2020 discharge: Joint Undertaking - Safety of air navigation (SESAR)

2021/2155(DEC) - 04/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to Interim Executive Director of the SESAR Joint Undertaking (now the Single European Sky ATM Research 3 Joint Undertaking) in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Joint Undertaking for the financial year 2020 and 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 2020 present fairly the financial situation of the Joint Undertaking on 31 December 2020 and the results of its operations, Parliament adopted, by 547 votes to 84 with 6 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of observations which form an integral part of the discharge decision.

General comments

Members recalled that SESAR 1 programme was formally closed in 2016 and that the last corrective reimbursements to beneficiaries for the excess in cash contributions received for the Seventh Framework Programme projects were completed in 2020.

Budgetary and financial management

In 2020, the total available budget (including re-entered unused appropriations of previous years, assigned revenues and reallocations to the next year) was EUR 163 189 459 for commitment appropriations and EUR 179 159 495 for payment appropriations. The respective implementation rate of the overall available budget for 2020 was 86.9 % for commitment appropriations and 67.7 % for payment appropriations.

Following the closure of SESAR 1, the Joint Undertaking determined an excess of financial contributions received from its Members amounting to EUR 30 959 396. However, the Joint Undertaking's members can only expect the reimbursement of their respective excess contributions at the dissolution of the Joint Undertaking by 31 December 2024.

SESAR 2020 final commitment appropriations amounted to EUR 162 784 059 and final payment appropriation to EUR 147 986 997. Regarding the Joint Undertaking’s 2020 budget available for Horizon 2020 projects, the implementation rates for commitment and payment appropriations were 87.1 % and 81.9 % respectively.

Parliament reiterated its call to harmonise the procedures regarding the calculation for the in-kind contributions.

Other observations

The resolution also contains a series of observations on performance, procurement and recruitment procedures and internal controls.

In particular, it noted the following:

- the key performance indicators (KPIs) on gender balance increased in comparison to previous years but nevertheless remained low, with only 24 % of women participants in Horizon 2020 projects;

- the Joint Undertaking achieved all its objectives as outlined in the Single Programming Document for 2020-2022 and implemented budgetary measures that mitigated the adverse effect of the COVID-19 crisis on the aviation sector, such as increasing pre-financing rates applicable to grant agreements signed in 2020 to support the cash flow of beneficiaries;

- there was an exceptional 50 % reduction in the amount of cash contributions to the Joint Undertaking's running costs received from members other than the Union and Eurocontrol, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that that reduction was compensated for by a reduction in the Joint Undertaking's running costs for 2020 of EUR 2.3 million (21 %);

- 67 projects were launched across its three strands of research in 2020, namely exploratory research (41 projects), industrial research and validation (15 projects) and very large-scale demonstrations (11 projects);

- completed a significant body of work related to U-space, the Commission's initiative for the safe and secure integration of drones;

- at 31 December 2020, the Joint Undertaking employed 39 temporary agents including the Executive Director;

- the Joint Undertaking implemented the Commission's internal control framework (ICF), which is based on 17 internal control principles, in 2020;

- persistent systemic errors were detected in the personnel costs declared by beneficiaries, in particular on the part of SMEs and new beneficiaries.