

2022 discharge: European Union Agency for Railways (ERA)

2023/2160(DEC) - 11/04/2024 - 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 2022 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 2022 were reliable and that the underlying transactions were legal and regular, Parliament adopted, by 527 votes to 63 with 9 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 2022 was **EUR 34 814 691**, representing an increase of 9.38 % compared to 2021.

Budgetary and financial management

Budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2022 resulted in a budget implementation rate of current year appropriations of 99.95 %, representing a slight increase of 0.13 % compared to 2021. Payment appropriations execution rate was 94.97 %, representing an increase of 1.43 % compared to 2021. The budget outturn in 2022 was EUR 81 821, up from EUR 69 638 in 2021.

The main impact on the budget implementation in 2022 was due to global external factors such as the volatile geopolitical context and the energy crisis, which led to high volatility resulting in unpredictable increase of the Agency's costs. The Agency has, however, implemented strong measures to control its expenditure and has adjusted the fees and charges level (i.e. hourly rate increased and regularly adjusted according to inflation rate) and has put in place a regular monitoring process of the budget execution with several planning and monitoring tools to automatise that process.

Parliament noted the non-respect by the Agency of the time limit foreseen in the Financial Regulation regarding payments, with 12.2 % of payments being late by more than 30 days in 2022.

Other observations

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

In particular, it noted that:

- the Agency reported a 81.13 % achievement of its 2022 annual work programme, compared to 76.41 % in 2021, a welcomed increase for a second year in a row. The Agency adopted a new structure of its work programme, moving from an activity-based work programme to a strategic statement-based one and launched a new platform for monthly reporting of all projects and services and a new monitoring dashboard;

- the implementation of enhanced controls for verifying the SMEs status for Single Safety Certificates and Vehicle Authorizations applications was welcomed;
- the illegal and unjustified Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has showcased the crucial role railways can play. The Agency contributed to EU cooperation with Ukraine on resilience and development of rail links, it supported Ukraine and the people around the world by finding additional ways to increase the volume of transport of Ukrainian food products by rail;
- the Agency has achieved a very high degree of digitalisation to increase its efficiency, eliminating paper-processes and bringing forward online solutions such as e-procurement, e-invoicing, electronic travel booking, including through the roll out in 2022 of the HR management system (SYSPER) of the Commission and the migration, in pilot phase, to the new budgetary, accounting and financial system, SUMMA;
- on 31 December 2022, the establishment plan was 97.40 % executed, with 150 temporary agents appointed out of 154 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared to 151 authorised posts in 2021);
- the Agency carried out 2 open calls for tenders, 3 negotiated procedures and one reopening of competition in 2022 and 2 open calls for tenders and 3 negotiated procedures financed by administrative appropriations;
- there are some shortcomings in the Agency's management and control systems, namely a lack of a policy for classifying and protecting sensitive information and the use of non-valid approval methods, other than physical or qualified electronic signatures, in the area of procurement procedures.