



2024/2286

10.10.2024

RESOLUTION (EU) 2024/2286 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 11 April 2024

with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Environment Agency for the financial year 2022

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 2022,
- 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 (A9-0130/2024),
- 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 2022 was EUR 88 173 021, representing an increase of 35,93 % compared to 2021; whereas the Agency's budget derives from the Union budget and the EFTA contribution (63,32 %) and contributions under specific agreements (36,67 %);
- B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the annual accounts of the Agency for the financial year 2022 (the 'Court's report'), states that it has obtained reasonable assurance that the Agency's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular;
- C. whereas with regard to the Agency's procurement sector, no issues requiring corrective actions were reported for 2022, nor are there ongoing or outstanding corrective actions from previous years' audits and assessments;

Budget and financial management

1. Notes with appreciation that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2022 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 100 % of the current year commitment appropriations, the same as 2021; notes that the current year payment appropriations execution rate was 86,66 %, representing an increase of 1,75 % compared to 2021;
2. Notes that the Court concluded in its report in 2021 that the use of a negotiated procedure without prior publication to amend a framework contract by doubling the initial budget to EUR 1 million was irregular and as a result, all subsequent payments made in connection with this procedure are irregular; notes furthermore that the contract expired in December 2022 and the associated 2022 payments amounted to EUR 470 660; notes that the current status of the Court's observation on this is already closed;

Performance

3. Notes that the Agency's performance framework is structured around five performance objectives monitored by 17 multiannual key performance indicators (KPIs) which include, inter alia, staff occupancy rate, budget execution and delivery of the annual work programme; observes that the delivery rate of the annual work programme as regards key reports and assessment achieved 95 % and 96 %, respectively, as regards updated core set indicators, both above the target established at 90 %; takes note of the indicators that have not yet been achieved or are lagging behind;
4. Welcomes that in 2022, the Agency continued to play a key role in informing actions to support the environment, responding to the objectives of the European Green Deal and the 8th Environment Action Programme ('8th EAP'), as well as to Europe's overall ambitions and global commitments; welcomes that the Agency continued to deliver on agreed actions and tasks, and took on new ones in support of the green transition and the implementation of the European Climate Law, while linking actions to the EU adaptation strategy; notes furthermore that it was the second year of the implementation of the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) Strategy 2021-2030, which aims to give Union policy makers and the public the best available knowledge to reach the targets on environment and sustainability;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 38, 31.1.2023, p. 6.

5. Observes that in 2022, amid heat waves, droughts and forest fires affecting large parts of Europe as well as with the continent experiencing the hottest summer on record, the Agency was mentioned in 27 000 online articles, and several staff members were interviewed by media outlets across Europe as result of significant media interest, with a focus on the causes and consequences of extreme weather;
6. Recalls that, in 2022, the Agency undertook new tasks in support of the green transition and the implementation of the European Climate Law, such as the launch of the European Scientific Advisory Board for Climate Change, while linking actions to the EU adaptation strategy, growing the Agency's role in supporting the delivery of Europe's climate targets; appreciates the Agency's support of members of Parliament's committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) with science based, up-to-date data and information;
7. Welcomes the establishment in 2022 of the new European Topic Centre on Biodiversity and Ecosystems for the period 2023-2026;

Efficiency and gains

8. Recalls that in line with the approach in recent years, in 2022, the Agency continued to pursue efficiency gains through sharing services with the Commission, other Union agencies, and the EU Agencies Network (EUAN) — Shared Support Office in Brussels; notes that following that practice, the Agency pursued joint procurement with the Commission services and EUAN, either by procuring and leading on framework contracts that are also used by the Commission and other Union agencies or by using framework contracts led by others;
9. Notes that the Agency also uses a variety of Commission services (e.g. payroll, IT security) and systems (e.g. ABAC, Sysper, Ares, e-Prior) in line with efficiency gains linked to increased use of electronic tools to support administration processes, including in procurement, finance and human resources; also notes that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the Agency has been using online recruitment, supported by the implementation of a recruitment platform (Systal), which allowed the Agency to complete a large number of recruitment procedures in both 2021 and 2022, giving a low vacancy rate at the year end;
10. Notes, furthermore, that the Agency's continued move to activity-based working has contributed to efficiency gains in the dynamic and flexible use of the refurbished office space, in addition to the extended possibility of teleworking for the Agency's staff; notes also with satisfaction that the Agency has gone 'mobile only', which in turn has produced considerable savings in telephone costs;
11. Recalls the importance of increasing the digitalisation of the Agency in terms of internal operation and management but also in order to speed up the digitalisation of procedures; stresses the need for the Agency to continue to be proactive in that regard in order to avoid a digital gap between Union agencies; draws attention, however, on the need to take all the necessary security measures to avoid any risk to the online security of the information processed; insists on the need to step up action against cyberattacks or infiltration attempts particularly those originating from Russia or China;
12. Invites the Agency to continue promoting cooperation with other Union agencies and international organisations, and fostering dialogue with stakeholders and citizens;

Staff policy

13. Notes that, on 31 December 2022, the establishment plan was 97,33 % implemented, with three permanent officials and 143 temporary agents appointed out of 150 posts authorised under the Union budget (compared to 140 authorised posts in 2021); notes that, in addition, 84 contract agents and 13 seconded national experts worked for the Agency in 2022; notes that from 2021 to 2023, the establishment plan authorised under the Union budget has increased by 25 temporary agents and 14 contract agents to address new tasks arising from the Scientific Advisory Board for Climate Change, LULUCF, Seveso and nature restoration legislation;
14. Regrets the lack of gender balance among the Agency's senior management members, with six out of nine (67 %) being men; notes with satisfaction the gender balance within the Agency's management board, with 18 out of 36 (50 %) being men; notes the gender balance within the Agency's overall staff, with 118 out of 221 (53 %) being women; asks the Agency to ensure gender balance at the senior management level in the future; notes that the Agency has not adopted the 'Charter on diversity and inclusion' and encourages the Agency to adopt it and actively participate in initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace;

15. Raises concerns about the geographical balance within the Agency's senior and middle management having no managerial staff from central and eastern Europe; insists that improvements have to be made; asks the Agency to report back on this to the discharge authority;
16. Welcomes that the Agency has a wellbeing coordinator and has carried out extensive work on awareness raising and setting up processes for staff returning from long term absence and, in case needed, staff are offered professional assistance via the medical advisor;
17. Observes that to reduce the risk of burnout, the Agency has introduced a stress monitoring app (called 'Howdy') with their health provider; takes note that staff are signed up to the app and asked a series of questions on a regular basis to monitor their stress levels and if there is an increase in this level, they are contacted by a medical psychologist to discuss the outcome; notes that there is the option for staff to consult, for up to three visits, with a psychologist at the Agency's medical provider to work through issues; highlights that all this is handled anonymously with only statistics fed back to the Agency;
18. Notes that the Agency has a policy on protecting the dignity of the person and preventing psychological and sexual harassment, and that the Agency is part of the interagency task force of confidential counsellors; looks forward to receiving their report and recommendations; notes that there were no cases of harassment reported in 2022 and encourages the Agency to continue and develop the work to prevent cases in the future as well;
19. Notes with concern that despite the multi-year nature of the Agency's tasks, an imbalance exists concerning the numbers of permanent versus contractual posts, as well as operational staff versus support staff, leading to a constant need for reskilling as well an overload of administrative work for scientists; calls on the Agency to review its staffing policy; considers that taking into account the substantial increase of workload, and in order to properly perform the tasks on the Union's goals for, inter alia, climate neutrality, circular economy and nature restoration, the Agency's staff number should continue to substantially grow in the years to come;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interest and transparency

20. Recalls that senior management members and management board members should provide a declaration of interest which is to be published on the Agency website; notes that senior management members should, as part of the career development dialogue, update the awareness of conflict of interest based on a self declaration (as part of the self-assessment), where the senior management member, as a member of staff, should state whether any new engagements or activities have been, or are to be, undertaken that could give rise to a potential conflict of interest; observes that when finalising the career development plan, the line manager responsible should specify his or her own assessment of the question of conflict of interest.; notes that there were no cases of conflict of interest identified in 2022;
21. Notes that the Agency continues to keep track of submitted CVs and declarations of interests for management board members and senior managers and they are published in its website;
22. Notes that according to the follow up 2021 discharge observations, the Agency is in the process of reviewing its policy on the prevention and management of conflict of interest to assess its fitness and relevance following a risk-based approach; notes that in doing so, the Agency will consider its internal control and anticorruption mechanisms and make adjustments to any gap which it may identify; calls on the Agency to report back to the discharge authority on the result of the above mentioned assessment;
23. Acknowledges the achieved visibility of the Agency; is of the opinion that there is still a room for greater visibility in the media, internet, and social media in order to make its work and the dangers to our environment known to the citizens;

Internal control

24. Takes note that in 2022, the Agency continued to work on the structural changes in its ways of working launched in 2021; notes that once changes are fully in place, full attention will be given to updating the documentation of procedures, which will remedy the weaknesses identified in the Agency's internal control framework; notes that the Agency's risk management approach is partially compliant, as it identifies and analyses risks across the organisation, but the systematic identification, assessment, and follow-up of risks at the project group level have been limited;

25. Observes that the control activities to mitigate risks are also partially compliant, as, due to structural changes in 2022, they are outdated; notes that the European Topic Centre policy and the policy for grants are also outdated given the change in the verification structure that was put in place in 2022; with regard to business continuity plans, they are in place and have been effectively used during crises, but their measures are scattered across various documents and have not been updated to reflect new ways of working; calls on the Agency to report back to the discharge authority on the measures taken to update the documentation of procedures;

Other comments

26. Welcomes that in September 2022, the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) registration for the Agency was successfully extended by a competent body for another year; notes with satisfaction from the Court's report that the Agency is among the agencies that issue an annual environmental statement;
27. Commends the Agency for its ongoing efforts towards public visibility and online presence in 2022, such as the development of an interactive digital corporate publication 'EEA 2021: the year in brief' to explain what the Agency is and does, and the ongoing multiannual web project which delivered key elements in 2022, amongst which, a user-centric navigation logic and updated content across the key knowledge areas based on intense user analysis;
28. Commends the Agency for taking part in a special task force to bring together knowledge, expertise and data for mapping the environmental impact of the Russia's unprovoked and unjustified attack against Ukraine;
29. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 11 April 2024 ⁽²⁾ on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.
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⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2024)0280.