2017 discharge: European Union Agency for Railways

2018/2193(DEC) - 04/03/2019 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Petri SARVAMAA (EPP, FI) on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Railway Agency (now European Union Agency for Railways) for the financial year 2017.

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 2017.

Noting that the Court of Auditors stated that it had obtained reasonable assurance that the annual accounts of the Agency for the financial year 2017 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

Members noted that the final budget of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2017 was EUR 30 732 000, representing an increase of 11.57 % compared to 2016.

Budget and financial management

The budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2017 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99.99 %, representing an increase of 0.79 % compared to 2016. Payment appropriations execution rate was 87.30 %, representing a decrease of 4.27 % compared to 2016.

Members noted that the Agency is now authorised to charge fees for some of its new competences. A charging regime for issuing certificates, authorisations and approvals was introduced, with the aim of being fully operational in 2019 and the requirement of implementing a new resources system and internal procedures within the Agency to ensure statutory and fee-based tasks are identified and tracked. The Agency should report to the discharge authority on the implementation of this new system.

The cancellations of carry-overs from 2016 to 2017 amounted to EUR 69 473, representing 3.40 % of the total amount carried over, showing a decrease of 1.12 % in comparison to 2016.

Members also made a series of observations regarding performance, procurement and staff policy.

In particular, they noted that:

- the Agency's role in the follow-up of the development, testing and implementation of European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS), as well as in evaluating the specific ERTMS projects was welcomed;

- on 31 December 2017, the establishment plan was 92.09 % executed, with 128 temporary agents appointed out of 139 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared with 135 authorised posts in 2016);

- the Agency had still not set up rules on whistleblowing but that they were to be adopted by the end of 2018;

- by the end of the transitional period (16 June 2019), the Agency will transform from a mere policy preparation and dissemination role into an authority working directly for the industry as regards authorisations for safety certifications and rolling stock;

- despite numerous contacts with French authorities, this has not resulted in the signature of the Agency's headquarter agreement. Members regretted that the Management Board has been unable in 2017 to unanimously adopt implementing rules for the language arrangements for the Agency, leading to extra costs and delays, e.g. during recruitment;

- the agency continues to operate in two locations. Members called for the Agency to relocate all activities to its headquarters and operate only from that site;

- regarding the United Kingdom's decision to withdraw from the European Union and its potential effect on the Agency's staff, intensive exchange with the UK rail sector has confirmed their interest in staying in the "European System".