



2024/2031(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 joint undertakings for the financial year 2023
(2024/2031(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 Clean Aviation Joint Undertaking (CAJU), the Single European Sky ATM Research 3 Joint Undertaking (SESAR 3 JU), and the Europe’s Rail Joint Undertaking (EU Rail);
2. Notes the Court’s observations directed at all three Joint Undertakings (JU) concerning their outdated business continuity and disaster recovery plans; welcomes the measures taken by the JUs following the Court’s assessment to ensure that these plans are regularly updated and adapted to organisational changes and emerging risks in the operating environment;
3. Welcomes the 2023 activities related to the calls for proposals and grant management carried out by the three JUs under their respective programmes; recognizes the value of initiatives fostering stakeholder engagement and participation, such as open calls for expressions of interest and joint calls across the JUs, as instrumental in leveraging the collective expertise and resources; draws particular attention to the joint call for proposals launched by EU-Rail and SESAR 3 JU – the first ever cross-joint undertaking synergy topic call aimed at developing an integrated air and rail network for a sustainable multimodal transport system;
4. Takes notice of the back-office arrangements signed by the three JUs in 2023, facilitating their collaboration with the other joint undertakings for efficiency gains in various shared areas, including human resources, accounting, ICT, and procurement;
5. Acknowledges the significant contributions of the JUs in advancing research, innovation, and technology development across various sectors, including aviation, rail, and air traffic management, as integral to achieving the EU's strategic objectives of sustainability, digital transformation, and competitiveness.

Part I – Discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Clean Aviation Joint Undertaking (CAJU)

1. Takes notice of the reduced 2023 commitment budget of CAJU (EUR 269 million, down from EUR 411,2 million in 2022), reflecting the lower value of the Horizon Europe calls launched in 2023; points out that its increased 2023 payment budget (EUR 468,4 million, up from EUR 415,3 million in 2022) covered the interim payments for the ongoing Horizon 2020 projects and the significant pre-financing for grant agreements planned by the end of 2023 under the Horizon Europe programme;
2. Observes that the members’ commitments for the JU’s operational and additional activities under Horizon 2020 programme exceeded their operational contribution targets, therefore, at the end of 2023, CAJU still had to pay around EUR 41 million (or 2,4%) in the coming

years for projects yet to be completed, and to validate in-kind contributions to its operational activities of EUR 244,3 million and in-kind contributions to additional activities of EUR 153,4 million;

3. Notes that the implementation rate for the 2023 operational payment appropriations under the Horizon Europe programme decreased to 51%, primarily due to the slower start of the CAJU's technically complex activities and delays in ongoing Horizon 2020 activities; notes that in 2023, CAJU requested EUR 178 million in additional EU financial contributions, exceeding the cash needs and resulting in a EUR 237 million cash surplus, which indicates shortcomings in its cash planning; notes that it is imperative to make the accumulated cash surplus available for other urgent EU needs and urges CAJU to define its goals and future financial resource needs more clearly, to prevent similar situations in the future^{1a};
4. Notes that the technical activity under the Clean Sky 2 (CS2) programme mostly completed in 2023 and acknowledges the progress made in finalisation of the remaining technology maturation and demonstration activities, notably in delivering a series of key demonstrators in the programme's different System & Platform Demonstrator (SPD) areas;
5. Points out that the 20 projects selected in the first call for proposals of the Clean Aviation programme successfully kicked-off in January 2023, committing 40% of the funding available over the life cycle of the programme (EUR 736 million); takes notice of the second call launched in February 2023, which resulted in the signature of 8 grant agreements for a maximum amount of approximately EUR 137 million (7,5% of the funding available), that will aim at definition of novel aircraft concepts, innovative propulsion architectures, as well as new fuselage and wing designs;
6. Draws attention to the open call for expression of interest published by CAJU in May 2023, targeting private stakeholders to become Associated Members of CAJU; notes that, following the evaluation, 20 new Associated Members from 12 different countries acceded to the Clean Aviation Partnership in December 2023, bringing the number of its Members to 59.

Part II – Discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Single European Sky ATM Research 3 Joint Undertaking (SESAR 3 JU)

1. Takes notice of the reduced 2023 commitment budget of SESAR 3 JU (EUR 111,2 million, down from EUR 158,8 million in 2022), reflecting the lower number of calls for Horizon Europe projects; points out that its increased 2023 payment budget (EUR 241,5 million, up from 146,9 million in 2022) covered the interim payments for the ongoing Horizon 2020 projects and the significant pre-financing payments for the grant agreements and contracts planned by the end of 2023 under the Horizon Europe programme;
2. Highlights that by the end of 2022, EU and the JU's private members met their operational contribution targets, while Eurocontrol committed only 70% of its target; notes that this

^{1a} Annual report on EU Joint Undertakings for the financial year 2023, Section 3.3.17 "Accumulation of unused EU financial contributions", p. 62.

shortfall prevented SESAR 3 JU from receiving all planned contributions necessary for the full implementation of its part of the Horizon 2020 programme; further notes that by the end of 2023, the JU had EUR 36,8 million (6,6%) in outstanding payments for incomplete projects and contracts, and needed to validate in-kind contributions of EUR 105,1 million;

3. Regrets that at the end of 2023, SESAR 3 JU still lacked a policy on the management of sensitive functions, essential to prevent or mitigate the risk of inappropriate actions and corruption, in accordance with the European Commission's Internal Control Principles; notes that in 2023, the Commission's Internal Audit Service observed that the JU's business continuity plan (BCP) and the related disaster recovery plan (DRP) had not been updated since 2016; calls on SESAR 3 JU to regularly update its BCP and DRP^{1b} ;
4. Welcomes the successful closure in 2023 of the remaining projects funded under the SESAR 2020 programme, integrating their outcomes into the new Digital European Sky (DES) programme; points out that the 2023 exploratory and industrial research calls under DES resulted in 50 projects, covering the nine SESAR flagship areas; welcomes three new Digital Sky Demonstrator projects funded under the Connecting Europe Facility along to the five already managed by the SESAR 3 JU; notes that 58 DES projects that involve more than 300 different beneficiaries, represent a total investment of more than EUR 600 million;
5. Welcomes the update of the European ATM Master Plan, commenced by SESAR 3 JU in order to set out the vision and prioritize the digital solutions necessary to deliver DES; points out that the update campaign includes extensive consultations with stakeholders to ensure a collaborative and aligned approach towards achieving the strategic objectives leading to ATM modernization; expects the Governing Board to have it adopted by December 2024.

Part III – Discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking (EU-Rail)

1. Notes that the reduced commitment and payment budgets for 2023 (respectively, EUR 102,6 million and 120,3 million, down from EUR 171,4 million and 180,8 million in 2022) reflected the lower value of calls for Horizon Europe projects and the diminishing level of payments related to Horizon 2020 projects;
2. Observes that the members' commitments for the JU's operational and additional activities under the Horizon 2020 programme exceeded their operational contribution targets, noting that at the end of 2023, EU-Rail still had to pay around EUR 40,5 million (or 10.8%) for projects and contracts yet to be completed, and to validate in-kind contributions to its operational activities of EUR 44,7 million;
3. Remarks that although the 2023 implementation rate for operational payment appropriations of Horizon 2020 programme increased to 67% (from 47% in 2022), it remained below expectations; points out that EU-Rail postponed final payments to 2024

^{1b} Annual report on EU Joint Undertakings for the financial year 2023, Section 3.2.18 "Out-of-date business continuity plan and disaster recovery plan", p. 54.

due to technical issues experienced by beneficiaries; takes notice of the several projects that did not fully claim their budgets, reducing the need for operational payments by approximately EUR 4,1 million; calls on EU-Rail to take action to improve the implementation rate for operational payment appropriations and to elaborate a plan on how to improve the accounting reporting obligations^{1c} ;

4. Commends the strong cooperation of the JU with the European Union Agency for Railways to ensure the interoperability of the developed projects; commends the collaboration with the sectoral associations, third country programmes and other programmes, partnerships, and bodies, to establish further synergies;
5. Welcomes the commitment of the JU to facilitate R&I activities to deliver an integrated European railway network by design, eliminating interoperability barriers and delivering smart, sustainable, and resilient railway system to ensure a harmonized approach to the evolution of the Single European Rail Area; commends the integrated EU-Rail programme for its continued efforts to disseminate information on the benefits of rail transportation and travel to European citizens, and recognizes the complementarity between its R&I output, particularly in fostering interoperability, and the key objectives outlined in the European Green Deal and the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy; acknowledges the progress made under the programme, based on its System Pillar, the “generic system integrator” for the future of the EU rail, providing governance, resources, and outputs to support a coherent and coordinated approach to railway system development, as well as on its Innovation Pillar, which encompasses advanced operational and technological solutions aimed at creating a more efficient railway system, including large-scale demonstrations and exploratory research; takes notice of the 2023 decision of the Governing Board to establish the Deployment Group to advise on the market uptake of rail innovation developed by EU-Rail and to support the deployment of innovative solutions;
6. Welcomes the 2023 achievements under the European Digital Automatic Coupler (DAC) Delivery Programme that facilitated cooperation among rail stakeholders, enhancing the implementation of DAC for European rail freight;
7. Congratulates the JU for its continued, active reporting on its contributions to the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as its contribution to completing the Single European Railway Area;
8. Highlights the importance of supporting the JU given rail’s inherent advantages in terms of environmental performance, land use, energy consumption, and safety.

^{1c} Annual report on EU Joint Undertakings for the financial year 2023, Section 3.8.13 "Implementation of the Horizon 2020 programme", pp. 108, 110.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR 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 -: 6 0: 6
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

6	-
ESN	Siebert Frank Droese, Stanislav Stoyanov
NI	Luis-Vicențiu Lazarus
PfE	Rachel Blom, Julien Leonardelli, Philippe Olivier

6	0
ECR	Carlo Ciccioli, Alberico Gambino, Kris Van Dijck, Kosma Złotowski
PfE	Anna Maria Cisint, Roman Haider

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention