

2022 discharge: Single European Sky ATM Research 3 Joint Undertaking (SESAR 3 JU)

2023/2181(DEC) - 11/04/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to Executive Director of the Single European Sky ATM Research 3 Joint Undertaking for the financial year 2022 in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Joint Undertaking for the financial year 2022 and approve the closure of the Joint Undertaking's accounts.

The European Parliament adopted, by 523 votes to 47 with 23 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of observations which form an integral part of the discharge decision.

General observations

The Digital European Sky programme commenced in 2022 with the approval of the multiannual work programme and the first biannual work programme, and the launch of the first two calls within the framework of Horizon Europe for exploratory and industrial research and fast-track to innovation and market uptake. Members noted that of the 127 project proposals received, 48 have been selected, representing a total investment of EUR 350 million.

Parliament welcomed the contribution of the Joint Undertaking to react to the illegal and unjustified Russian war of aggression against Ukraine as some traffic flows were affected, necessitating the adaptation of air traffic control (ATC) operations of the Joint Undertaking, which led to an increased need for air traffic controllers. It also noted that the activities developed are an important contribution to the European Commission's strategic priorities and initiatives, namely the single European sky, the European Green Deal and a Europe fit for the digital age.

Budgetary and financial management

Parliament noted that, for 2022, the available budget was **EUR 146.9 million** in payment appropriations (EUR 69.9 million in 2021) and **EUR 158.8 million** in commitment appropriations (EUR 34.8 million in 2021).

Concerning the implementation of Horizon 2020, that, at the end of 2022, the Joint Undertaking had fully committed the maximum EU operational contribution of EUR 555.8 million for signed grant agreements and contracts under the programme and that of this committed amount, around EUR 65.7 million (or 11.8 %) remains to be paid in the coming years for projects and contracts yet to be completed.

Parliament also noted that the private members had legally committed to provide their entire in-kind contributions of EUR 280 million, defined as target in the industry membership agreement and that of this amount, industry members reported EUR 278.5 million (or 99.5 %) at the end of 2022. Moreover, Eurocontrol had fully committed the target of EUR 467 million of operational contributions, defined in the bilateral agreement and that of this amount, it reported EUR 313.6 million (or 67 % of the target) at the end of 2022.

The Horizon Europe appropriations for 2022 were fully implemented for the first two calls launched in April 2022.

Parliament welcomed the fact that the Joint Undertaking continued to manage 71 projects in exploratory, industrial and validation research, with 300 different beneficiaries, of which nearly 20 % are SMEs, 17 % are higher education institutions and 9 % are research organisations. It underlined the importance of the Joint Undertaking in achieving the Digital European Sky, resulting in 48 selected projects, including the launch of five Digital Sky Demonstrators, with a total investment of EUR 350 million.

Other observations

The resolution also contains a series of observations on the management and controls systems, procurement and staff.

In particular, it noted the following:

- for Horizon 2020 expenditure (clearings and final payments), the Joint Undertaking reported a representative error rate of 2.4 % and a residual error rate of 1.8 %; the Court did not find serious quantifiable errors at the Joint Undertaking beneficiaries sampled;
- the Court considered that half of the Joint Undertakings, including SESAR 3, lacked a structured risk-based approach to ex-ante controls for Horizon 2020 grants;
- the Joint Undertaking did not assess risk at project level;
- the Joint Undertaking should address weaknesses in the use of the reinforced monitoring tool; it should ensure that all reinforced monitoring actions are accompanied by specific control actions targeting the identified risks, and that they are followed-up at a pre-defined deadline;
- the beneficiary or project structure of the Joint Undertaking is changing significantly under the Horizon Europe programme: the risk factors identified in previous programmes may no longer be relevant and new risk factors may emerge;
- due to its ramp-up activities, the Joint Undertaking focused on the management of its existing contracts covered by operational appropriations and on selecting the providers of specific programme management services and, as a consequence, the Joint Undertaking decided to move the indicative dates of some operational procurements to the first quarter of 2023;
- the Joint Undertaking has remained committed to maintaining a stable gender and geographical balance: by the end of 2022, 59% of its 37 employees were women and 41% men, and 15 nationalities were represented.