2017 discharge: European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

2018/2208(DEC) - 18/09/2018

PURPOSE: presentation of the EU Court of Auditors' report on the annual accounts of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) for the year 2017, together with the Office's reply.

CONTENT: the Court of Auditors carried out the audit on the annual accounts of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

In brief, its task is to enhance practical cooperation on asylum matters and helping Member States fulfil their European and international obligations to give protection to people in need. Since 2015, the Office has provided support to Greece and Italy in the context of the migration crisis.

Statement of assurance and reliability of the accounts

The Court considered that:

- the Office's annual accounts present fairly, in all material respects, its financial position as at 31 December 2017 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;

- the transactions underlying the annual accounts for the year ended 31 December 2017 are legal and regular in all material respects.

Adverse opinion regarding payments

The Court noted material and systematic instances of non-compliance of payments with the Office's Financial Regulation, mainly related to public procurement and recruitment procedures underlying payments. The systematic nature of non-compliances demonstrates an inadequate internal control system. Therefore, they stated that the payments underlying the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2017 are materially affected by error.

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 controls

Since 2016, the Office has been facing an unprecedented expansion of tasks and activities to provide Member States with operational and technical assistance in the context of the migration crisis. This is mirrored by a budget increase from initially EUR 19 million in 2016 to EUR 79 million after the second amendment to the 2017 budget. The number of procurement procedures increased from 87 in 2015 to 140 in 2017. Many procurement procedures were poorly managed. The number of payments increased by 225 % from 2 578 in 2015 to 8 381 payments in 2017.

The extraordinary operational challenge caused by the migration crisis was not mitigated by a solid governance structure and effective internal controls.

When launching in 2015 the operations in support of Greece and Italy, the Office faced a situation where resources provided for deployment operations by Member States were insufficient. Even before, the Office had faced difficulties filling the staff posts in its establishment plan. Since 2014, one recurring observation was that the Office suffered from high staff turnover.

Recruitment

As from the end of 2017, the human resources situation at the Office has deteriorated exponentially. This creates considerable managerial challenges to the Office.

The Office's replies

Internal controls

EASO is taking the Court's comments extremely seriously and has started putting corrective measures in place. It is grateful that the Court recognises the extremely difficult situation the agency was under during the reference period, namely the unprecedented expansion of tasks that EASO needed to carry out to support Member States.

Recruitment

EASO is urgently recruiting to fill management positions and other key roles (operational and administrative).

Lastly, the Court of Auditors' report contains a summary of the Office's key figures in 2017:

Budget

EUR 79 million.

Staff

200 including officials, temporary and contract staff and seconded national experts.