

RESOLUTION (EU) 2019/1447 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**of 26 March 2019****with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training for the financial year 2017**

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

- having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training for the financial year 2017,
 - having regard to Rule 94 of and Annex IV to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A8-0119/2019),
- A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure ⁽¹⁾, the final budget of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (the 'Centre') for the financial year 2017 was EUR 17 869 389, representing a slight decrease of 0,84 % compared to 2016; whereas the budget of the Centre derives mainly from the Union budget;
- B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the Centre's annual accounts for the financial year 2017 (the 'Court's report'), has stated that it 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 2017 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 99,95 %, representing a slight decrease of 0,04 % compared to 2016; takes note that the payment appropriations execution rate was at 89,66 %, representing a decrease of 4,89 % compared to the previous year;

Cancellation of carryovers

2. Notes with concern that the cancellation of carryovers from 2016 to 2017 amounted to EUR 52 767, representing 5,06 % of the total amount carried over, an increase of 2,31 % in comparison to 2016;

Performance

3. Notes with satisfaction that the Centre uses an exemplary performance measurement system that includes key performance indicators to assess the added value provided by its activities in the project, activity and organisational levels and other measures to improve its budget management;
4. Appreciates the Centre's continued high-quality work, providing research, analysis and technical advice to assist the development of European lifelong learning and Vocational Education and Training (VET) policies and stresses to this end the importance of ensuring adequate staff and financial resources allowing the Centre to implement its tasks;
5. Welcomes the Centre's focus on the development of competences and skills, in particular among the low-skilled, to support the objective of labour market inclusion through VET, work-based learning and apprenticeships and its contributions to the Erasmus+ Programme, the New Skills Agenda for Europe, Europass and Skills Panorama which has succeeded in reaching its primary target groups, policy makers and experts;
6. Welcomes the Centre's initiative on a new strand of work on digitalisation and the future of work and further welcomes the launch of the Centre's CareersNet, its new network for research and lifelong guidance and career development;
7. Welcomes the initiative of the Centre to reinforce its work on lifelong guidance and career development by setting up a network for research and cooperation in this field and by developing tools to integrate labour market intelligence into guidance;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 84, 17.3.2017, p. 1.

8. Notes the Centre's close cooperation with the European Training Foundation and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, formalised in collaboration agreements; notes with satisfaction that the Centre and the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security signed a service-level agreement which enables them to share conference facilities and storage space among other synergies; emphasises in this context that the Centre is one of the four Agencies on social policies; expresses its disappointment with the outcome in this respect of the Interinstitutional Working Group (IIWG) on decentralised agencies, as no specific proposals were developed to merge or co-locate agencies concentrating on related policy fields; asks the Centre to cooperate with the three other Agencies on social policies to investigate possible mergers;
9. Acknowledges that the Centre has been taking measures in light of the observations and comments from the discharge authority related to the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2016 with the aim of further improving the Centre's operations;
10. Notes that the Centre was subjected to external evaluation as required by the financial rules, covering the period 2013 to 2016; notes that the final report of the evaluation should have been received in 2018; calls on the Centre to report to the discharge authority on the results of that evaluation;

Staff policy

11. Notes that, on 31 December 2017, the establishment plan was 93,48 % executed, with 86 officials or temporary agents appointed out of 92 temporary agents and officials authorised under the Union budget (compared with 94 authorised posts in 2016); notes that in addition, 26 contract agents and four seconded national experts worked for the Centre in 2017;
12. Notes the departure of the Centre's head of service for human resources in April 2017 as well as the departure of the Centre's legal advisor and the resulting additional workload for the remaining staff; calls on the Centre to report to the discharge authority of any developments in this regard;
13. Notes that the Centre has a dignity at work policy in place and that in 2017 a mandatory session on dignity at work and prevention of harassment was delivered, and furthermore workshops and counselling skill session were offered;
14. Notes with regret from the Court's report that two recruitment procedures for management positions were considered to be irregular; notes the Centre's reply in this regard and expects that this concern will be addressed properly; urges the Centre to report to the discharge authority on the measures taken to respond to this observation;
15. Notes with regret that the transparency of recruitment processes is not always fully given; therefore welcomes the suggestion of the Court to publish vacancy notices also on the website of the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) in order to increase publicity; takes note of the Centre's reply that it already publishes some vacancies on EPSO and that translating all vacancy notices in the Union languages would considerably increase costs;

Procurement

16. Notes that, according to the Court's report, by the end of 2017 the Centre was not yet using any of the tools launched by the Commission aimed to introduce a single solution for the electronic exchange of information with third parties participating in public procurement procedures (e-procurement); notes that, according to the Centre's report, it has planned to implement the necessary electronic measures in late 2018; calls on the Centre to report to the discharge authority on the progress made regarding this matter;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interests and transparency

17. Notes the Centre's existing measures and ongoing efforts to secure transparency, prevention and management of conflicts of interests, and whistleblower protection; points out with concern, however, that the Centre does not publish the CVs of its senior management on its website, and that the Centre's senior management, in-house experts and assistants declare potential conflicts of interest only as they occur according to Centre's policy on the prevention and management of conflict of interests since 2014; calls on the Centre to report to the discharge authority on the measures taken in this regard;
18. Reiterates its call for the Centre to make public the minutes of its management board meetings;

19. Reiterates the need to urgently implement independent disclosure, advice and referral mechanisms with sufficient budgetary resources, in order to help reporting persons use the right channels to disclose their information on possible irregularities affecting the financial interests of the Union, while protecting their confidentiality and offering needed support and advice in line with the proposal for a directive on the protection of persons reporting on breaches of Union law (2018/0106 (COD)) which is currently under interinstitutional negotiations;

Internal audit

20. Takes note that the internal audit service (IAS) conducted an audit on the Centre's web-based services with the focus on Europass, Skills Panorama, Mobility Scoreboard and the European qualifications framework web pages, based on the IAS Strategic Audit Plan 2017 to 2019; welcomes the fact that the design and functioning of the Centre's internal control system was stated as effective and efficient in relation to these tools;
21. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 26 March 2019 ⁽²⁾ on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0254 (see page 361 of this Official Journal).