

NEWSLETTER

COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2019

9.00 – 12.30 and 14.30 – 18.30

THURSDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2019

9.00 – 12.30

Room: Paul Henri Spaak (PHS) 5B001
Brussels

1. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The draft agenda and meeting documents are available in the [meeting file](#).

Interpretation

FR, DE, IT, NL, EN, EL, ES, PT, FI, SV, CS, HU, PL, BG, RO.

[Webstreaming](#)

Please be aware that each time a speaker activates the microphone to make an intervention, the camera will be automatically directed to the speaker.

Voting cards

The electronic voting system will be used for the votes and Members are reminded to bring their electronic voting card.

WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2019

9.00 - 11.30

CONT PUBLIC MEETING

***** ELECTRONIC VOTING *****

3. 2017 DISCHARGE: EUROPEAN ASYLUM SUPPORT OFFICE (EASO)



Vote on the motion for decision on closure of accounts

Rapporteur: [Petri Sarvamaa](#) (EPP)

Administrator: Cécile Bourgault

Shadow Rapporteurs: Lara Wolters (S&D), Ramona Strugariu (RE), Viola Von Cramon-Taubel (Greens), Younous Omarjee (GUE/NGL)

On 23 October 2019, the EP refused to grant the Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office discharge for the financial year 2017.

Following such refusal, the EP's Rules of Procedure foresee that "a formal proposal to close the accounts for the year in question shall be submitted at a subsequent part-session" (Annex V, Article 5 (2) (b)).

The Rapporteur tabled a motion for decision to close the accounts of EASO. NO AMENDMENTS WERE TABLED.

CONT timetable:

Event	Body	Date
Adoption in CONT	CONT	4 December 2019
Adoption in Plenary	Plenary	December 2019

***** END OF ELECTRONIC VOTING *****

4. DISCHARGE 2018: GENERAL BUDGET OF THE EU - JOINT UNDERTAKINGS

[Procedure files](#)



Exchange of views with the representatives of Joint Undertakings, in the presence of the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible, Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz

Rapporteurs: [Joachim Stanisław Brudziński](#) (ECR) - (CLEAN SKY 2, ECSEL, IMI, ITER and BBI)
[Ryszard Antoni Legutko](#) (ECR) (Shift2Rail, SESAR and FCH)

Administrator: Rudolfs Verdins

Shadow Rapporteurs: Markus Pieper (EPP), Maria Grapini (S&D), Martina Dlabajova (RE), Michèle Rivasi (Greens), Joachim Hans Kuhs (ID), Younous Omarjee (GUE/NGL)

For the financial year 2018, the eight Joint Undertakings (JUs) subject to the discharge procedure by the Parliament are the following: Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI), Electric Components and Systems for European Leadership (ECSEL), Single European Sky ATM Research (SESAR), CLEAN SKY, Fuel Cells and Hydrogen (FCH), Bio-Based Industries (BBI), Fusion for Energy (F4E (ITER)) and Shift2Rail.

On 14 November, the Court of Auditors published its annual report on JUs. For this year's procedure, ECA has chosen the form of a single consolidated report on all JUs; however, that does not change the procedure in CONT. In its report, the Court:

- states that JUs' accounts are reliable, and none of the eight JUs has exceeded materiality threshold of 2%;
- notes that Horizon 2020 implementation is delayed; however, the Court also notes that the implementation of the previous programme was successful;
- draws attention to ITER / F4E, citing risk of cost increases and implementation delays.

CONT will invite three JUs to speak. The rest of the JUs may participate in the questions and answers session. In particular, CONT will invite the following JUs:

- Fuel Cells and Hydrogen (FCH);
- Fusion for Energy (F4E (ITER)).
- Clean Sky 2.

Other JU representatives as well as the relevant Commission services are encouraged to attend the hearing and may contribute to the answers to Members' questions.

It is proposed that the hearing shall proceed as follows:

-) Introduction by the Member of the European Court of Auditors (ECA), Ms Gáll-Pelcz, who will present the findings of the respective Annual Reports 2018;
-) Presentation of the Rapporteurs;
-) Presentation of each of the JUs invited:
 - FCH;

- ITER;
- Clean Sky 2;
-) The Chair, Shadow Rapporteurs and other Members will ask questions to the invited guests;
-) The Joint Undertakings will reply to the questions posed;
-) Closing remarks of the ECA Member and the Rapporteurs.

The documents that are important for this hearing are available on the [CONT website](#).

CONT Timetable:

Event	Body	Date
Consideration of draft report	CONT	20-21 January 2020
Deadline for amendments	CONT	29 January 2020
Adoption in CONT	CONT	19-20 February 2020
Adoption in Plenary	Plenary	March II 2020

5. ECA SPECIAL REPORT 5/2019 (DISCHARGE 2018): FEAD-FUND FOR EUROPEAN AID TO THE MOST DEPRIVED: VALUABLE SUPPORT BUT ITS CONTRIBUTION TO REDUCING POVERTY IS NOT YET ESTABLISHED



Presentation of the Special Report by the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible, Iliana Ivanova

Rapporteur: [Maria Grapini](#) (S&D)
 Administrator: Charlotte Kutzenberger

Shadow-rapporteur(s): Lefteris Christoforou (EPP)

Poverty reduction is a key policy component of the Europe 2020 strategy, with the target lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion. In 2017 113 million people, that is 22.5 % of the EU's population, were still at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The risk is highest for specific groups such as children and elderly people.

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), which is the subject of this audit report shall enhance social inclusion and ultimately contribute to the objective of eradicating poverty in the Union by offering both material assistance and social inclusion measures, in addition to food aid.

The Court decided to carry out this audit in time for the discussions on the regulation, which will replace the current FEAD by the proposed ESF + regulation and will be in place for the 2021-2027 programme period.

The auditors point out despite FEAD's objective of social inclusion it remains essentially a food support scheme. Moreover, the impact of the social inclusion measures often remains insufficiently monitored and evaluated, so that the Fund's contribution towards alleviating the worst forms of poverty cannot be measured.

The auditors also note that half of the Member States assessed by them do not target the aid to any specific vulnerable group or poverty situation. However, if FEAD is to provide EU added value, it needs to be targeted at those most in need, or the most extreme forms of poverty.

The Court considers FEAD as a relevant instrument. However, its contribution to alleviating poverty has not been established.

The ECA special report is available on the [CONT website](#). As a follow-up, a succinct working document with the recommendations of the Rapporteur has been sent to CONT Members on 14 November 2019.

6. ECA SPECIAL REPORT 11/2019 (DISCHARGE 2018): (SESAR DEPLOYMENT) THE EU'S REGULATION FOR THE MODERNISATION OF AIR TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT HAS ADDED VALUE – BUT THE FUNDING WAS LARGELY UNNECESSARY



Presentation of the Special Report by the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible, Iliana Ivanova

Rapporteur: [Matteo Adinolfi](#) (ID)
Administrator: Rudolfs Verdins

Shadow-rapporteurs: Marian-Jean Marinescu (EPP), Maria Grapini (S&D), Martina Dlabajova (RE)

Technological harmonisation and modernisation project, SESAR, is a part of EU's wider Single European Sky policy. Overall, between 2005 and 2020 the EU has committed to SESAR €3.8 billion. Funding from the EU budget to support coordinated investments (known as common projects) amounted to approximately €1.6 billion between 2014 and 2017.

In this audit, the Court assessed how the Commission managed the deployment of SESAR since 2011 and how that deployment helped it meet the objectives of its Single European Sky policy. It assessed whether the EU's intervention was designed in a way appropriate to address needs and target the projects in greatest need of support, and whether it was implemented well and added value to the management of air traffic in the EU. The Court visited entities involved in the governance of SESAR, and it examined a sample of 17 EU co-funded projects.

The Court found that the concept of common projects promotes coordinated investments. However, the Court found that EU funds were invested in projects that would have been financed without EU support, and that a majority of the projects audited did not need EU funding.

The Court recommends that the Commission should improve the focus and reinforce the effectiveness of common projects, review and formalise the preparation and submission of applications for funding, and ensure appropriate monitoring of performance benefits delivered by the modernisation.

The Commission accepts all of the Court's recommendations, and in several cases it has already taken the necessary steps. It considers that the deployment framework and the related EU funding served the purpose of accelerating the deployment of SESAR solutions.

The ECA special report is available on the [CONT website](#). As a follow-up, a succinct working document with the recommendations of the Rapporteur will be sent to CONT Members.

WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2019

11.30 - 12.30

IN CAMERA MEETING

7. COORDINATORS' MEETING



Meeting held in camera

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WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2019

14.30 - 18.30

CONT PUBLIC MEETING

8. DISCHARGE 2018: GENERAL BUDGET OF THE EU - AGENCIES

[Procedure files](#)



Exchange of views with the representatives of agencies, in the presence of the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible, Rimantas Šadžius

Rapporteurs:

[Ryszard Czarnecki](#) (ECR) -

[Joachim Stanisław Brudziński](#) (ECR)

[Ryszard Antoni Legutko](#) (ECR) -

(ACER, EBA, EEA, EFCA, EIOPA, EASO, EMSA, ESMA, ERA, EURATOM, EUROPOL, FRA, EIGE, EMA, EMCDDA, EUROJUST, ENISA, EFSA, CEPOL, BEREC) CDT, CEDEFOP, ECDC, ETF, EU_OSHA and EUROFOUND, FRONTEx) (EASA, EIT, ECHA, EU- LISA, GNSS)

Administrator: Benoît Lefort

Shadow Rapporteurs: Andrey Novakov (EPP), - Lara Wolters (S&D),
(RE): Ramona Strugariu (FRA, Eurojust, Europol, EMCDDA, Frontex, EU-Lisa, Cefpol, EASO),
Cristian Ghinea (EU-Osha, EBA, ETF), Gilles BOYER (EIOPA, ESMA),
Katalin Cseh (ECDC, BEREC, EIT, ECHA, EFSA, EMA, ENISA, ACER, Euratom, GNSS), EEA),
Luisa Porritt (EIGE, Eurofound),
Olivier Chastel (CDT, CEDEFOP, EFCA, EMSA, ERA, EASA),
Bas Eickhout (Greens), Joachim Hans KUHS (ID), Younous OMARJEE (GUE/NGL)

From the 32 decentralized EU agencies, which are subject to discharge, the three selected below agencies confirmed their participation to the hearing:

- European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)
- European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX)
- European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

Other agency representatives are also welcome to attend the hearing if they so wish.

The written questions by the Shadow Rapporteurs and other Members, addressed to the Agencies' Network as well as to the individual agencies, were submitted to the agencies on 24 October 2019.

The replies were sent to CONT Members on 11 November 2019. They are published on the [CONT website](#).

It is proposed that the hearing shall proceed as follows:

- Introduction by the Member of the European Court of Auditors (ECA), Rimantas Šadžius, who will present the findings of the Annual Report 2018;
- Executive Director of the Chemicals Agency (ECHA), Bjorn Hansen, will reply to this introduction on behalf of the Agencies' Network;
- One of the CONT Rapporteurs, Mr Joachim Brudziński will present his introduction on key issues in the 2018 agencies' discharge and put questions to the Agencies' Network, individual agencies and the Court;
- The Chair, Shadow Rapporteurs and other Members will question the agencies' network, individual agencies and the Court;
- Closing remarks by the ECHA Executive Director;
- Closing remarks by ECA;
- Closing remarks by the CONT Rapporteur.

CONT Timetable:

Event	Body	Date
Consideration of draft report	CONT	20-21 January 2020
Deadline for amendments	CONT	29 January 2020
Adoption in CONT	CONT	19-20 February 2020

9. DISCHARGE 2018: GENERAL BUDGET OF THE EU - EUROPEAN COMMISSION

[Procedure file](#)



Exchange of views with Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner responsible for Jobs and Social Rights, in the presence of Tony Murphy, Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible

Rapporteur: [Monika Hohlmeier](#) (EPP)

Administrators: Philippe Godts / Christian Ehlers

Shadow Rapporteurs: Tsvetelina Penkova (S&D), Olivier Chastel (RE), Viola Von Cramon-Taubel (Greens), Joachim Hans Kuhs (ID) Ryszard Czarnecki

(ECR), Luke Ming Flanagan (GUE/NGL)

The documents of particular relevance for the exchange of views as regards the 2018 Commission discharge are:

- The ECA's 2018 Annual Report, Chapters 1, 3 and 6;
- The Commission's follow-up report COM (2019) 334 final; and
- The Annual Activity Report of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

These documents are available on the [CONT website](#).

In accordance with the timetable for the discharge procedure, the written questions for this meeting were sent to the Commission on 26 November 2019 and e-mailed to Members on the same day.

The Secretariat expects to receive the answers from the Commission on 2 December 2019 at noon. The Commission's answers will be forwarded to Members on the same day. They will be available on the [CONT website](#).

It is proposed that the hearing with the Commissioner proceeds as follows:

- Introduction by the Member of the European Court of Auditors, who will present the findings of the respective chapters of the Annual Report 2018;
- Commissioner in charge will reply to this introduction;
- Other Members will question the Commissioner and/or the Court;
- Closing remarks by the CONT Rapporteur.

CONT Timetable:

Event	Body	Date
Consideration of draft report	CONT	20-21 January 2020
Deadline for amendments	CONT	29 January 2020
Adoption in CONT	CONT	19-20 February 2020
Adoption in Plenary	Plenary	March II 2020

10. ECA SPECIAL REPORT 15/2019 (DISCHARGE 2018): IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2014 STAFF REFORM PACKAGE AT THE COMMISSION - BIG SAVINGS BUT NOT WITHOUT CONSEQUENCES FOR STAFF



Presentation of the Special Report by the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible, Pietro Russo

Rapporteur: [Isabel García Muñoz](#) (S&D)

Administrator: Benoît Lefort

Shadow-rapporteur(s): Angelika Winzig (EPP)

The 2014 staff reforms package has been successful in achieving significant savings, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. But the auditors also identified a mixed impact on staff and additional challenges for human resources management. Some of the negative consequences could have been mitigated, at least in part, if the reforms had been better prepared and monitored, say the auditors.

This “2014 staff reforms package” included a 5 % cut in workforce, pay and pension freezes, as well as a revision of the staff regulations. The auditors found that the 2014 package is delivering significant savings for the EU budget. The direct budgetary impact on the 2014-2020 MFF alone is likely to be around €4.2 billion, which is more than was planned.

As for the impact on HR, the picture is more mixed.

Changes in career structure have improved the link between pay, grade and responsibility, and the Commission’s workforce is becoming more gender balanced and flexible.

However, the 2014 reforms have also led to less positive consequences for staff, as well as to additional challenges for human resources management, the auditors point out. Raising the retirement age to 66 and cutting recruitment have left the Commission with an ageing workforce. Furthermore, the increasing use of staff on short-term contracts has longer-term implications for knowledge management and business continuity. Finally, less favourable employment conditions have reduced job satisfaction and the attractiveness of working for the EU institutions. This comes at a time when the Commission is struggling to attract highly qualified, multilingual staff.

Based on their findings, the auditors recommend that the European Commission:

- establish a workforce management plan;
- strengthen its monitoring and reporting of HR issues; and
- assess needs and potential impact before any further revision of the staff regulations.

The ECA special report is available on the [CONT website](#). As a follow-up, a succinct working document with the recommendations of the Rapporteur will be sent to CONT Members.

THURSDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2019

9.00 - 12.30

CONT PUBLIC MEETING

11. DISCHARGE 2018: GENERAL BUDGET OF THE EU - EUROPEAN COMMISSION

[Procedure file](#)



Exchange of views with Johannes Hahn, Commissioner responsible for Budget and Administration, in the presence of Lazaros S. Lazarou, Annemie Turtelboom, Jan Gregor and Eva Lindström, Members of the European Court of Auditors responsible

Rapporteur: [Monika Hohlmeier](#) (EPP)

Administrators: Philippe Godts / Christian Ehlers

Shadow Rapporteurs: Tsvetelina Penkova (S&D), Olivier Chastel (RE), Viola Von Cramon-Taubel (Greens), Joachim Hans Kuhs (ID) Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR), Luke Ming Flanagan (GUE/NGL)

The exchange of views will give the opportunity to CONT Members to discuss with the Commissioner on the main topics addressed during the hearings with the Members and the Secretary- General of the Commission as to the Commission discharge (performance and compliance dimensions and human resources).

The documents of particular relevance for the exchange of views as regards the 2018 Commission discharge are:

- The ECA's 2018 Annual Report, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 10.
- The Commission's follow-up report COM (2019) 334 final; and
- The Annual Activity Reports of DG BUDGET for 2018

These documents are available on the [CONT website](#).

In accordance with the timetable for the discharge procedure, the written questions for this meeting were sent to the Commission on 27 November 2019 and e-mailed to Members on the same day. Questions concern, in particular, the following issues: RALs and financial management, reliability of the data communicated by the Commission and the Member States and conflict of interests.

The Secretariat expects to receive the answers from the Commission on 3 December 2019 and will forward them to Members on the same day. They will be available on the [CONT website](#).

It is proposed that the hearing with the Commissioner proceeds as follows:

- Introduction by the Member of the European Court of Auditors, who will present the findings of the respective chapters of the Annual Report 2018;
- Commissioner in charge will reply to this introduction;
- Other Members will question the Commissioner and/or the Court;
- Closing remarks by the CONT Rapporteur.

CONT Timetable:

Event	Body	Date
Consideration of draft report	CONT	20-21 January 2020
Deadline for amendments	CONT	29 January 2020
Adoption in CONT	CONT	19-20 February 2020
Adoption in Plenary	Plenary	March 11 2020

12. ECA SPECIAL REPORT 20/2019 (DISCHARGE 2018): EU INFORMATION SYSTEMS SUPPORTING BORDER CONTROL - A STRONG TOOL, BUT MORE FOCUS NEEDED ON TIMELY AND COMPLETE DATA



Presentation of the Special Report by the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible, Bettina Jakobsen

Rapporteur: [Tsvetelina Penkova](#) (S&D)
 Administrator: Olivier Sautière

Shadow-rapporteurs: Jeroen Lenaers (EPP), Olivier Chastel (RE)

The creation of the Schengen area, which abolished border checks between 22 participating Member States and four other European countries, reinforced the importance of effective control and surveillance of the area's external borders to prevent crime and terrorism and to control migration. According to the estimates, the EU budget provided over €600 million to set up the IT systems to facilitate the work of border guards.

To help border guards control the Schengen area's external borders, the EU has set up the following information systems or common frameworks for exchange of information: the Schengen Information System (SIS II); the Visa Information System (VIS); Eurodac (European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database - Fingerprint comparison system). In addition, the European Border Surveillance System (Eurosur) and the Passenger Name Record systems (PNR) provide further support to border authorities.

The Court examined how well the main IT systems for border control allowed border guards to check individuals entering the Schengen area at authorised border-crossing points - land, seaports and airports. The IT systems concerned checks on persons and objects, visas and asylum, fingerprint comparison and passenger records. The Court carried out visits to Finland, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Poland.

The Court found that Schengen border control IT systems are well designed to facilitate border checks and the Member States visited generally complied with the legal requirements. However, the border control authorities in Member States should focus more on entering timelier and complete data that support surveillance of the Schengen area's external borders.

More than half of border guards surveyed by the Court of Auditors had at some point allowed people to cross borders without consulting the systems. In particular, the Court found a discrepancy between the number of Schengen visas issued and the number of visas checked, which could indicate that visas are not systematically checked at all checkpoints. Border guards do not always get timely and complete data from the systems. When they check a name in SIS II, they may receive hundreds of results - mainly false positives, which they must verify manually. This not only makes border checks less efficient, but it also increases the risk of overlooking real hits.

The Court also reported that long delays in putting IT solutions for surveillance and passenger records into practice prevented border Authorities from sharing important information. Delays also affected the exchange of information on the situation at the borders and the exchange of fingerprint data. The Court warned that delayed transmission of fingerprint data can lead to the wrong country being made responsible for processing the asylum application.

In addition, Member States take a long time to remedy the weaknesses identified during the systems' evaluations, which the Court of Auditors nevertheless found to be 'thorough and methodical'.

The Court recommended that the European Commission promote further training on the IT systems, improve data quality procedures, analyse discrepancies in visa checks, reduce delays in data entry and shorten the time taken to correct identified weaknesses.

The ECA special report is available on the [CONT website](#). As a follow-up, a succinct working document with the recommendations of the Rapporteur will be sent to CONT Members.

13. ECA SPECIAL REPORT 24/2019 (DISCHARGE 2018): ASYLUM, RELOCATION AND RETURN OF MIGRANTS: TIME TO STEP UP ACTION TO ADDRESS DISPARITIES BETWEEN OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS



Presentation of the Special Report by reporting ECA Member, Leo Brincat

Rapporteur: [Tamás Deutsch](#) (EPP)
Administrator: Philippe Godts

Shadow-rapporteurs: Corina Cretu (S&D), Olivier Chastel (RE)

The objective of the special report 24/2019 was to determine whether EU support to migration management (including the hotspot approach) had helped bring about effective and swift asylum and return procedures in Greece and Italy. To answer this main audit question, the Court addressed two sub-questions:

(a) Has the EU-funded support action for Greece and Italy achieved its objectives? The Court assessed whether its recommendations of special report 06/2017 had been implemented and whether the temporary emergency relocation schemes had achieved their objectives. The Court also assessed the relevance and design of a sample of EU-funded support actions, and looked at whether planned outputs had been delivered and objectives met.

(b) Have the asylum and return procedures in Italy and Greece been effective and swift? The Court examined whether the performance of asylum and return procedures in the two Member States had improved since 2015, analysed

performance on the basis of data collected by the Commission, EASO, Frontex and the national authorities, and identified the reasons for any underperformance.

The Court concludes that there are disparities between the objectives of the EU support and the results achieved.

1) Even though the capacity of the Greek and Italian authorities has increased, implementation of the asylum procedures in Greece and Italy continues to be affected by long processing times and bottlenecks. As in the rest of the EU, returns of irregular third-country nationals from Greece and Italy are low.

Two key recommendations made by the Court in its special report 6 /2017 are still under implementation: the recommendations on the hotspot capacity and the situation of unaccompanied minors in the Greek hotspots, as the situation in the Greek hotspots remains highly critical.

The ECA recommendation that the deployment of Member States experts be sufficiently long has not yet been implemented. Although the Commission and the Agencies have repeatedly called on Member States to deploy more national experts, the shortage of national experts on EASO operations persists.

The Court found that a high share of migrants continues to move on to and apply for asylum in other EU Member States, without having their fingerprints stored in the European dactyloscopy fingerprint database (EURODAC).

The emergency relocation schemes, temporary by design, did not reach their targets and so did not effectively alleviate the pressure on the Greek and Italian asylum systems.

2. AMIF EMAS was originally designed as a small-scale instrument to address urgent and specific emergency needs. The increase in EMAS funding helped to make the Commission's crisis support more flexible and responsive. With the time it has become the Commission's key strategic instrument for rebalancing support towards the countries most affected by the migration crisis, particularly Greece, through complementing their national programme envelopes.

The Court found that this shift occurred without establishing a performance-monitoring framework. The Commission has proposed including emergency assistance under shared management with Member States in the new financial framework 2021-2027.

3. The Court found that the national authorities in both Greece and Italy assessed the operational support provided by EASO as relevant and useful. Nevertheless, EASO operational support plans until 2018 were largely input-driven, lacking output and outcome targets to assess the EASO performance. The situation is gradually improving in 2019.

4. It is the opinion of the Court that Greece and Italy are among the Member States that have not taken full advantage of Frontex's return potential (extended mandate and increased budget). Apart from the low number of returnees, the existence of two parallel EU-funding instruments supporting the same type of activities (forced returns funded under AMIF national programmes and Frontex operations) explains the situation.

5. Over the course of the crisis, most irregular migrants coming to Europe have arrived in either Italy or Greece. The two Member States have evolved from countries of transit to countries where migrants apply for asylum.

The Court found that Greek's processing capacity is still not sufficient to tackle the increasing backlog of pending asylum applications. A large caseload of negative first-instance decisions is moving to the appeals stage, which is lacking support and is already overloaded.

The Court notes that in the context of the sharp decrease in arrivals and asylum applications, Italy's current processing capacity at first instance is sufficient. The existing substantial backlog is expected to be cleared by the end of 2019. However, this is expected to result in heavy pressure on the appeal authorities. It took over 4 years for an asylum application lodged in 2015 to reach the final appeal stage. Without adequate support, this lengthy time frame could further increase in the future.

Committee on Budgetary Control

6. The Court found that there were far fewer actual returns than return decisions from both countries and the EU overall. The Court identified a number of reasons for this. Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) is affected by the lack of a harmonised approach within the EU. The Court detected structural weaknesses with the AVRR in Italy. The AVRR programme in Greece is achieving its objectives, but the reintegration package is offered to only 26 % of applicants. A dedicated AVRR accommodation facility is an example of good practice increasing the attractiveness of the scheme.

The Court recommends to call on the Commission and the agencies to :

- use lessons learned to build on experience for any possible voluntary relocation mechanism in the future;
- strengthen the management of emergency assistance and national programmes under the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund;
- enhance EASO's operational support to asylum procedures;
- adjust Frontex's return support and experts' deployment in the hotspots;
- reinforce the management of the national asylum systems;
- support further national return procedures.

The ECA special report is available on the [CONT website](#). As a follow-up, a succinct working document with the recommendations of the Rapporteur will be sent to CONT Members.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

15. NEXT MEETINGS

-) 20 January 2020, 15.00 – 18.30 (Brussels)
-) 21 January 2020, 09.00 – 12.30 (Brussels)
-) 21 January 2020, 14.30 – 18.30 (Brussels)

PAPERLESS PROGRAMME (INTERNAL USERS ONLY)

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- Study "Documenting climate mainstreaming in the EU budget - making the system more transparent, stringent and comprehensive"
- Study "How EU funds tackle economic divide in the European Union"
- Study "Pilot projects and preparatory actions (PP/PA) in the EU budget 2014-2019"
- Study "A Just Transition Fund - How the EU budget can best assist in the necessary transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy"

CONTACTS

Policy Department for Budgetary Affairs
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