2021 discharge: Agency for Support for BEREC (BEREC Office)

2022/2093(DEC) - 10/05/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the Director of the Agency for Support for BEREC (BEREC Office) in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for the 2021 financial year and to approve the closure of the Joint Undertaking's accounts for the same financial year.

Noting that the Court of Auditors stated that it had obtained reasonable assurance that the Office's annual accounts for the financial year 2021 were reliable and that the underlying transactions were legal and regular, Parliament adopted, by 547 votes to 57 with 17 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 2021 was EUR 7 341 357, representing an increase of 1.49 % compared to 2020, which mainly represents an increase in staff expenditure.

Budgetary and financial management

Budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2021 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99.97 % for the commitment appropriations of the final adopted budget for the year, representing an increase of 0.89 % compared to 2020. The budget implementation rate is the highest one of the last five years and is within the threshold of above 95 % established by the management board. Payment appropriations execution rate was 69.33 %, representing an increase of 8.19 % compared to 2020 but below the rates in 2017 and 2019 due to carry-overs related to the launch of a high number of specific projects that were intended to be finalised in 2022.

Parliament noted that the Court found, for the financial year 2019, that a procurement procedure for legal services was irregular and as a result the subsequent payments made based on this framework contract are irregular, and that in 2021, the associated payments amounted to EUR 4 444.

Other observations

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

In particular, it noted that:

- the Agency delivered two studies for BEREC in 2021, namely, the ‘Study on consumer behaviour toward digital platforms as means of communication’ and the ‘Study on post-COVID measures to close the digital divide’, and part of one on reducing the environmental footprint of the BEREC and Agency, with its final report due in 2022, for which three specific contracts were signed in 2021;

- on 31 December 2021, the establishment plan was 93.75 % implemented, with 15 temporary agents appointed out of 16 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (the same number of authorised posts as in 2020). Measures should be taken to achieve gender balance as soon as possible;

- the Agency should improve its internal recruitment procedure to clarify evaluation processes and vacancy notices;

- more systematic rules on transparency, incompatibilities, conflict of interests, illegal lobbying and revolving doors should be put in place. The Agency should also strengthen its internal control mechanisms, including the setting up of an internal anticorruption mechanism;

- in 2021 a project of workshops to define a strategic roadmap for the future digital workplace projects on technologies and way of working, and a data protection impact assessment and IT security plan for Microsoft Office services and possible cloud migration strategies. Moreover, the Agency is asked to speed up the development of the cybersecurity policy.