Discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union agencies for the financial year 2018: performance, financial management and control

2019/2098(DEC) - 13/05/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 603 votes to 84, with 6 abstentions, a resolution on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union agencies for the financial year 2018: performance, financial management and control.

This resolution includes, for each EU agency, the cross-cutting observations accompanying the discharge decisions. Agencies have a significant influence on policy development, decision-making and programme implementation in areas of key importance to European citizens such as safety, security, health, research, economic affairs, freedom and justice.

General comments

For the 32 decentralised agencies, the 2018 budget amounted to around EUR 2 590 million in commitment appropriations (+10.22 % compared to 2017) and EUR 2 360 million in payment appropriations (+5.13 % compared to 2017). Of the EUR 2 360 million, some EUR 1 700 million was financed from the general budget of the Union, which represents 72.16 % of the total financing of the agencies in 2018 (compared to 72.08 % in 2017). 657 million was financed through fees and charges and direct contributions from participating countries.

Parliament welcomed the positive efforts made by the agencies to respond to the requests and recommendations made in the context of the annual discharge procedures. It recalled its request to streamline and speed up the discharge procedure with a view to deciding on granting discharge in the year immediately following the year for which discharge is granted and thus closing the discharge procedure in the year following the financial year in question.

Main risks and recommendations identified by the Court

According to the Court’s report, the overall risk to the reliability of agencies’ accounts, based on international accounting standards, to be low, and that only a few material errors arose in the past. The overall risk to the legality and regularity of revenue underlying the agencies’ accounts to be low for the majority of agencies, and to be medium for the partly self-financed agencies.

The sources of high risk are generally in public procurement and grant payments, which the Court should take into account when defining the sample for future controls and audits.

Parliament invited the Agencies (i) to focus more on thematic bundling and to strengthen their cooperation according to their policy areas in order to ensure harmonisation and effective sharing of resources, and (ii) to make further efforts to increase the scope of their shared services and thus improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of their procedures.

Members also noted that the audited reports on the implementation of the budget of some agencies are less accurate than those of the majority of other agencies, hence the need to establish clear guidelines on the provision of budgetary information by the agencies.

Performance

Parliament encouraged the agencies and the Commission to further develop and implement the principle of performance-based budgeting, to consistently seek the most effective ways to provide added value, and to explore possible improvements in efficiency in relation to resources management. Agencies should cooperate more closely, wherever possible, not only in the development of shared services and synergies, but also in their common policy areas.

Noting that only the European Union Intellectual Property Office had published a sustainability report, Members called on all agencies to fully integrate sustainability information into their reporting, to publish sustainability reports covering both their functioning and activities, and to ensure the reliability of sustainability reporting through auditing.

Staff policy

The 32 decentralised agencies employed a total of 7 626 officials, temporary agents, contract agents and seconded national experts in 2018 (7 324 in 2017), representing an increase of 3.74 % compared with the previous year. Only one agency, European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), has reported an even gender balance for both senior management staff and the management board. Other agencies are urged to follow this good example.

Parliament encouraged the agencies to develop a long term human resources policy framework which addresses the work-life balance of its staff, lifelong guidance and career development, gender balance, teleworking, non-discrimination, geographical balance and the recruitment and integration of persons with disabilities.

While taking note of the measures taken by the agencies towards establishing a harassment-free environment, Members encouraged the agencies which have not yet introduced such steps to do so. They also encouraged agencies which have received harassment-related complaints to treat these as a priority.

Public Procurement

In view of the shortcomings noted by the Court, Parliament recommended ensuring an adequate ratio between price and quality when awarding contracts, an optimal design of framework contracts, justified intermediary services and the use of detailed framework contracts.

For six agencies the framework contract terms for the provision of IT maintenance and equipment were weak, as they allowed the purchase of items which were not specifically mentioned therein and were not subject to an initial competitive procedure, and they also allowed the contractor to charge uplifts on the prices of items purchased from other suppliers. Members therefore called on all EU agencies and bodies to strictly respect public procurement rules, stressing that digitisation is an excellent opportunity for agencies to increase efficiency and transparency.

Prevention and management of conflicts of interest and transparency

Parliament stated that an insufficiently detailed conflict of interest policy could undermine an agency's credibility. In this respect, it stressed that the starting point for all such policies was the regular submission of sufficiently detailed declarations of interest. In addition, EU agencies should have a conflict of interest screening mechanism which is proportionate to the size and function of the agency concerned.

Members considered it regrettable that there are still no clear guidelines or a consolidated policy on the revolving door issue. Lastly, they called on all agencies to participate in the inter-institutional agreement on the transparency register for interest representatives, which is currently being negotiated between the Commission, Council and Parliament.