2016 discharge: European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

2017/2177(DEC) - 18/04/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 622 votes to 46, with 21 abstentions, to **postpone its decision** on discharge to the Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) on the implementation of the Office's budget for the financial year 2016.

Follow-up to the 2013 and 2014 discharges: Members noted with concern the number of outstanding issues and ongoing corrective actions in response to the Court's comments in 2013 and 2014 related to late payments, internal control standards (ICSs) and high staff turnover. They called on the Office to **complete the corrective actions** as soon as possible in the course of 2018.

Basis for the qualified opinion: Members expressed deep regret the material findings made by the Court in relation to **two out of five significant procurement procedures from 2016** for which payments were incurred during that year, which demonstrates a lack of rigour in the Office's procurement procedures.

The resolution recalled that two of the three tenderers participating in one audited procurement procedure for the provision of travel services under a framework service contract amounting to EUR 4 million for the period from 2016 to 2020 were asked to provide additional information in relation to the same selection criteria. Although neither of them submitted the requested information (CVs of the persons who would perform the task at the Office's premises), only one of them was excluded from the procedure for this reason. The other tenderer was awarded the contract on the basis that the relevant CVs would be provided following the award of the contract. **The procurement procedure did not comply with the principle of equal treatment**. Members stated that the framework contract and associated 2016 payments, amounting to EUR 920 561, are therefore irregular.

Another framework contract for interim services to support it in its response to the migration crisis for a period of 12 months amounting to **EUR 3 600 000** was awarded to a single preselected economic operator without applying any of the procurement procedures laid down in the Financial Regulation. The associated 2016 payments, amounting to EUR 592 273, are irregular.

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has opened an investigation on the Office's operations.

Budget and financial management: budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2016 resulted in a **low budget implementation rate of 80.64 %.** Members noted that the Office's work programme was amended three times and its budget four times in order to take into account significant changes that took place during 2016, in particular the significant increase in the operational support activities of the Office in "hotspots" in some Member States and the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement.

Commitments and carry-overs: the level of committed appropriations carried over for **administrative expenditure was high at EUR 2.5 million or 43.9 %** (compared to EUR 1 076 583 or 36.9 % in 2015). These carry-overs mainly relate to IT infrastructure, translations and publications, business consultancy and the costs for management board meetings for which contracts were signed towards the end of 2016 or invoices were only issued in 2017.

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

It highlighted that in 2016 the Office faced several challenges in its operating environment, including not only a substantial increase in its budget and expansion of its tasks but also a significant increase in the number of transactions, a change of the accounting officer with several interim solutions and the introduction of a paperless workflow system. It regretted that this situation of considerable change and instability was neither mitigated by a revalidation of the accounting system nor by introducing a **system of regular ex post verifications of transactions**.

In 2016, the Commission presented a proposal for a new Regulation that proposed transforming the Office into a fully-fledged agency. Members noted the opening of offices in Rome and in Athens and the expanding role of the Office across the Union as it reaches out closer to the hotspots.

Parliament welcomed the Office's support to Member States, in particular Greece and Italy, in responding to the constant and unprecedented pressure to which their asylum systems have been subjected, as well as its full support for the implementation of the EU relocation program in Italy and Greece for persons in clear need of international protection.