2020 discharge: European GNSS Agency (GSA)

2021/2147(DEC) - 04/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the European GNSS Agency (from 1 January 2021, the European Union Agency for the Space Programme) for the financial year 2020 and to approve the closure of the accounts for that year.

Noting that the Court of Auditors has stated that it has obtained reasonable assurance 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 584 votes to 15 with 44 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 2020 was EUR 35 449 479.85, representing an increase of 5.54 % compared to 2019.

Budgetary and financial management

The budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2020 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 100 %, representing the same rate as in 2019. The execution rate of payment appropriations was 83.38 %, representing a decrease of 2.57 % compared to 2019. In addition to its core budget, the Agency continued to manage a large amount of delegated budget, in particular under the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) Exploitation, Galileo Exploitation, and Horizon 2020 Delegation Agreements; notes also that in 2020 the Agency started the management of the Govsatcom preparatory actions contribution agreement. Also in 2020, a total of EUR 402 000 000 was committed under a delegated budget and an amount equal to EUR 753 000 000 was made in payments.

Other comments

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

In particular, it noted that:

- the Agency adopted a new information and communication technology (ICT) strategy and ICT security strategy, as well as ICT security policy and its Implementing rules in the second quarter of 2020. It also approved a digital transformation programme, also in connection to the transformation from the European GNSS Agency to the European Union Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA), with the aim to modernise the Agency's working environment, extend the possibilities of teleworking with EU classified information, and develop modern applications supporting the core business, coupled with increasing the security level reflected in the aspiration to establish 24/7 cyber defence capabilities along with the new modernised systems;

- the Agency significantly needs to improve its cooperation with Member States, other agencies and internationally;

- on 31 December 2020 the establishment plan was 100 % implemented, with 150 temporary agents appointed out of 150 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared to 139 authorised posts in 2019). The lack of gender balance is worrying throughout the Agency as is the lack of geographical balance;

- the Agency struggles to recruit staff with the necessary technical expertise and in order to compensate for a shortage of posts or national experts, the Agency increasingly outsources core tasks to private contractors, on whom it may then become dependent;

- 100 % of its planned contracts were in place and on time in 2020;

- there is a risk that the Agency's payments to the European Space Agency (ESA) in relation to the implementation of the EGNOS and GALILEO programmes may be calculated on the basis of inaccurate costs due to the absence of a comprehensive ex-ante or ex post strategy;

- during the pandemic, the Agency's external events moved online, turning the physical restrictions into an opportunity to reach new user communities and go global, as it was the case for the User Consultation Platform and the annual European Space Week, which attracted more than 3 000 participants from over 100 countries;

- the Agency implemented a set of measures to increase cybersecurity;

- the Agency is seeking new premises for its headquarters in Prague. Other sites for the Agency in France and Spain are undergoing construction and refurbishment.