2020 discharge: European Union Agency for Railways (ERA)

2021/2136(DEC) - 04/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Railways in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for the financial year 2020 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 2020 were reliable and that the underlying transactions were legal and regular, Parliament adopted, by 578 votes to 53 with 13 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.

Agency's financial statements

The Agency's final budget for the financial year 2020 was EUR 30 764 883, representing an increase of 13.36 % compared to 2019.

Budgetary and financial management

The budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2020 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99.98 %, equal to the implementation rate in 2019. Payment appropriations execution rate was 89.28 %, representing a decrease of 2.97 % compared to 2019. Parliament recalled that

the Agency has the smallest budget among the transport agencies despite the outstanding environmental and climate performance and other benefits of rail transport. It should not be put in a position where it feels compelled to request additional support from the Commission, due to inadequate financial means, especially at a time when railways are a policy priority of the EU. Therefore, Parliament called for an increase of the budget of the Agency so that it has the necessary means to enable it to act as an efficient authority and to fulfil its tasks, particularly those with regard to increasing competitiveness, improving safety and cross border interoperability, and particularly its enhanced role and responsibilities in the timely deployment of ERTMS.

Other observations

Parliament also made a series of observations concerning performance, staff policy, procurement and Covid-19.

In particular, it noted that:

- despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Agency, in implementing its 2020 work programme, met its targets for the various outputs to a satisfactory extent, as confirmed by the management board, as well as attaining a satisfactory level of achievement for its set of KPIs;

- the Agency is located in both Lille and Valenciennes, which indicates that costs could be reduced if all operations were centralised in one location;

- the timely and adequate response by the Agency to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, in relation to both its staff/working arrangements and to the railway sector in general, in particular by drafting guidance documents and EU Covid-19 roadmaps for public transport by rail;

- on 31 December 2020, the establishment plan was 97.29 % executed, with 144 temporary agents appointed out of 148 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared with 148 authorised posts in 2019). Once again, the lack of gender balance is of concern in senior management (87.5 % men) and within the management board, with 72.1 % being men;

- the Agency carried out four open calls for tenders and four negotiated procedures of low value and without publication of a contract notice in 2020;

- during the pandemic, the Agency responded in a timely manner and adequately to the COVID-19 pandemic, in relation to both its staff and working arrangements, and to the railway sector. A taskforce was set up for timely monitoring of the pandemic situation and for taking real time decisions in order to safeguard staff health and safety at work.