RESOLUTION (EU) 2020/1909 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 Training Foundation (ETF) 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 Training Foundation 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 Employment and Social Affairs,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0047/2020),

A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure [1], the final budget of the European Training Foundation (the 'Foundation') for the financial year 2018 was EUR 20 144 018, representing almost the same amount as in 2017 (with a very slight decrease); whereas the budget of the Foundation derives entirely from the Union budget [2];

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

Budget and financial management

1. Notes with satisfaction that budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2018 resulted in a high budget implementation rate of 99,99 %, representing a slight increase of 0,06 % compared to 2017; notes that the payment appropriations execution rate was 98,07 %, representing an increase of 0,10 % compared to 2017;

Performance

2. Notes that the Foundation uses certain key performance indicators (KPIs) in addition to other productivity and quality indicators to assess the added value provided by its activities and to improve its budget management;

3. Notes that the Foundation achieved a 91 % activity completion rate of which 94 % were completed on time; notes that for 14 out of the 15 KPIs, the Foundation was above the target;

4. Welcomes the Foundation's agreements and annual action plans on cooperation in areas of policy overlap with the European Foundation for the Improvements of Living and Working Conditions and with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training; appreciates the fact that the Foundation became the leader of the inter-Agency contract for the provision of benchmarked staff engagement surveys; commends this practice as an example worth following; strongly encourages the Foundation to actively seek further and broader cooperation with all of the Union agencies;

5. Notes that the Foundation has been involved in the identification, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Union external programmes in skills and human capital development and employment; appreciates the fact that the Foundation is the only Union agency with a mandate to work outside the Union in supporting the Union's external action in the area of education, vocational training, skills and labour market systems and human capital development in the Union's partner countries to improve the employability and employment prospects of their citizens;

[1] OJ C 120, 29.3.2019, p. 182.
[2] OJ C 120, 29.3.2019, p. 183.

6. Welcomes the work of the Foundation with the Union's neighbouring countries, candidate countries and Central Asian countries and its contribution to the Union's Pan-African policies and programmes with a view to promoting employability and socioeconomic inclusion and strongly supports the Foundation's objective to improve its Vocational and Educational Training (VET) policy-making globally;

7. Encourages the Foundation's work in the area of digital skills and competences, and in supporting countries to improve their qualifications and qualifications systems to modernise VET for lifelong learning, employability and future competitiveness of those regions and countries; acknowledges that 86 % of the countries where the Foundation has been active showed progress in the areas of qualifications, governance, employability, VET provision, entrepreneurial learning, and policy analysis;

8. Reiterates that lifelong learning has been identified in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the European Consensus on Development, and the ILO's Global Report on the future of work, as being essential to sustainable growth and an inclusive stable society and recommends that it should remain central to the Foundation's work;

9. Notes with regret from the Court's report that there was no evidence that the procurement procedure through which five interim workers worked for the Foundation led to the award of the best value for money contract; endorses the Court's observation in this regard that the Foundation should use award criteria which focus on competitive price elements;

10. Welcomes the fact that the Foundation implemented actions which led to the formal closure of all recommendations issued by the Commission's Internal Audit Service from the 2017 audit of progress monitoring in VET and that the rate of implementation of internal audits recommendations is 100 % for a third year in a row;

11. Highlights the fact that transparency and citizens' awareness of the existence of the agencies are essential for their democratic accountability; considers that usability and ease of use of agency resources and data are of paramount importance; calls therefore for an assessment of how data and resources are currently presented and made available and of the degree to which citizens find them easy to identify, recognise and use; observes that public awareness in this respect can be raised by Member States through developing a comprehensive plan to reach out to more Union citizens;

Staff policy

12. Notes that, on 31 December 2018, the establishment plan was 98,84 % executed, with 85 temporary agents appointed out of 86 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared to 88 authorised posts in 2017); notes that, in addition, 39 contract agents and 1 seconded national expert worked for the Foundation in 2018;

13. Notes that further efforts are needed to achieve a better gender balance among senior managers (3 men and 1 woman); notes with satisfaction, however, that gender balance has been achieved on the management board (14 men and 14 women);

14. Notes that the Foundation has several anti-harassment measures in place and that all newcomers attend an information session presented by counsellors, whose tasks are performed in confidence;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interests and transparency

15. Notes the Foundation's existing measures on and ongoing efforts to secure transparency, the prevention and management of conflicts of interests, and the protection of whistleblowers;

16. Notes that the Foundation developed its own anti-fraud strategy, on the basis of methodology developed by OLAF, and has implemented it since 2014;

Internal controls

17. Notes that 2018 was the first full year of implementation of the Foundation's 17 Internal Control Principles, following their adoption by the governing board in November 2017 and that in January 2018 the Foundation developed a methodology and set of indicators to support and strengthen the regular monitoring and annual assessment of internal controls; calls on the Foundation to report to the discharge authority on the measures taken in order to improve the situation;

18. Notes that, according to the Court's report, an external evaluation of the Union agencies under the remit of Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (the Foundation, EU-OSHA, Eurofound and Cedefop) was carried out in 2018 on behalf of the Commission with regard to their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and Union value added; calls on the Foundation to report to the discharge authority on that evaluation;

19. Calls on the Foundation 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;

20. Encourages the Foundation to make further use of innovative digital solutions, including e-procurement;

21. 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.