)

2017/2163(DEC) - 26/03/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

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 Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (before 1 July 2016: European Police College) (CEPOL) for the financial year 2016.

The committee called on the European Parliament to grant the Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training 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 College 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 College'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:

- **College's financial statements**: the final budget of the European Police College for the financial year 2016 was EUR 10 291 700, representing an increase of 17.34 % compared to 2015 due to the grant agreement with the Commission on the EU/MENA Counter-Terrorism Training Partnership. The entire budget of the College derives from the Union budget.
- **Budget and financial management**: the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2016 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 95.95 %, representing an increase of 0.44 % compared to 2015. Following the signature of the grant agreement with the Commission in 2005 on EU /MENA Counter-Terrorism Training Partnership, a budget of EUR 2 490 504 was agreed, out of which a second instalment of EUR 1 243 891 became available for commitments and payments. 89 % of the available credits have been committed and 48 % of the available credits have been paid.
- It should be noted that a number of staff brought a legal claim against the College disputing the conditions in which the relocation was carried out and its financial impact on their income. An amicable settlement has been reached with some members of staff and the payments were made to this end in 2015 and 2016.
- **Commitments and carry-overs**: Members observed that a total of EUR 1 477 288 was carried over to 2017, amounting to 17 % of the overall 2016 budget. The level of carryovers of committed appropriations was high for expenditure for support activities at EUR 140 055, i.e. 30 % (compared to EUR 212 456, i.e. 49 %, in 2015). These carry-overs mainly refer to IT consulting and IT related goods and services ordered late in the year. Members noted that carry-overs are often justified and do not necessarily indicate weaknesses in budget planning and implementation.
- **Staff policy**: Members noted with satisfaction the gender balance achieved by the posts occupied in 2016, since the ratio is 50 % female to 50 % male. However, the gender balance ratio of 69 % to 31 % in the management board. The report highlighted that, as a consequence of the **College's relocation** from the United Kingdom to Hungary, and due to the significantly lower correction coefficient applied to staff salaries in the new location, the **number of resignations has increased**. Although a number of mitigating actions have been implemented, the low grading of posts combined with low correction coefficient does not encourage foreigners (especially from West and Northern Europe) to move to Hungary, and that as a result, the **geographical balance of staff is not ensured**. In 2016, 30% of all College staff were Hungarian, which is a disproportionate number.

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

On performance, Members stated that in 2016 the College's training portfolio encompassed 174 training activities, of which 87 residential activities and 87 webinars, 492 exchanges in the frame of the European Police Exchange Programme, 27 online modules, one online course. They noted with satisfaction that for the sixth year in a row the outreach of the College has increased, resulting in the College training 18 009 law enforcement professionals in 2016 compared to 12 992 in 2015, representing an increase of over 38 %.

Members noted that the five-year external evaluation of the College (2011-2015) was completed by the external evaluator in January 2016. It was concluded that the College is efficient. However, there is a clear need for a significant reinforcement of the College with both human and financial resources.

Lastly, Members noted with concern that for the time being the College does not have sufficient information to allow a thorough preparation for carrying out future activities after **Brexit**. Brexit will limit the College's access to United Kingdom law enforcement expertise and its ability to organise training with United Kingdom officials. These aspects might negatively impact the development of common practices, information exchange and ultimately cross-border cooperation on fighting and prevention of crime. Members recommended that measures be implemented to maintain - at the least - the current level of cooperation.