2020 discharge: European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX)

2021/2146(DEC) - 04/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in regard to the implementation of the agency's budget for the 2020 financial year and to approve the closure of the accounts for the financial year in question.

Noting that the Court of Auditors has stated that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the agency's annual accounts for the financial year 2020 are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular, Parliament adopted by 492 votes to 145 with 8 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of recommendations, which form an integral part of the decision on discharge and which add to the general recommendations set out in the resolution on performance, financial management and control of EU agencies.

Agency's financial statements

The Agency's final budget for the financial year 2020 was EUR 364 432 655, representing an increase of 10.40 % compared to 2019.

Budget and financial management

The budget-monitoring efforts during the financial year 2020 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 78.42 %, representing a decrease of 21.42 % compared to 2019. EUR 360 million of EUR 364 million of the budget were committed. EUR 95 million has been returned to the EU general budget. Payment appropriations execution rate however was very low at 43.84 %, representing a decrease of 25.30 % compared to 2019.

Parliament noted that the pandemic has affected the Agency's operations and budget implementation in 2020, with the Agency reducing its initial budget by EUR 95 000 000, through two amending budgets. A provisional budgetary commitment of EUR 18 100 000 for the preparation of field deployments in 2021 was carried forward without the Agency having entered into legal commitments within the time limit. Moreover, the Union funding to the Agency increased by EUR 10 million by means of Amending budget No 1/2020. Parliament deplored that that amount was not visible in the budgetary accounts of the Agency which reduces transparency as it makes it harder to see how much Union funding was available to the Agency in 2020 and how that amount changed over time.

Other observations

Parliament also made a series of observations concerning performance, fundamental rights, staff policy, internal controls and Covid-19.

In particular, it noted that:

- the Agency implemented two rapid border interventions at the external land and maritime borders of Greece with Turkey that required deployment of technical equipment from the rapid reaction equipment and technical equipment pools, as well as human resources;

- the Agency’s surveillance aircraft services performed a total of 1 068 missions in 2020 out of which 1030 were surveillance flights and 38 related to fishery control;

- the Agency’s assets in maritime operations have helped to rescue more than 3 408 migrants during patrolling activities, which also resulted in the detection of 790 facilitators, four traffickers of human beings and a wide variety of other types of cross-border crimes, such as smuggling of illegal goods and substances (1 463 litres of alcohol, 4 013 pieces of ammunition, approximately 361 kilogrammes of cocaine, more than 144 tonnes of hashish and marijuana, and 40 kilogrammes of heroin);

- the return operations, despite being impacted by the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, continued with 21 Member States taking part as either organisers or participants in return operations by charter flights coordinated and co-financed by the Agency, with overall 7 952 persons handed over, reaching 28 third countries of return, significant lower numbers than in 2019. Voluntary returns made up for 18 % of all supported flights and 26 Member States carried out returns by scheduled flights with the Agency’s support, returning 3 981 third country nationals to 83 countries of return, with among the returnees 2 173 (55 %) unescorted and 1 532 (38%) returning in a voluntary manner;

- the Agency is still unable to recruit at least 40 fundamental rights monitors (FRMs) which was a condition set out in the 2019 discharge;

- on 31 December 2020, the establishment plan was 63.01 % implemented, with 662 temporary agents appointed out of 1 050 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared to 484 authorised posts in 2019). Gender balance is lacking at senior management level and on the management board;

- further efforts should be made to ensure full functionality of the Agency especially in the context of the current situation in Ukraine;

- the Agency’s training plan was significantly affected the pandemic, with travel restrictions imposed by Member States and the Schengen Associated Countries leading to the unavailability of both trainers and training locations, as well as restricted possibility to travel to the training sites.