2019 discharge: Joint Undertaking - Safety of air navigation (SESAR)

2020/2183(DEC) - 28/04/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 604 votes to 89, with 5 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the SESAR Joint Undertaking in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Joint Undertaking for the financial year 2019 and to approve the closure of the Joint Undertaking's accounts.

Noting that the Court of Auditors found that the annual accounts of the Joint Undertaking for the financial year 2019 present fairly the financial situation of the Joint Undertaking on 31 December 2019 and the results of its operations, Parliament adopted, by 597 votes to 86 with 8 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of observations which form an integral part of the discharge decision.

General comments

Members noted that the Commission provided funding to the Joint Undertaking under the Seventh Framework Programme and the Horizon 2020 programme, as well as under the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) programme, in the 2007-2013 multiannual financial framework, and under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) in the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework. Following a call for expressions of interest in 2015, 19 public and private aviation entities became members of the Joint Undertaking.

The Joint Undertaking is of growing importance in light of emerging technologies enabling autonomous and unmanned aircraft.

Parliament called for a comprehensive programme that includes all the steps towards the finalisation of the development phase of the next generation of air traffic management system.

It called for the successor to the Joint Undertaking to make a greater contribution to the sustainability of the aviation sector in line with the European Green Deal’s objectives and to help make the aviation market more flexible and resilient to traffic fluctuations, in order to make the Single European Sky the most environmentally friendly and efficient airspace in the world.

Budgetary and financial management

In 2019, the total available budget, including re-entered unused appropriations of previous years, assigned revenues and reallocations to the next year, consisted of commitment appropriations amounting to EUR 161 041 597 (of which EUR 112 618 000 came from the Union budget) and payment appropriations amounting to EUR 183 279 715 (of which EUR 113 733 525 came from the Union budget).

At the end of 2019, for SESAR 1, the total Union contribution amounted to EUR 634 136 000, Eurocontrol's contribution amounted to EUR 560 732 000, of which EUR 422 943 000 were validated contributions in kind, and the industry members' contribution amounted to EUR 539 780 000, of which EUR 514 302 000 were validated contributions in kind. The overall actual implementation rate of SESAR 1 is 90%. At the end of 2019, the total EU cash contribution from Horizon 2020 to the operational activities of the Joint Undertaking amounted to EUR 330 987 000.

In 2019, SESAR 2020 final commitment appropriations amounted to EUR 159 845 788 and the final payment appropriations to EUR 181 529 090. Horizon 2020 projects are at their maximum growth level and SESAR 2020 is in a ramping up phase.

Parliament has called for harmonising the calculation of in-kind contributions to Joint Undertakings with a view to establishing a common procedure for establishing the real value of the contribution.

Other observations

The resolution also contains a series of observations on performance, procurement and recruitment procedures and internal controls. In particular, it notes the following:

- the Joint Undertaking launched two Horizon 2020 calls for proposals, following which 15 projects were selected and 13 were launched under the Wave 2 call; the completion of the Wave 1 programme under SESAR 2020 in 2019 resulted in 21 SESAR Solutions ready for industrialisation;

- in 2019, the Joint Undertaking had 70 ongoing SESAR 2020 projects, including 17 exploratory research projects, 32 industrial research and validation projects and 21 very large-scale demonstration projects;

- the Joint Undertaking has achieved all its objectives as set out in the 2019-2021 Single Programming Document, which in 2019 was structured around six areas of activity. The Joint Undertaking is on track to meet the research and innovation objective within the related timeframe;

- gender balance KPIs have increased compared to previous years, but remained low, with only 19% of women participating in Horizon 2020 projects and 20% of project coordinators;

- the issue of intellectual property rights (IPR) should be addressed in all contracts that are likely to produce an intended outcome or result of the performance;

- as of 31 December 2019, the Joint Undertaking employed 40 people and had signed 30 contracts;

- the Joint Undertaking has put in place reliable ex-ante control procedures based on reviews of financial and operational documents. It still needs to develop further relevant key control indicators to assess the effectiveness of its control activities and to identify weaknesses;

- the Joint Undertaking published its internal audit strategic plan for the period 2019-2021 in May 2019. The Internal Audit Service will carry out audit missions on grant implementation and programme management, on the validation process of in-kind contributions and on human resources management, and possibly on two other risk areas.