2019 discharge: European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

2020/2162(DEC) - 28/04/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 568 votes to 100, with 30 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for the financial year 2019 and to approve the closure of the accounts for that year.

Noting that the Court of Auditors had stated that it had obtained reasonable assurance that the Authority's annual accounts for the financial year 2019 were reliable and that the underlying transactions were legal and regular, Parliament adopted, by 605 votes to 58 with 28 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of recommendations which form an integral part of the discharge decision and which complement the general recommendations set out in the resolution on the performance, financial management and control of EU agencies.

Authority's financial statements

The Authority's final budget for the financial year 2019 was EUR 80 736 785.59, which represents an increase of 1.96% compared to 2018.

Budgetary and financial management

Members welcomed the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2019 which resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99.99%, which represents a slight decrease of 0.01% compared to the financial year 2018. The execution rate for payment appropriations was 91.45%, which represents a slight increase of 0.15% compared to 2018.

The Commission is invited to grant the Authority, in duly justified cases, a set of means to use their budget in the most impactful way which would, inter alia, include the option of hiring contract agents in excess of the establishment plans, for a limited period of time and without exceeding the Authority's agreed annual budget envelope.

Other comments

Members also made a number of observations concerning performance, staff policy, procurement, conflicts of interest and internal controls.

In particular, they noted that:

- the Authority contributes to the safety of the food and feed chain in the EU and makes considerable efforts to provide risk managers with comprehensive, independent and up-to-date scientific advice on issues related to the food chain, clearly communicating its findings and the information on which they are based to the public, and cooperating with stakeholders and institutional partners to enhance coherence and confidence in the food safety system;

- in 2019, the Authority finalised 838 issues through scientific opinions, technical reports and related publications;

- the Authority shares resources and activities with the European Chemicals Agency, the European Environment Agency, the European Medicines Agency and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control within the same policy cluster;

- the Authority, which is one of the EU's regulatory agencies responsible for the risk assessment of regulated products, is not given sufficient resources to carry out its responsibilities effectively;

- Parliament adopted 16 objections to the import of GM food and feed crops;

- on 31 December 2019, the establishment plan was 97.81 % implemented, with five officials and 308 temporary agents appointed out of 320 posts authorised under the Union budget;

- the Authority has taken measures to ensure transparency, prevention and management of conflicts of interest and protection of whistleblowers;

- as regards the two-year cooling-off period, the Authority's independence policy still requires it to monitor the interests of experts only in relation to the mandate of the scientific panel to which the expert is applying. Members called for the policy to be updated without delay to ensure that the interests of experts are considered in the context of the Authority's overall remit;

- the Authority should update its anti-fraud strategy and focus on disseminating the results of its research to the general public.