2019 discharge: European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice (eu-LISA)

2020/2181(DEC) - 28/04/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 633 votes to 56, with 9 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the European Agency for the Management of Large-scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA) 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 619 votes to 63 with 9 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.

Agency's financial statements

The Agency's final budget for the financial year 2019 amounted to EUR 288 403 000, a significant increase of 40.23% compared to the financial year 2018. This increase was related to the amount carried over from 2018 and an increase in workload and staffing.

Budgetary and financial management

Parliament regretted that the budget monitoring efforts made in 2019 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 44.51%, which is a decrease of 30.67% compared to 2018. This low implementation rate is due to a lack of alignment between the budgetary planning of the new tasks presented in the legislative financial statements prepared by the Commission and the actual date of entry into force of the relevant legal acts.

As a result of this low implementation rate, the Agency returned EUR 66 million in payment appropriations to the Commission, of which EUR 23 million were not requested when the budget was established, and carried over EUR 159 million in commitment appropriations.

The budgeting of a high amount of resources for the implementation of legislation not yet adopted presents a serious risk for the efficient use of appropriations. The Agency, together with the Commission, is invited to improve the alignment of the budgetary planning with the timing of the legal acts.

Other comments

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

In particular, they noted that:

- the Agency makes a significant contribution to improving Europe's security by ensuring the highest level of information security and data protection for the information entrusted to it, by providing quality services and by helping Member States to align their technological capabilities with their needs

- the Agency seeks to control its costs and achieve economies of scale by pooling its resources with and through other agencies through participation in inter-institutional tenders and contractual arrangements with other service providers in order to reduce administrative costs and avoid duplication of horizontal services;

- the Agency manages three separate and non-integrated large-scale information systems. The different development timetables and constraints arising from the different legal frameworks governing these systems have resulted in the information systems being implemented in a separate and non-integrated way. The Agency launched the framework tender for transversal engineering to significantly increase efficiency and economies of scale;

- at the end of 2019, the establishment plan was only 89,53 % implemented, with 154 temporary agents appointed out of 172 temporary agents authorised under the EU budget. The gender imbalance reported for 2019 in senior management, the Management Board (50 men and 8 women) and staff is a concern;

- the Agency's workload has increased significantly over the years and the limited number of staff remains one of the main challenges for the Agency, which expects to grow to over 300 by the end of 2020. Dependence on private contractors can only be reduced by a further substantial increase in the number of staff within the Agency;

- the Agency faces difficulties in recruiting qualified staff and retaining them in the long term. The Commission is invited to consider the possibility of setting different correction coefficients for remuneration and pensions on the basis of a regional rather than a national assessment;

- as regards public procurement, the Agency has taken steps to strengthen contract and supplier management;

- efforts are being made to ensure transparency and the prevention and management of conflicts of interest and whistleblowing;

- at the end of 2019, the implementation rate of audit recommendations was 62%.

In anticipation of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the Agency made all necessary preparations to execute the disconnection of the UK and the possible deletion of UK data from the Schengen Information System and the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database as and when required by the legal framework.