2019 discharge: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL)

2020/2172(DEC) - 28/04/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 644 votes to 11, with 43 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) for the financial year 2019 and to approve the closure of the accounts for that year.

Noting that the Court of Auditors stated that it had obtained reasonable assurance that the Agency's annual accounts for the financial year 2019 were reliable and that the underlying transactions were legal and regular, Parliament adopted, by 637 votes to 18 with 36 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of recommendations which form an integral part of the discharge decision and which complement the general recommendations contained in the resolution on the performance, financial management and control of EU agencies.

Europol's financial statements

The Agency's final budget for the financial year 2019 was EUR 141 620 456, an increase of 4.33% compared to 2018.

Budget and financial management

Parliament welcomed the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2019, which resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99.42%, which represents an increase of 3.31% compared to the financial year 2018. The implementation rate for payment appropriations was 86.61%, a decrease of 0.31% compared to 2018.

The Agency accumulated payment delays in 20% of cases in 2019. The overall value of invoices paid late was approximately EUR 6.6 million in 2019, which is equivalent to 4.6% of payments made. According to its response to the Court of Auditors' report, the Agency faced an understaffing situation in the financial administration and took mitigating measures to respect the principle of sound financial management.

Due to the lack of budgetary and human resources, the Agency had to give lower priority to a number of objectives and actions. Parliament called for an intensified dialogue with the Agency to address the budgetary and staffing shortages.

Other observations

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

In particular, they noted that:

- the Agency has implemented 79% of the work programme objectives and 75% of the actions contained in the 2019 work programme;

- Europol plays an important role in supporting Member States in criminal investigations and providing operational analysis. With the increase in tasks, its role becomes more important in preventing and combating terrorism, cybercrime and other forms of serious and organised crime in the EU;

- the number of operations supported by the Agency increased from 1 748 in 2018 to 1 921 in 2019 (an increase of 9.89%) and the number of operational meetings funded by the Agency increased from 427 in 2018 to over 500 in 2019 (an increase of 17%);

- on 31 December 2019, 92.89% of the establishment plan was implemented with 549 temporary agents appointed out of the 591 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget. The reported gender imbalance in senior management, the Management Board and staff is a cause for concern;

- two cases of alleged psychological harassment and related inappropriate behaviour were reported and subsequently investigated by means of a formal administrative inquiry in 2019 and a decision on the outcome was to be taken in 2020;

- as regards public procurement, the Agency needs to (i) improve the regularity of transactions and strengthen contract management and ex-ante controls accordingly and (ii) ensure that tender specifications are complete to allow fair and effective competition;

- the Agency should promptly publish the CVs and declarations of interest of all members of its Management Board and inform the discharge authority of the measures taken in this respect;

- the digitalisation of the Agency's internal operations and management procedures should be increased.

In view of the continuing uncertainty surrounding the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the Agency examined, during the first quarter of 2019, all options for maintaining an effective operational relationship with the UK as a third country.