

2022 discharge: European Joint Undertaking for ITER and the Development of Fusion Energy (Fusion for Energy)

2023/2178(DEC) - 11/04/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament to **grant discharge** to the Director of the European Joint Undertaking for ITER and the Development of Fusion Energy (Fusion for Energy) for the financial year 2022 and to approve the closure of the Joint Undertaking's accounts for that year.

Noting that the Court of Auditors found that the Joint Undertaking's annual accounts for the financial year 2022 present fairly the financial situation of the Joint Undertaking on 31 December 2022, as well as the results of its operations, Parliament adopted, by 555 votes to 24 with 18 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of observations which form an integral part of the discharge decision.

General

The Commission's current estimate regarding the total Euratom budget needed for Joint Undertaking to finance the European part of the implementation of the ITER project and the associated activities up to 2035, amounts to EUR 15 billion (in current values); the ITER host state (France) and the Euratom Member States are to contribute an additional EUR 3.2 billion (in current values).

The Court draws attention to the fact that the Joint Undertaking disclosed in the 2022 annual accounts its estimate of the total cost for completing its delivery obligations for the ITER project (estimate at completion), assessed at **EUR 19.1 billion** (in 2022 values), consisting of the total payments made up to the end of 2022, amounting to EUR 9.2 billion and the estimate of the future payments, assessed at EUR 9.9 billion (in 2022 values). The 2022 estimate at completion is still based on 2016 milestone and cost assumptions and that these estimates will be subject to significant revision, once the new ITER project baseline and requirements are finalised, approved by the ITER Council, and formally communicated to the Joint Undertaking.

Parliament acknowledged that, during 2022, the Joint Undertaking experienced strong inflationary effects, initially due to COVID-19 induced supply chain issues and then (after February 2022) due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. It is worried that the estimated impact of these on the Joint Undertaking's total estimate at completion amounts to **EUR 144 million** (2008 values) per the latest assessment. In addition, this estimate at completion increase is expected to materialise as additional expenditure in the years 2023-2026.

Members also noted with concern that **Russia** is a member of the ITER International Fusion Energy Organisation (ITER-IO), with the obligations to deliver several components for the ITER project to the ITER assembly site in France (Cadarache) and to provide annual contributions to the ITER-IO. This situation presents a high risk of delays and higher costs for the ITER project. Members insisted on the need to develop solutions in order to mitigate these risks appropriately. Any decision taken should safeguard Union's strategic interests and policy priorities.

Budgetary and financial management

Parliament noted that for the Multiannual Financial Framework period 2021-2027, the European Council has agreed a budget for the Euratom contribution to ITER amounting to a total value of **EUR 5 614**

million (in current values) of which EUR 5 560 million (in current values) of direct contribution to the project. The ITER Host State and Membership contributions will be added to this figure.

The final available appropriations, including the carry-over from the previous year amount to **EUR 981.18 million** in commitment appropriations (compared to EUR 1 069.9 million in 2021) and EUR 844.02 million in payment appropriations (compared to EUR 764.8 million in 2021).

The execution rate of the Joint Undertaking's final available budget stood at 72 % in commitments and 91 % in payments (compared to 99.7 % and 97.4 % respectively in 2021). The low implementation rates resulted from the slowdown of operational activities at the level of both the ITER-IO and the Joint Undertaking, mainly due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and recent technical design issues concerning the current assembly phase of the ITER project.

At the end of 2022, for Title 2 - Infrastructure and Operating Expenditure, the implementation rate was 63 % when considering the new 2022 administrative payment budget only, and 69 % when also considering the unused administrative payment budget of previous years reactivated in 2022 for implementation, and the cancellation rate of commitment carried over from the previous year was high with an average of 20 %.

Other observations

The resolution also contains a series of observations on staff, prevention of fraud and conflict of interest and the management and controls systems.

In particular, it noted the following:

- from 31 December 2022, the occupied staff posts at the Joint Undertaking included 46 officials, 224 temporary agents and 164 contract agents;
- the Joint Undertaking has slightly improved the gender imbalance (38 % were female and 62 % male). The Joint Undertaking continues to improve gender imbalance and strives for a balanced geographical balance in this respect;
- the implementation of the actions in the anti-fraud action plan has been systematically followed up using a dedicated database (RAPID); the anti-fraud and ethics officer provided information and support on fraud prevention matters to staff involved in procurement, contracts management, finance, and human resources management;
- the Joint Undertaking's contract management has weaknesses that have seriously affected the achievement of contract's objectives and – if not addressed - may also affect other operational activities of Joint Undertaking;
- as regards the contract signed in 2013 amounting to EUR 500 million for the design, equipment, and installation of the ITER nuclear and non-nuclear buildings; the Joint Undertaking's director settled with the contractor only the first cost claim for an amount of EUR 75 million, and the contractor opened a dispute for the unsettled second cost claim;
- the Joint Undertaking continues to implement a recognised, mature and well-functioning internal control system.