

2015 discharge: ECSEL Joint Undertaking

2016/2201(DEC) - 18/10/2016 - Court of Auditors: opinion, report

PURPOSE: presentation of the EU Court of Auditors report on the annual accounts of the ECSEL Joint Undertaking for the financial year 2015, together with the Joint Undertakings replies.

CONTENT: in accordance with the tasks conferred on the Court of Auditors by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Court presents to the European Parliament and to the Council, in the context of the discharge procedure, a Statement of Assurance as to the reliability of the annual accounts of each institution, body or agency of the EU, and the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying them, on the basis of an independent external audit.

This audit focused on the annual accounts of the ECSEL Joint Undertaking (electronic components and systems). To recall, the objective of the ECSEL Joint Undertaking is to contribute to the development of a strong and globally competitive electronics components and systems industry in the European Union. It also aims to ensure the availability of electronic components and systems for key markets and for addressing societal challenges, and to maintain and grow semiconductor and smart system manufacturing capability in Europe. Lastly, it aims to align strategies with Member States to attract private investment and contribute to the effectiveness of public support by avoiding unnecessary duplication and fragmentation of effort, and by facilitating the participation of actors involved in research and innovation.

Statement of assurance: pursuant to the provisions of Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the Court has audited:

- the annual accounts of the ENIAC Joint Undertaking, which comprise the financial statements and the reports on the implementation of the budget for the financial year ended 31 December 2015;
- the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying those accounts.

Opinion on the reliability of the accounts: in the Courts opinion, the Joint Undertakings annual accounts present fairly, in all material respects, its financial position as at 31 December 2015 and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended, in accordance with the provisions of its financial rules and the accounting rules adopted by the Commissions accounting officer.

Basis for a qualified opinion on the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts: the Court noted that the ECSEL Joint Undertaking has taken over the FP7 projects of the ARTEMIS and ENIAC Joint Undertakings. The payments made for these projects by the ECSEL Joint Undertaking in 2015, against certificates of acceptance of costs issued by the national funding authorities (NFAs) of the ECSEL Participating States, amounted to EUR 94.2 million, which represents 65 % of the total payments made by the Joint Undertaking in 2015.

Administrative agreements concluded by the ARTEMIS and ENIAC Joint Undertakings with the NFAs have continued to apply since those Joint Undertakings were merged to form the ECSEL Joint Undertaking. Under these agreements, the NFAs perform ex post audits of FP7 project payments on behalf of the Joint Undertaking. The ARTEMIS and ENIAC Joint Undertakings ex post audit strategies relied heavily on the NFAs to audit project cost claims.

The ECSEL Joint Undertaking has taken steps to assess the implementation of ex post audits by the NFAs and has obtained written statements from the NFAs declaring that the implementation of their national procedures provides reasonable assurance on the legality and regularity of transactions. However, the significant variation in the methodologies and procedures used by the NFAs does not allow the ECSEL Joint Undertaking to calculate a single reliable weighted error rate or a residual error rate.

Therefore, the Court was not in a position to conclude whether ex post audits are functioning effectively and whether this key control provides sufficient assurance as to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions for FP7 projects.

This issue concerning the variation in the methodologies and procedures used by the NFAs is not relevant anymore for the implementation of Horizon 2020 projects, as the ex post audits will be undertaken either by the ECSEL Joint Undertaking or by the Commission.

Joint Undertakings reply: the Joint Undertaking stated that in 2016, it will continue undertaking a number of actions towards improving the internal control environment with regard to the internal policy on fraud prevention.