

2016 discharge: European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

2017/2177(DEC) - 23/03/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Bart STAES (Greens/EFA, BE) on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) for the financial year 2016.

The committee called on the European Parliament to postpone its decision on granting the Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office discharge in respect of the implementation of the Offices budget for the financial year 2016.

Follow-up to the 2013 and 2014 discharges: Members noted with concern the number of outstanding issues and ongoing corrective actions in response to the Courts comments in 2013 and 2014 related to late payments, internal control standards (ICSs) and high staff turnover. They called on the Office to complete the corrective actions as soon as possible in the course of 2018.

Basis for the qualified opinion: Members expressed deep regret the material findings made by the Court in relation to two out of five significant procurement procedures from 2016 for which payments were incurred during that year, which demonstrates a lack of rigour in the Offices procurement procedures.

The report recalled that two of the three tenderers participating in one audited procurement procedure for the provision of travel services under a framework service contract amounting to EUR 4 million for the period from 2016 to 2020 were asked to provide additional information in relation to the same selection criteria. Although neither of them submitted the requested information (CVs of the persons who would perform the task at the Offices premises), only one of them was excluded from the procedure for this reason. The other tenderer was awarded the contract on the basis that the relevant CVs would be provided following the award of the contract. The procurement procedure did not comply with the principle of equal treatment. Members stated that the framework contract and associated 2016 payments, amounting to EUR 920 561, are therefore irregular.

Another framework contract for interim support services regarding the migration crisis was also deemed as incompatible with the relevant Union rules.

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has opened an investigation on the Offices operations.

- Budget and financial management: Members noted with concern that budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2016 resulted in a low budget implementation rate of 80.64 %. They noted that the Offices work programme was amended three times and its budget four times in order to take into account significant changes that took place during 2016, in particular the significant increase in the operational support activities of the Office in hotspots in some Member States and the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement.
- Commitments and carry-overs: the level of committed appropriations carried over for administrative expenditure was high at EUR 2.5 million or 43.9 % (compared to EUR 1 076 583 or 36.9 % in 2015). These carry-overs mainly relate to IT infrastructure, translations and publications, business consultancy and the costs for management board meetings for which contracts were signed towards the end of 2016 or invoices were only issued in 2017.

Members also made a series of observations regarding procurement and staff policy, the prevention and management of conflicts of interests and internal audits.

They highlighted that in 2016 the Office faced several challenges in its operating environment, including not only a substantial increase in its budget and expansion of its tasks but also a significant increase in the number of transactions, a change of the accounting officer with several interim solutions and the introduction of a paperless workflow system. They regretted that this situation of considerable change and instability was neither mitigated by a revalidation of the accounting system nor by introducing a system of regular ex post verifications of transactions.

Lastly, in 2016, the Commission presented a proposal for a new Regulation that proposed transforming the Office into a fully-fledged agency. Members noted the opening of offices in Rome and in Athens and the expanding role of the Office across the Union as it reaches out closer to the hotspots.