



2024/2030(DEC)

29.1.2025

OPINION

of the Committee on Transport and Tourism

for the Committee on Budgetary Control

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the EU agencies
for the financial year 2023
(2024/2030(DEC))

Rapporteur for opinion: Gheorghe Falcă

PA_NonLegDec

OPINION

The Committee on Transport and Tourism calls on the Committee on Budgetary Control, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following into its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the ‘clean’ opinion for the 2023 financial year provided by the European Court of Auditors (‘the Court’) in relation to the reliability of the annual accounts as well as the legality and regularity of the revenues and payments underlying the accounts of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), and the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA);
2. Takes notice of the high 2023 budget implementation rates in all three Agencies; observes that the overall value of automatic carryovers of voted non-differentiated appropriations in the Agencies was below the 15% benchmark established by the Court;
3. Notes that following the assessment by DG MOVE, which ensures supervision of the three Agencies, their 2023 performance of the three Agencies was in full alignment with the agreed objectives of the Commission: the regular monitoring and supervision activities did not identify any particular issues that could have a material impact on the assurance, furthermore, the reports from the external and internal auditors did not highlight any major issues that could raise additional concerns for DG MOVE; nevertheless, points out the weaknesses in public procurement and budget management identified by the Court and calls for increased transparency and efficiency in the financial management of the Agencies, stressing the need for effective implementation of the Court's recommendations to eliminate these shortcomings.

Part I – Discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) for the financial year 2023

1. Is pleased to note that the revenue and payments underlying the Agency’s accounts for the year that ended on 31 December 2023 are legal and regular in all material respects; recalls the Court’s 2022 observation concerning the Agency’s public procurement shortcomings, noting with satisfaction that those shortcomings have been addressed in 2023 and that the Court did not identify any non-procurement weaknesses in its control and management or budgetary management systems; with regard to the follow-up of the Court’s previous years’ observations, remarks that at the end of 2023, 3 out of 5 observations remained open;
2. Takes notice of the adoption of the ReFuelEU Aviation legislation in October 2023 and of the new set of specific tasks that the Agency would be charged with in this framework, including the development of the European Environmental Labelling for Aviation scheme and the reinforced role of the Agency in promoting and measuring the usage of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) and the associated reductions in CO₂ emissions, for example, through the Sustainability Portal and the annual technical report prescribed by Article 13 of the RefuelEU Aviation Regulation; welcomes the Agency’s commitment to environmental protection by setting key milestones related to the ReFuelEU Aviation legislation, aiming at a level playing field for sustainable air transport and SAF uptake; calls for sufficient financial resources and personnel to ensure successful accomplishment of the above-mentioned tasks;

3. Remarks that in 2023, the Drone programme entered the last phase of its regulatory development for Unmanned Aircraft Systems; recalls that the Commission's Drone Strategy 2.0 actively tasked the Agency with nine flagship actions and that in 2023 all nine were fully or partially achieved, meeting its objectives to deliver a world's leading regulatory framework for this innovative part of the aviation industry;
4. Notes that in 2023, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine continued impacting European aviation; points out that the closure of Ukrainian airspace and restrictions on Russian and Belarusian airspace resulted in extended flight routes for most carriers, escalating fuel costs, increased CO₂ emissions, and higher airfares for commercial flights; at the same time, denounces the significant increase in GNSS interference, such as GPS jamming and spoofing, observed in 2023, especially in the Baltics, and calls for a coordinated European approach to address this issue; urges EASA to continuously monitor the situation to prevent unsafe conditions and to develop recommendations for Member States to mitigate the risks;
5. Notes that in 2023, EASA significantly strengthened its cooperation with military organizations within the scope provided by the EU Action plan on military mobility 2.0 and is now invited to all NATO Aviation Committee meetings; takes notice of the endorsement of the Agency's Civil Military Cooperation strategy – its long-time priority – supporting its involvement in certification tasks for military aircraft deriving from civilian ones based on the “as civil as possible as military as necessary” concept.

Part II – Discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) for the financial year 2023

1. Acknowledges that the revenue and payments underlying the Agency's accounts for the year that ended on 31 December 2023 are legal and regular in all material respects; at the same time, takes notice of the Court's observation identifying irregularities in the Agency's management and control systems, noting however that these irregularities did not affect the payments; points out that EMSA took action to address the shortcomings identified;
2. Notes that in 2023, EMSA continued providing a highly effective assistance in helping to reduce the impact of the maritime transport sector on the environment, including through its involvement in the numerous initiatives related to European Green Deal; takes particular notice of the technical expertise it provided in the context of the review of the Maritime Safety Package; commends the Agency's support to the Commission and the Member States in the final adoption of the proposals made as a part of the Fit for 55 package, notably on the extension of the Emission Trading System (ETS) to maritime transport and the FuelEU Maritime Regulation; in this context, appreciates its ongoing research into the potential of various alternative fuels and the associated safety considerations arising from the uptake and deployment of sustainable alternative sources of power for ships; welcomes the adaptation of THETIS-MRV to the requirements of the ETS legislation;
3. Commends the contribution of EMSA to safety and standardization frameworks at both EU and IMO levels; welcomes the ongoing research into automation of Maritime Autonomous

Surface Ships (MASS), encompassing the identification of requisite competences for MASS operators and of the associated safety risks; welcomes the proactive role the Agency plays in addressing safety and standardization gaps, including by drafting best practices and guidance that cover both traditional safety concerns and new challenges related to electrical systems, batteries, and the carriage of electric vehicles on ships;

4. Observes that 2023 was marked by the geopolitical instability, including the continuation of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, and the security threats in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, all seriously impacting shipping; in this context, commends the support that EMSA provided to the Commission and the Member States by using its monitoring and surveillance capacities, including its advanced digital tools, to mitigate the impact of this instability on maritime transport; urges the Agency to devise a long-term strategy to address geopolitical shifts, including cooperation with NATO and other international partners, with the aim of bolstering European maritime security; encourages it to continue investing in the development of advanced technologies to enhance its capacity to respond to emerging security threats in the maritime domain and to bolster its resilience to cyber threats; acknowledges EMSA's nine RPAS operations for the Member States and the relevant EU Agencies, including regional Multipurpose Maritime Surveillance, and welcomes the successful Baltic RPAS service, which operated from mid-April to September 2023, covering Estonia, Finland, and Latvia;
5. Underlines the continued significance of EMSA's support to Member States in developing relevant capacity-building initiatives and coordinating training activities.

Part III – Discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA) for the financial year 2023

1. Notes with satisfaction that the revenue and payments underlying ERA's accounts for the year ended 31 December 2023 are legal and regular in all material respects; this notwithstanding, highlights the Court's observations that identified the weaknesses concerning the Agency's public procurement, management and control systems as well as various aspects of its budgetary management, and calls ERA to establish clear selection criteria in procurement procedures and to conduct appropriate assessments of abnormally low bids^{1a}; observes that the frequency of the Agency's late payments in 2023 reached 13% (148 payments out of 1 101); notes that while the total amount of late payment interest was immaterial, the significant frequency is detrimental to the Agency's reputation; calls on ERA to improve its compliance with the legal time limits for payments, noting that also 14% of invoices were issued late; anticipates that, following the review of Regulation 2018/764, ERA will continue to implement the necessary measures to minimize delays in invoicing; encourages the Agency to introduce more rigorous internal control mechanisms and staff training to reduce the frequency of late payments and improve budget management;
2. Acknowledges that, in response to the Court's 2022 observation, ERA's management has endorsed a policy for classifying and protecting sensitive information to reinforce the implementation of the internal control framework;

^{1a} Annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2023, Section 3.11.10 "Observations on management and control systems", pp. 132-133, 137.

3. Reiterates the paramount importance of establishing an interconnected, efficient, and safe railway network across the Union, stressing the need to enhance the access to and the quality of rail services for all; this notwithstanding, recalls that ERA has the smallest budget of all the transport agencies despite the outstanding environmental performance, which is prioritized by the Commission, and the other benefits of rail transport; commends the Agency's efforts to reduce the burden on the EU budget by increasing its Fees and Charges activities in 2023, compared to the previous year; highlights the Agency's continuous efforts to improve its efficiency and budget execution through its Strengthening Plan adopted in 2022, but notes that these efforts cannot fully compensate for its insufficient budget; acknowledges the 9% increase in the Agency's 2023 budget and calls for ERA to be equipped with sufficient budgetary resources in order to enable it to function as an efficient authority and to effectively fulfil its tasks, particularly with regard to increasing competitiveness, safety and cross-border interoperability;
4. Welcomes in particular, that ERA contributes, on technical matters, to the implementation of Union legislation by developing a common approach to safety in the Union rail system and by enhancing the level of interoperability in the Union rail system and the associated data, thus supporting the development of a Trans-European Transport Network, with a specific focus on facilitating the interoperable deployment of European Rail Traffic Management System ERTMS and on the access to data for pushing rail modernisation and digitalisation; welcomes the 2023 results achieved in its role of the EU authority in charge of issuing authorizations for placing railway vehicles on the market, single safety certificates for railway undertakings, and ERTMS trackside approvals, which were the highest since the full implementation of the Technical Pillar of the 4th Railway Package^{1b} ; in this context, underlines the need to increase investment in research and innovation to further accelerate the deployment of ERTMS and digitalisation solutions, with the objective to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of rail, by positioning it as one of the most sustainable and safe transport modes, to enhanced regional connectivity, and to the seamless cross-border traffic in the EU.
5. Welcomes ERA's commitment to the close cooperation with the national authorities acting in the fields of railway safety and interoperability; commends the Agency's swift response in conducting audits and issuing recommendations in accordance with Article 35(5) of its regulation, following the tragic rail accident near Tempí in Greece; welcomes the Agency's continued work on safety culture through preparing specific reports and organizing tailored training sessions; regrets the fragmented nature of the current railway safety accident and incident reporting across Europe, which is limited to oversight and lacks an appropriate enabling tool; calls for action to address this gap and provide the necessary funding to rectify this deficiency;
6. Points out that in 2023, ERA successfully addressed the difficulties related to human and budgetary resources as well as a significant increase in both policy and authority tasks; this notwithstanding, regrets that resource-related constraints have continued to impact the Agency's potential, and the development of the information sharing system in Europe; observes that in 2023, the Agency's Management Board has endorsed a dedicated paper on

^{1b} In 2023, ERA issued 1837 decisions on vehicle authorization, 76 single safety certificates and 10 ERTMS trackside approvals.

Strengthening Operational Safety (SOS) in Europe focusing on two initiatives – the Safety Information Sharing System and the Priority Countries Programme, noting however the absence of an associated legal and financial statement to underpin the potential of boosting operational safety across the EU by these initiatives; calls on the Agency to continue working closely with the Commission and the Member States to unlock this important stream of work in the future;

7. Welcomes ERA's endorsement of the EU Agencies Network (EUAN) Diversity and Inclusion Charter, which promotes the development of a modern, diverse workforce essential for the future of the European rail sector; acknowledges the Agency's efforts to foster an inclusive and equitable environment, particularly for women pursuing careers in the rail industry, thereby ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender or background, within the European railway sector; encourages continued support for such efforts aimed at fostering a more inclusive, dynamic, and innovative rail workforce.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPOREUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The rapporteur for the opinion declares under his exclusive responsibility that he did not receive input from any entity or person to be mentioned in this Annex pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION BY COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	29.1.2025
Result of final vote	+: 31 -: 8 0: 4
Members present for the final vote	Oihane Agirregoitia Martínez, Daniel Attard, Tom Berendsen, Rachel Blom, Nikolina Brnjac, Nina Carberry, Benoit Cassart, Carlo Ciccioi, Anna Maria Cisint, Vivien Costanzo, Johan Danielsson, Valérie Devaux, Siegbert Frank Droese, Gheorghe Falcă, Jens Gieseke, Borja Giménez Larraz, Sérgio Gonçalves, Roman Haider, Sérgio Humberto, Dariusz Joński, François Kalfon, Martine Kemp, Sophia Kircher, Elena Kountoura, Luis-Vicențiu Lazarus, Julien Leonardelli, Vicent Marzà Ibáñez, Alexandra Mehnert, Ștefan Mușoiu, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Philippe Olivier, Matteo Ricci, Rosa Serrano Sierra, Stanislav Stoyanov, Kai Tegethoff, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Kosma Złotowski
Substitutes present for the final vote	Alberico Gambino, Jutta Paulus, Dario Tamburrano, Kris Van Dijck, Ana Vasconcelos
Members under Rule 216(7) present for the final vote	Elisabeth Grossmann

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

31	+
PPE	Tom Berendsen, Nikolina Brnjac, Nina Carberry, Gheorghe Falcă, Jens Gieseke, Borja Giménez Larraz, Sérgio Humberto, Dariusz Joński, Martine Kemp, Sophia Kircher, Alexandra Mehnert, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi
Renew	Oihane Agirregoitia Martínez, Benoit Cassart, Valérie Devaux, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Ana Vasconcelos
S&D	Daniel Attard, Vivien Costanzo, Johan Danielsson, Sérgio Gonçalves, Elisabeth Grossmann, François Kalfon, Ștefan Mușoiu, Matteo Ricci, Rosa Serrano Sierra
The Left	Elena Kountoura, Dario Tamburrano
Verts/ALE	Vicent Marzà Ibáñez, Jutta Paulus, Kai Tegethoff

8	-
ESN	Siebert Frank Droese, Stanislav Stoyanov
NI	Luis-Vicențiu Lazarus
PfE	Rachel Blom, Anna Maria Cisint, Roman Haider, Julien Leonardelli, Philippe Olivier

4	0
ECR	Carlo Ciccioi, Alberico Gambino, Kris Van Dijk, Kosma Złotowski

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention