



Brussels, 1 December 2017
(OR. en)

15004/17

FIN 763

COVER NOTE

| | |
|------------------|--|
| From: | Mr Klaus-Heiner LEHNE, President of the European Court of Auditors |
| date of receipt: | 28 November 2017 |
| To: | Mr Märt KIVINE, President of the Council of the European Union |
| Subject: | Report on the annual accounts of the European Training Foundation for the financial year 2016 together with the Foundation's reply |

Delegations will find attached the European Court of Auditors' report on the annual accounts of the European Training Foundation for the financial year 2016.

This report is accompanied by the Foundation's reply and will shortly be published in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Encl.: Report on the annual accounts of the European Training Foundation for the financial year 2016 together with the Foundation's reply.¹

¹ In English only. The other languages of this report are available on the European Court of Auditors' website: <http://eca.europa.eu/>.



EUROPEAN
COURT
OF AUDITORS

Report on the annual accounts
of the European Training Foundation
for the financial year 2016

together with the Foundation's reply

INTRODUCTION

1. The European Training Foundation (hereinafter “the Foundation”, aka “ETF”), which is located in Turin, was established by Council Regulation (EEC) No 1360/90¹ (recast (EC) No 1339/2008). The Foundation’s task is to support the reform of vocational training in the European Union’s partner countries. To do this, it assists the Commission in the implementation of various vocational training programmes.

2. **Table 1** presents key figures for the Foundation².

TABLE 1: KEY FIGURES FOR THE FOUNDATION

| | 2015 | 2016 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Budget (million euro) | 21 | 21 |
| Total staff as at 31 December ³ | 129 | 130 |

Source: data provided by the Foundation.

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF THE STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

3. The audit approach taken by the Court comprises analytical audit procedures, direct testing of transactions and an assessment of key controls of the Foundation’s supervisory and control systems. This is supplemented by evidence provided by the work of other auditors and an analysis of management representations.

¹ OJ L 131, 23.5.1990, p. 1.

² More information on the Foundation’s competences and activities is available on its website: www.etf.europa.eu.

³ Staff includes officials, temporary and contract staff and seconded national experts.

OPINION

4. We have audited:

- (a) the accounts of the Foundation which comprise the financial statements⁴ and the reports on the implementation of the budget⁵ for the financial year ended 31 December 2016, and
- (b) the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying those accounts,

as required by Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Reliability of the accounts*Opinion on the reliability of the accounts*

5. In our opinion, the accounts of the Foundation for the year ended 31 December 2016 present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Foundation at 31 December 2016, the results of its operations, its cash flows, and the changes in net assets for the year then ended, in accordance with its Financial Regulation and with accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer. These are based on internationally accepted accounting standards for the public sector.

Legality and regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts**Revenue***Opinion on the legality and regularity of revenue underlying the accounts*

6. In our opinion, revenue underlying the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2016 is legal and regular in all material respects.

⁴ The financial statements comprise the balance sheet, the statement of financial performance, the cashflow statement, the statement of changes in net assets and a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory notes.

⁵ The reports on implementation of the budget comprise the reports which aggregate all budgetary operations and the explanatory notes.

Payments*Opinion on the legality and regularity of payments underlying the accounts*

7. In our opinion, payments underlying the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2016 are legal and regular in all material respects.

Responsibilities of management and those charged with governance

8. In accordance with Articles 310 to 325 of the TFEU and the Foundation's Financial Regulation, management is responsible for the preparation and presentation of the accounts on the basis of internationally accepted accounting standards for the public sector and for the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying them. This responsibility includes the design, implementation and maintenance of internal controls relevant to the preparation and presentation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error. Management is also responsible for ensuring that the activities, financial transactions and information reflected in the financial statements are in compliance with the authorities which govern them. The Foundation's management bears the ultimate responsibility for the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts.

9. In preparing the accounts, management is responsible for assessing the Foundation's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting.

10. Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the entity's financial reporting process.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts and underlying transactions

11. Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the accounts of the Foundation are free from material misstatement and the transactions underlying them are legal and regular and to provide, on the basis of our audit, the European Parliament and the Council or other respective discharge authorities with a statement of assurance as to the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying them. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit will always detect a material misstatement or non-compliance when it exists. These can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if,

individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these accounts.

12. An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the accounts and the legality and the regularity of the transactions underlying them. The procedures selected depend on the auditor's judgment, including an assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the accounts and of material non-compliance of the underlying transactions with the requirements of the legal framework of the European Union, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, internal controls relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of the accounts and legality and regularity of underlying transactions, is considered in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal controls. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates made by the management, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the accounts.

13. For revenue, we verify the subsidy received from the Commission and assess the Foundation's procedures for collecting fees and other income, if any.

14. For expenditure, we examine payment transactions when expenditure has been incurred, recorded and accepted. Advance payments are examined when the recipient of funds provides justification for their proper use and the Foundation accepts the justification by clearing the advance payment, whether in the same year or later.

15. In preparing this report and Statement of Assurance, we considered the audit work of the independent external auditor performed on the Foundation's accounts as stipulated in Article 208(4) of the EU Financial Regulation⁶.

16. The comments which follow do not call the Court's opinion into question.

COMMENTS ON SOUND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

17. In 2016 an external evaluation of the Foundation was carried out on behalf of the Commission. This was the first step in a cross cutting evaluation of the four agencies working

⁶ Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1).

in the area of employment, social affairs and inclusion⁷. The evaluation concluded that the considerable re-organisation of the ETF since 2011 had no significant negative effects and has been viewed mainly positively by internal and external stakeholders, especially in terms of strategy and effectiveness. Governance of the ETF was viewed as efficient and effective. The evaluation also highlights that the ETF has continued to enhance its monitoring capacity since 2011 but that there is still scope to present a clearer picture of its activities and achievements. Unifying and simplifying indicators around one single intervention logic and using a common terminology across the organisation would help to improve the situation. The Foundation prepared a plan to implement the evaluators' recommendations.

OTHER COMMENTS

18. In its Report on the annual accounts of the Foundation for the year 2011 the Court highlighted already that the situation regarding the Foundation's premises is unsatisfactory and puts activities at risk of disruption. The situation remains at a standstill since the Consortium that managed and occupied part of the complex went into liquidation in 2011 and left part of the complex empty. There is an urgent need for the host country to find a solution to this matter. Under the host agreement, appropriate facilities are guaranteed until 2027.

FOLLOW-UP OF PREVIOUS YEARS' COMMENTS

19. An overview of the corrective action taken in response to the Court's comments from previous years is provided in the **Annex**.

⁷ The other Agencies which will be covered are the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions (Dublin) , the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (Bilbao) and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Thessaloniki)

This Report was adopted by Chamber IV, headed by Mr Baudilio TOMÉ MUGURUZA,
Member of the Court of Auditors, in Luxembourg at its meeting of 12 September 2017.

For the Court of Auditors

Klaus-Heiner LEHNE

President

AnnexFollow-up of previous years' comments

| Year | Court's comments | Status of corrective action (Completed / Ongoing / Outstanding / N/A) |
|-------------|--|--|
| 2013 | At the end of 2013, the Foundation had 7,5 million euro in accounts at a single bank with a low credit rating (F3, BBB) ¹ . | Completed |

¹ Amount reduced to 1,8 million euro.

THE FOUNDATION'S REPLY

The Foundation has taken note of the Court's report.