



2024/2352

10.10.2024

RESOLUTION (EU) 2024/2352 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 Union Agency for the Space Programme 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 Union Agency for the Space Programme (the 'Agency') for the financial year 2022,
- having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0121/2024),
- A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure ⁽¹⁾, the final budget of the Agency for the financial year 2022 was EUR 70 032 491,77, representing an increase of 22,58 % compared to 2021; whereas the actual revenue of the Agency amounted to EUR 1,2 billion being the difference with the above mentioned budget, explained by operational activities that are financed through assigned revenue which are included in the approved budget as a token entry;
- B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the Agency's annual accounts for the financial year 2022 (the 'Court's report'), states that the Court obtained reasonable assurance that the Agency's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular; whereas the Court presents an 'emphasis of matter' paragraph in relation to the impact of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in the Agency's operations;
- C. whereas with regard to the Agency's internal control systems, 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 current year commitment appropriations of 100 %, representing the same rate as in the previous two years; regrets however that the execution rate of the current year payment appropriations was 72,86 %, representing a decrease of 1,92 % compared to 2021;
2. Notes that the Agency's administrative board approved three budget amendments in 2022, first in January increasing the overall appropriations by EUR 1 687 363,77, with the second budget amendment the Agency's administrative board approved reallocation of overall amount of EUR 2 659 300, mostly from the operational budget to the data processing line, and the third amending budget decreased payment appropriations by EUR 4 640 000, bringing the overall amount of payment appropriations to the EUR 65 392 491,77;
3. Notes that in addition to its core budget, the Agency continued to manage a large amount of delegated budget (earmarked appropriations), and a total of EUR 574,5 million was committed under delegated budget in 2022 and EUR 1,26 billion made in payments;

Performance

4. Welcomes that the Agency uses key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the outcomes related to its objectives, which include, among others, operate effective administration of the security accreditation board so as to support timely decision making, Galileo threat and risk analysis, managing and reporting on the Agency budget, efficiently handling all legal arrangements, ensuring the operational capability of Agency premises, and fulfilling statutory audit and control obligations; notes that most objectives have been achieved, however recommends to address the KPIs that remain unfulfilled or are progressing slower than expected; recommends that the Agency fine tunes KPIs on a regular basis in order to optimise its performance;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 453, 29.11.2022, p. 56.

5. Takes note that the Agency has disclosed potential impacts from the war in Ukraine, including the interruption in using Soyuz launchers for Galileo satellites due to the unilateral withdrawal of the Russian Soyuz launcher team; notes that the Agency does not envisage any direct, immediate impact on its financial performance but recognises that intensive work is required to minimize delays in the launch of new satellites, which could then lead to delays in expense recognition and the clearing of receivable assets paid in the form of pre-financing; notes with concern that this amount cannot be reliably estimated at this point;
6. Notes furthermore that the work on the Galileo and European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) ground stations in Ukraine has halted due to the conflict, but this has no direct impact on EGNOS system functionality; highlights that the Agency has taken all the steps that it could to protect the equipment already installed as far as possible, but its exact condition is not currently known; notes that there is a force majeure raised by the hosting entity and that, as soon as removed, the contract in place is expected to be re-activated; asks the Agency to report back to the discharge authority on the state of the installed equipment as soon as the war allows;
7. Observes that the Agency has implemented measures to monitor ties with Russian and Belarusian institutions, and market condition changes from sanctions are not expected to materially affect the Agency's operations;
8. Notes that in 2022 a set of important accreditation decisions for EGNOS were achieved and regarding EGNOS highlights include the signing of the next EGNOS service provision contract and a new search and rescue service contract, the maintenance contract for EGNOS v2, and the launch of the EGNOS GEO4 payload, notably, a common mode failure in EGNOS was identified and resolved; notes with appreciation that the global impact of Galileo is emphasized with over 3,5 billion enabled devices worldwide; observes that two new Galileo satellites entered into force; notes with appreciation that Galileo Services, including security monitoring and public regulated service demonstrated outstanding performances despite the challenges of COVID-19;
9. Takes note that other achievements of the Agency in 2022 include the organisation of the EU Space Week 2022 in Prague in cooperation with the Commission and with the support of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the creation of the Agency's network of 1 000 start-ups and 28 investors and the first CASSINI entrepreneurship day, the entry into service of two new Galileo satellites, and the publication of the first market report covering both Earth Observation and GNSS;
10. Stresses that the Agency should become the main implementing agency of all components of the Union space programme, guaranteeing secured services provision and accreditation of all space programme components Galileo, EGNOS, Earth Observation, Space Traffic Management and governmental Telecom and Connectivity, offering robust services that continuously evolve in accordance with the needs of current and future users, also to governmental users with resilience, defence and security needs;
11. Calls on the Agency to make use of its added value for the implementation of the future Union Space Law, as cornerstone for ensuring the Union's security, safety, and sustainability in space addressing the Union economic Security in space activities and the acceleration of New Space growth;

Efficiency and gains

12. Notes that the Agency dedicated significant effort to further streamline and automate the human resources management processes to achieve efficiency gains; observes that in this context, the Agency continued on the deployment of various Sysper modules (e.g. TIM, FLEX, TELEWORK), and interconnecting them with the existing in-house supporting applications (e.g. Intranet-based working time recording tool); notes that the human resources department has introduced an e-ticketing system to streamline processing of various requests from its staff; invites the Agency to find more internal procedures that could be streamlined via new IT tools;
13. Notes that, under the Financial Framework Partnership Agreement (FFPA), the Agency is obliged to collaborate with the Commission and the European Space Agency (ESA) to jointly define arrangements to reach the European Union climate objectives, and to cooperate on activities contributing to these targets; notes further that, under Art. 30 FFPA, the Agency is obliged to implement the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) by the end of 2023;
14. Notes that, in regard to the Green Public Procurement (GPP), in 2022 there has been some progress in the identification of cases of tender procedures with 'green' aspects and the consideration of application of green criteria; notes further that in 2023 the Agency gradually develops a more robust approach in order to actually implement GPP on a permanent basis, train its staff and gradually introduce green criteria in its public procurement in line with its environmental policy and the ongoing EMAS certification;

15. Commends the Agency for the commitment to the process of reducing its environmental impacts, optimising resource consumption and decreasing its carbon footprint and for the first step in this direction, the adoption and publication of its environmental policy on 16 December 2022;
16. Recalls the importance to increase 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 this regard in order to avoid a digital gap between the agencies; draws attention, however, to the need to take all the necessary security measures to avoid any risk to the online security of the information processed, insist on the need to step up action against cyberattacks or infiltration attempts particularly originating from Russia or China;
17. Calls on the Agency to further identify and stimulate the synergetic use of the Union Space Programme components and of IRIS², among others for the implementation of the Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence in order to ensure that all tasks can be merged long-term into one unified space programme allowing for better synergy between the various components;
18. Calls on the Agency to continue its work in partnership with the Commission for GOVSATCOM Hubs and looks forward to the synergies which will be realized with IRIS² system; highlights the role of EUSPA in the development, deployment and operations of IRIS² ensuring the access to highly secure, sovereign and global connectivity services based on advanced encryption technologies;
19. Highlights the Agency's role in the evolution of Copernicus in particular when it comes to the governmental use of Earth Observation given the geopolitical situation and recalls the need to make use of the Agency's expertise in the security accreditation, monitoring and contract implementation in this regard in order to strengthen the operational capacity of the Union to act in all phases of disaster risk management, in both natural and man-made disasters;

Staff policy

20. Commends the Agency for the fact that on 31 December 2022 the establishment plan was 100 % implemented, with 231 temporary agents appointed out of 231 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared to 191 authorised posts in 2021); notes that, in addition, 46 contract agents and 9 seconded national experts worked for the Agency in 2022, bringing the total number of staff to 286;
21. Notes with concern the lack of gender balance within the Agency's senior and middle management, with 3 out of 3 being men; regrets the lack of gender balance within the Agency's administrative board members, with 22 out of 28 being men; further notes the gender balance within the Agency's overall staff, with 153 out of 232 being men; notes from the Agency's report with regard to the follow-up measures taken in light of the discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Agency for the financial year 2021 (the 'Agency's follow-up report') that the Agency has adopted a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in 2023, accompanied by an action plan including concrete measures how to contribute to diversity and inclusion, including gender perspective; notes that the gender balance within the Agency's senior and middle management and the administrative board needs to be improved; recalls the importance to ensure gender balance and calls on the Agency to take this aspect into consideration with regard to future recruitments of staff and appointments especially within its senior and middle management; insists that the Commission and the Member States take into account the importance of ensuring gender balance when nominating their members to the Agency's administrative board;
22. 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; looking forward to receiving their report and recommendations; notes that there were no reported cases of harassment in 2022 and encourages the Agency to continue and develop the work to prevent cases in the future as well;
23. Recalls the Court's observation from 2021 concerning the procedural deficiencies in two audited recruitment procedures, that the Agency implemented further changes in its selection processes, and templates and instructions provided to the selection board members have been modified, and more guidance is being provided to selection board members when setting the criteria for a vacancy notice; notes further that the Court has found these improvements satisfactory, therefore the observation is closed;

24. Recalls that, the Agency continues to implement the gradual and progressive reduction in the total number of contract agent posts to be in line with the overall resourcing provided to the Agency; notes that at the same time, the Agency continues to further focus its remaining contract agent posts on security and Galileo Security Monitoring Centre (GSMC) operations functions; highlights that in this regard the Agency continues to note that there are risks associated with the reduction of contract agent posts and that this indeed requires additional outsourcing which induces increased financial costs and results in the development of competency and knowhow outside of the public sector;
25. Recalls from the Court's report the 2021 observation regarding the restrictions imposed by the Agency to a senior member of the staff taking a new job elsewhere, but without providing justification for these restrictions; notes further that this observation is closed, the Agency has revised its procedures to address the identified shortcoming and in 2022 no similar cases were observed;
26. Welcomes that, in 2022, the Agency has fully on boarded the time management module including teleworking and flexitime and has signed an additional service level agreement for the human resources reporting and analytics module, to be deployed in 2023; notes that the Agency has adopted the Commission decision on working time and hybrid working C(2022)1778 and is closely monitoring the results of this decision, which is expected to improve the staff's wellbeing at work and facilitate work-life balance;

Procurement

27. Notes from the Court's report that in September 2021, the Agency launched a negotiated procedure without prior publication of a contract notice with a national public entity for the provision of various services in relation to search and rescue activities; highlights that the tenderer had already been providing similar services to the Agency since 2016 and the Agency intended to conclude a new framework contract with an expiry date set on 31 December 2032 and a maximum budget of EUR 120 million; notes that the final framework contract was signed on 1 December 2022, including the involvement of several subcontractors; observes that Court noted that there were some discrepancies between the tender specification requirements and the evaluation committee's assessment; notes that, for example, the requirement to declare absence of a conflict of interest for the contractors in the evaluation phase was either waived or not properly analysed, another example is that the offer received, instead of using 2021 as reference year for setting the prices, as per the technical specifications, used 2022 as the reference year; takes note of the Agency's considerations that the discrepancies were justified by the status of the main contractor which is a national public entity and by the checks performed by the latter and that, in regards to the reference year used for setting the price in the offer, the Agency accepted the deviation because of the length of the procedure which led to the conclusion of the contract at end of 2022;
28. Highlights that the objective of public procurement rules is to enable procuring entities to obtain the goods and services they need at best price, while ensuring fair competition between tenderers and compliance with the principles of transparency, proportionality, equal treatment and non-discrimination; calls on the Agency to further improve its public procurement procedures, ensuring full compliance with the applicable rules, so that they achieve the best possible value for money;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interest and transparency

29. Notes that the Agency executed a broad assessment of the implementation of its anti-fraud strategy in 2020 and, consequently, in 2022, the Agency released its new anti-fraud strategy, which has been adopted by the Agency's administrative board; observes that the Agency is now starting to implement it with major and broad measures affecting in particular its staff; notes with satisfaction that declarations of interests and CVs of the administrative board members and senior management are published on the Agency's website;
30. Notes that the Agency had one whistleblowing case during 2022 that caused several investigations, some of which are still ongoing in 2023; calls on the Agency to report to the discharge authority on the developments in that regard; notes from the 2021 Agency's follow up report that, concerning the whistleblowing case from 2021, the Agency has cooperated as required with OLAF providing all information available as required; notes that no cases of conflict of interest have been investigated or concluded in 2022;
31. Takes note of the fact that an internal register is kept for senior management meetings with industry but it is not published on the Agency's webpage; emphasizes the importance of transparency and calls on the Agency to publish them without delay;
32. Insists on the need to continue working on transparency, incompatibilities, conflicts of interest, illegal lobbying and revolving doors;

33. Recalls the importance for the Agency to develop greater visibility in the media, internet, and social media in order to make its work known to the citizens;

Other comments

34. Commends the Agency for continuing to be active on the biggest social media platforms, for opening accounts in the privacy-aware Union social media channels Mastodon and Peertube, for publishing 107 news stories on its website and 13 press releases (majority in all official EU languages), aiming to reach all the Member States; notes further that the Agency organised events as EU Space Week (3 000 visitors onsite and online), EUSPA Open Days, CASSINI Hackathons, Horizon Europe info sessions, and numerous webinars on public procurement opportunities;
35. 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.