2018 discharge: European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

2019/2096(DEC) - 13/05/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in respect of the implementation of the Office's budget for the 2018 financial year and to approve the closure of the accounts for the financial year in question.

Noting that the Court of Auditors has stated that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the Office's annual accounts for the financial year 2018 are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular, Parliament adopted by 599 votes to 77 with 17 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of recommendations, which form an integral part of the decision on discharge and which add to the general recommendations set out in the resolution on performance, financial management and control of EU agencies.

Having said this, the Court did issue a basis for a qualified opinion in relation to the Court's findings reported for the financial years 2016 and 2017 on the legality and regularity of the payments. Except for the effects of the financial years 2016 and 2017, the Court is of the opinion that payments underlying the annual accounts for the year ended 31 December 2018 are legal and regular in all material aspects.

Follow-up to the 2017 discharge report

Parliament noted the decision of the Office's management board of 6 June 2018 to release the previous executive director from his duties with immediate effect as well as the designation of an ad interim executive director on 6 June 2018 and the appointment of a new executive director on 16 June 2019.

It welcomed the follow-up report by the Office on the observations of Parliament for the financial year 2017, in particular the corrective measures taken by the Office's management board, the ad interim executive director and the new executive director to improve the governance structure and efficiency of the Office, restore transparency and build trust.

The outcome of the investigation of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)

Parliament called on the Office to report to the discharge authority on the follow-up of the measures proposed by OLAF as regards irregularities surrounding the breach of procurement procedures, misappropriation of Union funds, mismanagement, abuse of position in human resources issues, breaches of data protection rules, harassment and inappropriate behaviour towards staff in 2017.

Office's financial statements

The final budget of the European Asylum Support Office for the financial year 2018 was EUR 97 665 322, representing an increase of 12.52 % compared to 2017.

Budget and financial management

Parliament regretted that limited annual budgets and the partial absence of contingency funds in the Office' s budget to cover the financing of unforeseen urgent operational needs create budgetary uncertainties and hamper emergency planning.

According to Members, the proposed budgetary cuts may hamper the Office's ability to continue to properly fulfil its functions in providing the necessary support to Member States, as entrusted to it through its mandate. Strengthening the mandate of the Office and the increase in the workload should be accompanied by adequate budgetary allocations.

Other observations

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

In particular, they noted that:

- on 31 December 2018, the establishment plan was only 68.22 % executed, with 146 temporary agents appointed out of 214 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared with 155 authorised posts in 2017);

- as regards housing arrangements concerning the accommodation of asylum support teams and other Office forces in the Member States, the Office signed a hosting arrangement with Cyprus in July 2019 and is to sign a hosting agreement with Greece in January 2020;

- the Office should continue to pay particular attention to the prevention of conflicts of interest and the proper implementation of rules and procedures regarding whistleblowing;

- at the end of 2018, the Office did not have an internal audit capability and that no comprehensive Internal audit Service audit reports have been issued since January 2018;

- concrete and positive steps aimed at improving organisational governance have been taken;

- there is still no policy regarding sensitive posts at the Office, which is not in line with the Office's internal control standards whereby sensitive functions are to be clearly defined, recorded and kept up to date;

- the Office should establish an effective policy for the management of rented premises as the lack of clear responsibilities and roles concerning the management of rented premises and related services and works may hamper an efficient mitigation of premises-related risks.