RESOLUTION (EU) 2020/1957 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 14 May 2020

with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) for the financial year 2018

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

— having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control for the financial year 2018,

— having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0065/2020),

A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure [1], the final budget of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (the 'Centre') for the financial year 2018 was EUR 58 030 000, representing a slight decrease of 0,02 % compared to 2017; whereas 97,82 % of the Centre's budget derives from the Union budget [2];

B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the Centre's annual accounts for the financial year 2018 (the 'Court's report'), states that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the Centre's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular;

Budget and financial management

1. Notes with satisfaction that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2018 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 98,53 %, representing a decrease of 1,25 % compared to 2017; notes that the payment appropriations execution rate was 81,21 %, representing a slight decrease of 0,50 % compared to the previous year;

Performance

2. Notes that the Centre uses several of the key performance indicators (KPIs) in its Single Programming Document 2019-2021 in order to evaluate the added value provided by its activities, and the list of KPIs contained in the Commission Staff Working Document of 2015, among others, to improve its budget management; notes that in 2018 the Centre added 7 KPIs and 12 multiannual KPIs, and that, as part of its long-term strategy 2021-2027, it was to review indicators systematically in 2019;

3. Notes that, in 2018, the Centre implemented 89 % of the key outputs indicated in its work programme (above the target of 85 %);

4. Observes that, in 2018, the Centre started the reengineering of its disease surveillance systems, the outsourcing of IT capacity, and the redesign of the Early Warning and Response System, and strengthened collaboration with its external partners and other Union agencies;

5. Welcomes the fact that the Centre continues to share best practices and regularly works with other agencies, most notably the European Food Safety Authority, the European Medicines Agency and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction; notes, furthermore, that the Centre participates in inter-institutional procurements organised by other agencies; strongly encourages the Centre to actively seek further and broader cooperation with all of the Union agencies;

6. Notes that an external evaluation for the period 2013-2017 was carried out between 2018 and 2019 and that the final report on that evaluation was expected in July 2019 and has to be forwarded to Parliament once approved by the Centre's management board; calls on the Centre to report to the discharge authority on the outcome of that external evaluation;

[1] OJ C 160, 10.5.2019, p. 6.
[2] OJ C 160, 10.5.2019, p. 7.

7. Recalls that the Centre's mission is to identify, assess and communicate on current and emerging threats to human health from communicable diseases; stresses that, in 2018, the Centre responded to 31 formal scientific requests from the Commission (of which 10 were from Members), and published a total of 214 reports, including 35 rapid risk assessments addressing disease threats; points out that its role will become ever more important in the context of climate change, as the breeding grounds for various pathogens are changing and diseases are spreading to areas which have not been affected by them before;

8. Notes that, in 2018, the management board adopted a revised independence policy for non-staff and endorsed a corresponding internal procedure;

9. Regrets, concerning the implementation of the independence policy of the Centre, that not all the required annual declarations of interest were submitted, particularly by management board members (96 %) and advisory forum members (89 %); calls, therefore, for strict adherence to the rules and internal procedures; recalls that independence and transparency are crucial, given the important tasks of the Centre; calls for a mechanism to ensure that all outstanding and future declarations of interest are submitted without delay, and calls on the Centre to consider not allowing members to take up their roles before this crucial information has been provided and checked;

10. Stresses that the Centre launched its third external evaluation, which was coordinated by a steering committee comprised of management board members, and that the result of the evaluation was expected for mid-2019;

11. Draws attention to the Centre's role in developing tools for the digitisation of healthcare in the Union, in particular in the context of tackling a pandemic;

12. Recalls that, as a Union agency, the Centre has a budget which is denominated in euro; however, since its seat is outside the Euro-zone (in Sweden), a lot of its expenses are incurred in Swedish krona (SEK); furthermore, the Centre is exposed to exchange rate fluctuations, since, not only does it have bank accounts in Swedish krona, it also carries out certain transactions in other foreign currencies;

Staff policy

13. Notes that, on 31 December 2018, the establishment plan was 96,11 % executed, with 173 temporary agents appointed out of 180 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared with 182 authorised posts in 2017); notes that, in addition, 92 contract agents and two seconded national experts worked for the Centre in 2018;

14. Notes that the Centre has reported a relatively good gender balance for 2018 with regard to senior managers (four men and two women) and its management board (12 men and 15 women);

Procurement

15. Acknowledges that the use of electronic workflows for procurement, based on the Commission's DG DIGIT application e-PRIOR, helped to complete 142 procurement procedures in 2018, and that the Centre put in place four new internal electronic workflows in other areas to ensure faster and more efficient processes;

16. Notes that, according to the Court's report, the Commission signed an interinstitutional framework contract with one contractor for the acquisition of software, licences and the provision of the related IT consultancy services in 2014, and the Centre did not systematically check the prices and uplifts the framework contractor charged against suppliers' quotes and invoices; notes that, according to the Centre's reply, in practice it was difficult for the Centre to enforce such checks, as there was no contractual obligation requiring the original price and the uplift to be presented separately; calls on the Centre to adapt *ex ante* controls under framework contracts and ensure that there is competition in all procurements;

17. Notes that, according to the Court's report, similar control weaknesses were found regarding the implementation of a framework contract for the provision of conference and multimedia equipment and services, and that the Centre did not sufficiently check whether the provision of a contractual discount rate had been applied to the product price list of the contractor's major suppliers before placing order forms in relation to that framework contract; notes that the Centre decided not to renew the contract after the expiry date in October 2019, and that that contract will be replaced by a new interinstitutional framework contract managed by the Commission; calls on the Centre to adapt *ex ante* controls on order forms;

18. Notes that, according to the Court's report, for two payments for meeting events, weaknesses were found in the structure and documentation of checks and reconciliations on order forms, deliverables and invoices; notes that, according to the Centre's reply, no errors were found in the two audited payments, and that the Centre will review the structure and the documentation of checks and reconciliations in place concerning meetings;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interest, and transparency

19. Notes, in light of observations and comments from the discharge authority related to the absence of some declarations of interest and CVs of the management board and of the advisory forum, that all members/alternates who physically attended meetings of the management board and the advisory forum, and/or exercised the right to vote, have submitted a declaration of interest; notes that further improvements were made in 2018 in the independence policy for staff and non-staff including external experts; notes that the Centre publishes the CVs of management board members, senior management staff and external experts;

20. Notes the Centre's existing measures and ongoing efforts to secure transparency, prevent and manage conflicts of interest, and provide whistleblower protection; notes that 10 relevant potential conflicts of interest were identified and further investigated in 2018, 5 of which were identified as arising in relation to an agenda point of a meeting and that the persons concerned were asked to abstain from discussing and voting on that agenda point; notes that the Centre registered meetings with lobbyists;

Internal controls

21. Notes that, in light of last year's observations and comments from the discharge authority, two of the three actions in the action plan to reduce the number of overrides of controls and deviations from processes and procedures have been implemented, and that for the remaining action, regarding open-access fees for publication of articles in non-Union countries, a permanent solution is being looked into;

22. Notes that, in light of last year's comments and observations from the discharge authority, draft procedures and templates have been prepared regarding meetings with the pharmaceutical industry and the conclusion of memoranda of understanding and collaboration agreements with third parties have been adopted, and furthermore, that an internal procedure on meetings with commercial organisations is currently in the process of being formally adopted internally;

Other comments

23. Notes that the Centre moved to its new premises in April 2018, which provide staff and visiting stakeholders with a safe, environmentally friendly and cost-effective workspace, and represented a smooth transition that went according to schedule;

24. Calls on the Centre to focus on disseminating the results of its research to the public, and to reach out to the public via the social media and other media outlets;

25. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 14 May 2020 ([3]) on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

([3]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0121.