RESOLUTION (EU) 2020/1860 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 Environment Agency (EEA) 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 Environment Agency 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 (A9-0064/2020),

A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure ([1]), the final budget of the European Environmental Agency (the 'Agency') for the financial year 2018 was EUR 65 800 176,52, representing a decrease of 6,57 % compared to 2017; whereas the Agency's budget derives mainly from the Union budget (65,45 %) and the contributions under specific agreements, namely the Copernicus and European Human Biomonitoring Programmes (34,55 %) ([2]);

B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the annual accounts of the Agency for the financial year 2018 (the 'Court's report'), has stated that it has obtained reasonable assurances that the Agency'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 99,96 %, representing a slight decrease of 0,01 % compared to 2017; notes that the payment appropriations execution rate was 91,06 %, representing an increase of 2,03 % compared to the previous year;

Performance

2. Welcomes the fact that, according to the Agency, substantial progress was made in the sharing of resources on overlapping tasks among other agencies with similar activities; also notes that the Agency shared efforts with other science-based agencies, including the European Chemicals Agency and the European Food Safety Authority, on issues related to human health; welcomes the fact that there is a growing interest in the Agency's information and data; is of the opinion that dissemination of environmental information is of key importance in light of the new Commission's policies and the dangers of climate change;

3. Notes that the Agency achieved its 2018 objectives as referred to in the Agency's Annual Work Programme and provided European decision-makers and citizens with access to timely and relevant information: the Agency's website gained 500 000 users (+ 17 %) in 2018 to reach a total of 3,45 million users, registering 10,7 million page views (+ 15 %);

([1]) OJ C 416, 15.11.2018, p. 1.
([2]) OJ C 416, 15.11.2018, p. 3.

4. Encourages the Agency to pursue the digitalisation of its services;

5. Recalls that the Agency provides sound and independent information on the environment; commends the quality of the output of the Agency in 2018, such as its reports on air quality in Europe, on mercury in Europe's environment and on the circular economy; underlines the fact that it is still difficult to obtain clear and reliable information on some sectors of the Union's economy, which prevents the Agency from undertaking a fully comprehensive analysis of the state of the Union's environment;

6. Notes the key role of the Agency in delivering quality data on the state of our environment, which becomes increasingly important in light of the huge challenge that the Union faces in tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis, and its role in finding answers through the European Green Deal; welcomes the fact that the Agency's opinion is being heard through the institutions and recommends that the scientific committee of the Agency play a key role in advising the Commission;

7. Encourages the Agency to work together with the other relevant agencies of the Union in order to better assess environmental impacts of human activity;

8. Recalls that the Agency started, in 2018, its work on Energy Union Governance and streamlining of environmental reporting;

9. Regrets that some activities could not be fully delivered in 2018 due to a number of circumstances, including limited IT and staff resources; notes with concern that the management board stressed that the Agency's capacity to further respond adequately to policy developments will depend on an increase in allocated core resources or the further prioritisation and/or discontinuation of current core tasks;

10. Notes the conclusions of the evaluation of the Agency and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) carried out by the Commission;

11. Stresses that the aims of the Agency are pan-European and for this reason it is necessary for it to cooperate closely with third countries located in Europe.

12. Notes that the outcome of the internal review of the functioning of the management board and bureau carried out in 2018 will be implemented in 2019; calls on the Agency to report to the discharge authority on the measures taken in this regard;

Staff policy

13. Notes that, on 31 December 2018, the establishment plan was 98,39 % executed, with 3 officials and 119 temporary agents appointed out of 124 posts authorised under the Union budget (compared with 127 authorised posts in 2017); notes that, in addition, 63 contract agents and 19 seconded national experts were working for the Agency in 2018;

14. Notes the uneven gender balance reported for 2018 with regard to senior managers (seven men and two women), but the good balance achieved within the management Board (15 men and 17 women);

15. Notes with concern from the Court's report that the Agency does not have an up-to-date policy covering sensitive posts; notes from the Agency's reply that the Agency has carried out an inventory of its sensitive posts since 2009, which is currently under review to reflect the changes resulting from the Agency's reorganisation in September 2018; calls on the Agency to adopt and implement that sensitive posts policy without delay;

16. Supports the suggestion of the Court to publish vacancy notices also on the website of the European Personnel Selection Office in order to increase publicity; understands the issue raised in the Agency's reply concerning the translation costs triggered by such publication; notes that the Agency publishes vacancy notices on the EU Agencies Network's website and on social media to increase publicity;

Procurement

17. Deplores the fact that, following the termination of a EUR 1,4 million contract due to a contractor's unsatisfactory performance, the Agency signed, a few months later, a new EUR 2 million contract 'in cascade' for the same type of service with the same contractor, without inserting in the technical specifications elements to neutralise the risk of similar problems arising again under the new contract; is of the opinion that such contracting behaviour raises serious concerns as to the Agency's sound financial management; calls on the Agency to award contracts only if satisfactory performance can be expected; and asks the Agency to report back to the Court and the discharge authority on the performance of the contractor;

18. Notes with concern from the Court's report that for the provision of Copernicus local land monitoring services, the Agency concluded a contract for services for an amount above the ceiling of the governing framework contract, but did not formalise it through a contract amendment; notes from the Agency's reply that it considers that the increase of the budget ceiling was made in accordance with the guidance from the Commission; nevertheless calls on the Agency to formalise contract modifications only in line with public procurement provisions;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interests and transparency

19. Acknowledges the Agency's existing measures and ongoing efforts to secure transparency, prevent and manage conflicts of interests, and provide whistleblower protection; raises concerns that the Agency has not put in place a system for declarations of conflict of interest for in house experts;

20. Stresses that the publication of CVs and declarations of interest of management board members should be obligatory;

Other comments

21. Notes the Agency's efforts to provide a cost-effective and environmentally friendly working place and to preferably reduce and offset its CO_2 emissions in the areas of premises and travel;

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

23. 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.