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*Plenary sitting*

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**A9-0100/2023**

31.3.2023

# REPORT

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021  
(2022/2113(DEC))

Committee on Budgetary Control

Rapporteur: Olivier Chastel

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## 1. PROPOSAL FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DECISION

**on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021  
(2022/2113(DEC))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the final annual accounts of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021,
- having regard to the Court of Auditors' annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2021, together with the agencies' replies<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to the statement of assurance<sup>2</sup> as to the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions provided by the Court of Auditors for the financial year 2021, pursuant to Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the Council's recommendation of 28 February 2023 on discharge to be given to the Agency in respect of the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2021 (06248/2023[22] – C9-0095/2023),
- having regard to Article 319 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012<sup>3</sup>, and in particular Article 70 thereof,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2016/796 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Railways and repealing Regulation (EC) No 881/2004<sup>4</sup>, and in particular Article 65 thereof,
- having regard to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/715 of 18 December 2018 on the framework financial regulation for the bodies set up under the TFEU and Euratom Treaty and referred to in Article 70 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>5</sup>, and in particular Article 105 thereof,
- having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 412, 27.10.2022, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 412, 27.10.2022, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 138, 26.5.2016, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> OJ L 122, 10.5.2019, p. 1.

- having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Transport and Tourism,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0100/2023),
- 1. Grants the Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Railways discharge in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for the financial year 2021;
- 2. Sets out its observations in the resolution below;
- 3. Instructs its President to forward this decision, and the resolution forming an integral part of it, to the Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Railways, the Council, the Commission and the Court of Auditors, and to arrange for their publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (L series).

## 2. PROPOSAL FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DECISION

**on the closure of the accounts of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021  
(2022/2113(DEC))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the final annual accounts of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021,
- having regard to the Court of Auditors' annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2021, together with the agencies' replies<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to the statement of assurance<sup>2</sup> as to the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions provided by the Court of Auditors for the financial year 2021, pursuant to Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the Council's recommendation of 28 February 2023 on discharge to be given to the Agency in respect of the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2021 (06248/2023[22] – C9-0095/2023),
- having regard to Article 319 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012<sup>3</sup>, and in particular Article 70 thereof,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2016/796 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Railways and repealing Regulation (EC) No 881/2004<sup>4</sup>, and in particular Article 65 thereof,
- having regard to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/715 of 18 December 2018 on the framework financial regulation for the bodies set up under the TFEU and Euratom Treaty and referred to in Article 70 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>5</sup>, and in particular Article 105 thereof,
- having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 412, 27.10.2022, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 412, 27.10.2022, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 138, 26.5.2016, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> OJ L 122, 10.5.2019, p. 1.

- having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Transport and Tourism,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0100/2023),
1. Approves the closure of the accounts of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021;
  2. Instructs its President to forward this decision to the Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Railways, the Council, the Commission and the Court of Auditors, and to arrange for its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (L series).

### 3. MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

**with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021 (2022/2113(DEC))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021,
  - having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Transport and Tourism,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0100/2023),
- A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure<sup>1</sup>, the final budget of the European Union Agency for Railways (the ‘Agency’) for the financial year 2021 was EUR 31 827 678, representing an increase of 3,45 % compared to 2020; whereas the budget of the Agency derives mainly from the Union budget;
- B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the ‘Court’), in its report on the annual accounts of the Agency for the financial year 2021 (the ‘Court's report’), has stated that it has obtained reasonable assurance that the Agency's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular;

#### ***Budget and financial management***

1. Notes with satisfaction that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2021 resulted in a budget implementation rate of current year appropriations of 99,82 %, representing a slight decrease of 0,16 % compared to 2020; further notes that the current year payment appropriations execution rate was 93,54 %, representing an increase of 4,25 % compared to 2020;
2. Notes that the budget outturn in 2021 was EUR 69 638, down from EUR 114 225 in 2020;
3. Acknowledges the challenges which the Agency faced in budget execution in 2021, including with regard to the efforts made to absorb as fast and effectively as possible the IT security budget of around EUR 1,3 million assigned by the Commission in May 2021 to strengthen the Agency's IT security capabilities; commends the Agency for the implementation of around 81 % of that budget despite the limited timeframe;
4. Notes the Agency reporting on the ongoing strain on its budget in the last years, owing to insufficient staff to cover the new and extended tasks brought upon by the 4th Railway Package; notes with concern the Agency's reply that every year it has had to make an increasingly significant cut in its operational budget to pay its staff's salaries;

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 162, 13.4.2022, p. 5.

commends the Agency for the measures taken to mitigate the effects of such insufficiencies, e.g. by increasing the hourly rate applied by the Agency for authority tasks-related activities;

5. Recalls that the Agency has the smallest budget among the transport agencies despite the outstanding environmental performance and other benefits of rail transport which the Commission established as one of its priorities with the Action plan to boost long distance and cross-border passenger rail; reiterates its support for an increase of the budget of the Agency in order to provide it with the necessary means to enable it to act as an efficient authority and to fulfil its tasks, particularly those with regard to increasing competitiveness, improving safety and cross-border interoperability;

### *Performance*

6. Acknowledges that the Agency reported a 76,41 % achievement of its 2021 annual programme (compared to 59,35 % in 2020); welcomes the fact that most of the KPIs set under the Single Programming Document (SPD) 2021 - 2023 have been achieved; takes note, however, that some important KPIs have still not been achieved, such as those related to gender equality audit, to the closure of pre-2021 audit findings (12 out of 14 actions opened at the beginning of 2021 having been postponed to 2022) and the presence of women in the transport sector;
7. Notes some of the Agency's main achievements in 2021, such as the timely delivery of a substantially increasing number of Vehicle Authorisations (1260), Single Safety Certificates (41) and ERTMS Trackside Approvals (2), the completion of an ambitious safety climate survey aimed at developing a positive safety culture in the railway sector (with 100 participating organisations and overall 46 500 replies), the deployment of the European Vehicle Register in a production environment and the progress made in revising the TSI package by 2022; welcomes the full transposition of the technical pillar of the 4th Railway Package in all Union's Member States and recalls the importance of completing ERTMS by 2030 as a matter of urgency;
8. Notes, with regard to the follow-up of last year's discharge observations, that the Agency moved its SPD from an annual - and output - focused system to a multiannual outcome-driven one with, at the core, the application of the intervention logic throughout the Agency's 'plan-do-check-act' cycle, KPIs for monitoring outcome and impact (the added value on the railway system), as well as a SPD Dashboard regularly shared with the Agency's Management Board for evidence-based governance of the Agency;
9. Recalls that, following the full transposition of the 4th Railway Package Technical Pillar at the end of 2020, the Agency was given a number of new tasks that entailed a considerable increase of workload; notes that the Agency has developed a Strengthening Plan (SP) in collaboration with the Commission and conducted ad-hoc prioritisation exercise to cope better with the new workload;
10. Commends the Agency's continuous effort to improve its efficiency and budget execution through its SP drafted in 2021; notes that the SP is built on a number of pillars, such as further consolidating data collection and transparency through reinforced monitoring and a data-driven performance culture; calls on the Agency to continue to develop its synergies (for instance human resources, building management, IT services



and security), cooperation and exchange of good practices with other Union agencies with a view to improving efficiency;

11. Salutes the fact that the Agency has continued to successfully deliver its tasks in the field of EU rail interoperability, safety and harmonisation; welcomes the continuous commitment from the Agency to the objective of creating a Single European Railway Area and for improving rail transport connectivity; notes the important role of rail in ensuring sustainable travel and freight throughout the Union for decades to come, and stresses therefore the importance of the agency's work to this respect;
12. Recalls that 2021 was also the European Year of rail, and highlighted rail as one of the most sustainable, innovative, and safest transport modes available; notes that, as part of the European Year of Rail, a special EU train travelled across the continent stopping in over 100 cities in 26 countries and that this initiative showcased the potential of rail, as well as its achievements in developing interoperable railways across Europe, together with the importance of removing any of the cross-border barriers that persist;
13. Welcomes the Agency's strategic contribution within the field of national rules; salutes the extensive work carried by the Agency in 2021 to assess the Vehicle Authorisation (VA) National Rules and is looking forward to the finalisation of the assessment for the remaining Member States in 2022, as well as to the results in terms of rules reduction over the next years;
14. Urges that completion of the core TEN-T rail network shall be a key priority; calls for a new European Investment Bank (EIB) support for investment in rail, and measures to prepare the ground for the renaissance of rail;
15. Suggests the Agency to consider measures to improve the quality of services for rail transport;

### ***Staff policy***

16. Notes that, on 31 December 2021, the establishment plan was 98 % executed, with 148 temporary agents appointed out of 151 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared to 148 authorised posts in 2020); notes, in addition, that 34 contract agents (out of 36 authorised) and 2 seconded national experts (out of 4 authorised) worked for the Agency in 2021;
17. Notes the lack of gender balance within the Agency's senior management, with 7 out of 9 (77,78 %) being men; notes the gender distribution within the Agency's management board, with 28 out of 49 (57,14 %) being men; further notes the gender distribution within the Agency's overall staff, with 125 out of 192 (65 %) being men; acknowledges the Agency's continuous work towards closing the gender gap, with specific projects such as "Women in transport" to strengthen women's employment and equal opportunities in the transport sector; acknowledges the effort made by the Agency to strengthen the telework and the geographical balance in recruitment; recalls that procedural deficiencies in recruitment procedures undermine the principles of transparency and equal treatment; requests that the Agency improves its internal recruitment procedure to clarify evaluation processes and vacancy notices; recalls the importance of developing a long term HR policy on work-life balance, lifelong guidance and career development and recruitment and integration of people with

disabilities;

18. Observes the Agency's new HR strategy (2023-2027) aimed at fostering long-term commitment and reducing turnover among staff; highlights that all priority actions identified to ensure gender balance and equal opportunities will be delivered in synergy with that strategy and calls on the Agency to keep the discharge authority informed on the ongoing implementation thereof; notes that, in 2021, the Agency started its transition to the SYSPER tool for the management of its human resources which is planned to 'go live' at the beginning of 2022;
19. Notes that the Commission envisaged an increase in the Agency's establishment plan from 2023 which was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in subsidy allocation; recalls that the Agency is already making substantial efforts to match the level of ambition required to achieve the Commission's policy objectives effectively under the current budgetary constraints; highlights that several employees reported significant overtime in 2021; acknowledges that this underlines a mismatch between the resources envelop and the needs on the ground; points out that maintaining a proper work-life balance within the staff is necessary to fulfil the Agency's tasks in a satisfactory manner;
20. Takes note of the issues incurred by the Agency's staff members seeking healthcare in France, as the French national authority does not accept them to be affiliated with the national health system;
21. Notes that, between 2020 and mid-2022, four cases of harassment were reported within the Agency and three of its staff members were put on the register; notes, nevertheless, that no investigations were carried out and no cases were brought to court; encourages the Agency to further develop its policies and methods to prevent such cases more efficiently in the future;

### ***Procurement***

22. Notes that the original procurement plan has been updated throughout the year by adding EUR 350 000 for a new call for tenders and EUR 228 000 for an amended framework contract; notes that the Agency carried out 4 open calls for tenders, 4 negotiated procedures and 2 reopening of competition in 2021;
23. Recalls that the Agency is mandated to take into account the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); notes the Court's observation in 2020 that the Agency should introduce effective controls to check the SME status of applicants; commends the Agency's ongoing measures to implement the Court's recommendation, such as making the information on the specific conditions for SMEs clearly visible to the applicants, ensuring that a self-declaration is enabled for applicants declaring themselves as SMEs and ensuring that a workflow is in place to process the checks based on the evidence provided;

### ***Prevention and management of conflicts of interest, and transparency***

24. Notes that the Agency has published the CVs and declaration of interests of management board members and its senior management on the Agency's website; notes that the CVs of 2 out of 49 management board members are missing; notes that the

Agency does not publish the CVs of external experts and in-house experts;

25. Welcomes the Agency's efforts to enhance the transparency of the Agency's activities by regularly publishing on its website information on all meetings held by the Executive Director with organisations or self-employed individuals on issues relating to the activities of the Agency; calls on the Agency to participate in the newly established interinstitutional agreement on a mandatory transparency register for interest representatives, signed by the Commission, the Council and Parliament;

### ***Internal control***

26. Observes, following the observations of the discharge authority in 2020, that the Agency, in order to strengthen the control dimension of its internal management system, has shifted towards a system focused on the Internal Control Framework based on the Commission's guidelines, while the international standard ISO 9001:2015 remained secondary reference to be phased out in 2022;
27. Notes that the Agency performed the annual assessment of its Internal Control Framework, concluding that the Agency is overall compliant with some areas for further improvements; notes that the established follow-up actions will be monitored throughout 2022; further notes that the Agency was subject to a surveillance audit to verify that the Agency's processes are complying with the ISO requirements, with no non-conformities identified by the certification body;
28. Notes that the Internal Audit Service of the Commissions (IAS) carried out a risk assessment to identify areas for prospective audits for the Agency in the next years (2021-2023); notes that the risk assessment identified three audit topics, namely Strategic planning and monitoring, IT governance, and 4th Railway Package Implementation; notes that the first audit has been conducted, the final audit report has been sent to the Agency in March 2022 and an action plan has been agreed with the IAS;
29. Recalls that the IAS had performed an audit on Information Management and Information Security in 2019; notes that the final report contained two recommendations rated as very important by the IAS on data governance framework and IT continuity and physical security; highlights that the formal revised implementation date of those recommendations was set to the end of 2022; calls on the Agency to report to the budgetary authority on the progress made in this regard;
30. Notes that 35 nonconformities have been registered in 2021, with a number of financial nonconformities decreasing compared to the previous years;
31. Notes that an internal investigation has been opened by OLAF in 2021, which is still ongoing; calls on the Agency to report to the budgetary authority about the outcome of the investigation; calls on the Agency to take note to the fact that the participation rate of the anti-fraud and ethics trainings are low even though they are mandatory; encourages the Agency to improve the participation rates of these trainings in order to improve the detection techniques and to encourage staff to report any suspicion of fraud;

### ***Digitalisation and Green Transition***

32. Acknowledges that the Agency has achieved a very high degree of digitalisation in its workflow; notes that the Agency is an active member of the working group of the Commission e-Procurement Project, which is almost fully implemented; welcomes the Agency's role from 2021 as one of the three pilot agencies migrating from the financial IT application ABAC to the new SUMMA; welcomes the fact that the Agency, benefitting from Commission's dedicated support in 2021, introduced valuable measures to strengthen its cybersecurity, such as corrective actions addressing vulnerabilities in some IT systems, penetration tests for its IT systems, security controls procedure for outsourced IT systems, as well as periodic IT security awareness sessions for all its staff; notes that, as a consequence, the Agency experienced cybersecurity attacks in 2021 to a lesser extent than in 2020; further notes that the Agency is cooperating with EASA for sharing expertise on a well-established IT system for monitoring the safety information in aviation; encourages the Agency to work in close cooperation with ENISA (European Union Agency for Cybersecurity);
33. Welcomes the Agency's commitment and ongoing efforts to promote sustainability and to reduce its environmental impact; notes with interest that in the draft SPD 2023 the Agency included a dedicated environmental strategy in line with the Green Deal priorities and the current economic context; calls on the Agency to set a CO<sub>2</sub> reduction target in its work programme and keep the discharge authority informed about the effective introduction of the environmental strategy;

#### ***Business continuity along crisis***

34. Notes from its consolidated annual activity report for 2021 that the Agency responded in a timely manner and adequately to the COVID-19 pandemic, in relation to both its staff and working arrangements, and to the railway sector; notes, regarding its response in relation to the staff policy, that the Agency supported the application of teleworking by all staff with a number of measures that are bound to become the new normal, such as increasing the bandwidth of data connection and optimising remote VPN connectivity for staff working from home; encourages the Agency to put the lessons learned regarding remote and hybrid working methods into practice, in order to better organise meetings and tasks that could be carried out more efficiently remotely than in-person in the future; regarding response to pandemic in relation to the railway sector, notes in addition that the Agency prepared a report on "Travel safety during COVID-19 for passengers travelling long distance by train and other modes" and organised a webinar on "Post pandemic Recovery of Rail Transport";

#### ***Other comments***

35. Notes the Agency's ongoing trend to reduce the costs of double premises, in Lille and Valenciennes, and concentrate its operations in one location only; notes, in particular, that the Agency's commitment not to renew the contract lease for the premises in Lille and to limit the travels to Lille to mandatory meetings;
36. Notes that, due to the Agency's evolution into an EU authority, the current Agency headquarters' building in Valenciennes no longer satisfies the necessary requirements for accommodating the Agency's staff and activities;
37. Stresses that financial regulation and high management standards have to be respected by all the EU's institutions;



38. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of . [...] 2023 <sup>2</sup> on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

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<sup>2</sup> Texts adopted, P9\_TA(2023)0000.

## **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 European Union Agency for Railways for the financial year 2021  
(2022/2113(DEC))

Rapporteur for opinion: Gheorghe Falcă

### **SUGGESTIONS**

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

1. Welcomes the finding of the Court of Auditors that the accounts of the European Union Agency for Railways ('the Agency') for the 2021 financial year are legal and regular in all material aspects;
2. Stresses that financial regulation and high management standards have to be respected by all the EU's institutions;
3. Suggests the Agency to consider measures to improve the quality of services for rail transport;
4. Notes that the Agency's final annual budget for 2021 was EUR 32.83 million (EUR 27.06 million from EU subsidy, EUR 4.38 million from fees and charges) and that the implementation rate for current year appropriations was 99.81 % in commitments; strongly welcomes the increase of the hourly rate for Authorities task activities from EUR 130 to EUR 239 pursuant to the adoption of implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1903;
5. Notes that the cancelled payment appropriations amounted to 0.97 % and the implementation rate for current-year payment appropriations was 93.71 %;
6. Notes that the budget outturn in 2021 was EUR 69 638, down from EUR 114 225 in 2020;
7. Notes that 35 nonconformities have been registered in 2021, with a number of financial nonconformities decreasing compared to the previous years;
8. Notes that out of 175 key performance indicators, 135 were achieved, 22 partially achieved and 18 not achieved;
9. Welcomes the fact that, following the full transposition of the technical pillar of the fourth railway package in October 2020, the Agency has successfully and in a timely manner

delivered authorisations for placing 1260 railway vehicles on the market, 41 single safety certificates for railway undertakings and 2 ERTMS trackside approvals despite the significant increase in the number of applications received in 2021; recalls that the ERTMS is a horizontal priority within the Trans-European Transport Network and highlights the importance of completion of ERTMS by 2030 as a matter of urgency;

10. Salutes that the Agency has continued to successfully deliver its tasks in the field of EU rail interoperability, safety and harmonisation; welcomes the continuous commitment from the Agency to the objective of creating a Single European Railway Area and for improving rail transport connectivity; welcomes in this regard the work of the Agency on the revision of the TSI package, which shall be delivered in 2022; recalls the important role of rail in ensuring sustainable travel and freight throughout the Union for decades to come, and the importance that should thus be attached to the agency's work;
11. Welcomes the Agency's strategic contribution within the field of national rules; salutes the extensive work carried by the Agency in 2021 to assess the Vehicle Authorisation (VA) National Rules and is looking forward to the finalisation of the assessment for the remaining Member States in 2022, as well as to the results in terms of rules reduction over the next years;
12. Regrets the limited resources available to perform National Safety Authorities (NSA) and notified bodies (NoBo) monitoring which are thus limited only to targeted scope;
13. Recalls that 2021 was also the European Year of rail, and highlighted rail as one of the most sustainable, innovative, and safest transport modes available; notes that as part of the European Year of Rail, a special EU train travelled across the continent stopping in over 100 cities in 26 countries and this initiative showcased the potential of rail, as well as its achievements in developing interoperable railways across Europe, together with the importance of removing any of the persisting cross-border barriers;
14. Highlights the work of the Agency on the implementation of the 4th Railway Package and the European Year of Rail 2021;
15. Welcomes the publication by the European Commission of an ambitious Action Plan, with the aim to boost long-distance and cross-border passenger rail services, combined with changes to the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and to increase high-speed rail capacity and improve cross border connectivity and interoperability; urges that completion of the core TEN-T rail network shall be a key priority; calls for a new European Investment Bank (EIB) support for investment in rail, and measures to prepare the ground for the renaissance of rail;
16. Salutes the agency's very high degree of digitalisation, which allows for elimination of paper-processes using online solutions such as e-procurement, e-invoicing etc..;
17. Commends the Agency continuous effort to improve its efficiency and budget execution through its Strengthening Plan drafted in 2021; notes however that these efforts cannot compensate the insufficient budget of the Agency, which leads to systematic budget outruns, as reported by the agency;
18. Commends the Agency's efforts to increase IT security as well as the Commission's decision to allocate EUR 1,30 million to that end;



19. Recalls that the Agency has the smallest budget among the transport agencies and that this trend continued even throughout the European Year of Rail, despite the outstanding environmental performance and other benefits of rail transport which the Commission established as one of its priorities with the Action plan to boost long distance and cross-border passenger rail; as part of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy; calls for an increase of the budget of the Agency in order to provide it with the necessary means to enable it to act as an efficient authority and to fulfil its tasks, particularly those with regard to increasing competitiveness, improving safety and cross-border interoperability; notes that the European Year of Rail 2021 and the drafting of the ERA Strengthening plan allowed the identification of the streams of work for which additional resources are required for the Agency to effectively deliver on its policy objectives in line with its full level of ambition; welcomes the fact that the plan also reaffirmed the Agency's commitments for an efficient and effective use of its human and financial resources;
20. Calls for more resources for the agency to be able to effectively deliver on all its policy objectives and demands that the agency's budget progressively matches the level of other transport sector agencies;
21. Underlines that, besides budgetary constraints, the Agency is limited to a ceiling of 151 permanent agents; asks the European Commission to raise this ceiling in the Agency's next establishment plan;
22. Notes that due to the evolution of the Agency into an EU authority, the current Agency headquarters' building in Valenciennes no longer satisfies the necessary requirements to offer the conditions to accommodate its staff and activities;
23. Welcomes the efforts made by the agency to improve the gender balance within its Management Boards, Senior Management, and staff in general and commends the improvements achieved on this end so far; urges the agency to keep working on their improvements in this regard, and looks forward to seeing the results of the gender audit planned for Q4 2022, particularly regarding the existing imbalance in the gender ratio at all levels in the agency;
24. Urges the Agency to take into account the specific needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in rail transport and to introduce effective checks to verify the SME status of applicants;
25. Proposes that Parliament grants discharge to the Executive Director of the Agency in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for the financial year 2021.



## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	31.1.2023
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 39 -: 1 0: 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Andris Ameriks, José Ramón Bauzá Díaz, Erik Bergkvist, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Ciarán Cuffe, Karima Delli, Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg, Ismail Ertug, Gheorghe Falcă, Isabel García Muñoz, Jens Gieseke, Elsi Katainen, Elena Kountoura, Bogusław Liberadzki, Peter Lundgren, Benoît Lutgen, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska, Marian-Jean Marinescu, Tilly Metz, Caroline Nagtegaal, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Philippe Olivier, Dominique Riquet, Vera Tax, Achille Variati, Henna Virkkunen, Petar Vitanov, Lucia Vuolo, Roberts Zile, Kosma Złotowski
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Sara Cerdas, Ignazio Corrao, Clare Daly, Nicola Danti, Markus Ferber, Maria Grapini, Colm Markey, Beata Mazurek, Ljudmila Novak, Jörgen Warborn

## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

39	+
ECR	Beata Mazurek, Roberts Zīle, Kosma Złotowski
ID	Philippe Olivier
PPE	Gheorghe Falcă, Markus Ferber, Jens Gieseke, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska, Benoît Lutgen, Marian-Jean Marinescu, Colm Markey, Ljudmila Novak, Henna Virkkunen, Lucia Vuolo, Jörgen Warborn
Renew	José Ramón Bauzá Díaz, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Nicola Danti, Elsi Katainen, Caroline Nagtegaal, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Dominique Riquet
S&D	Andris Ameriks, Erik Bergkvist, Sara Cerdas, Ismail Ertug, Isabel García Muñoz, Maria Grapini, Bogusław Liberadzki, Vera Tax, Achille Variati, Petar Vitanov
The Left	Clare Daly, Elena Kountoura
Verts/ALE	Ignazio Corrao, Ciarán Cuffe, Karima Delli, Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg, Tilly Metz

1	-
ECR	Peter Lundgren

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

<b>Date adopted</b>	22.3.2023
<b>Result of final vote</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">+:</div> <div>22</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">-:</div> <div>0</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">0:</div> <div>0</div> </div>
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Gilles Boyer, Olivier Chastel, Caterina Chinnici, Ilana Cicurel, Corina Crețu, José Manuel Fernandes, Luke Ming Flanagan, Daniel Freund, Isabel García Muñoz, Monika Hohlmeier, Jean-François Jalkh, Alin Mituța, Markus Pieper, Petri Sarvamaa, Eleni Stavrou, Angelika Winzig, Lara Wolters, Tomáš Zdechovský
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Maria Grapini, Niclas Herbst, Mikuláš Peksa
<b>Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote</b>	Anne-Sophie Pelletier

## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

22	+
ID	Jean-François Jalkh
PPE	José Manuel Fernandes, Niclas Herbst, Monika Hohlmeier, Markus Pieper, Petri Sarvamaa, Eleni Stavrou, Angelika Winzig, Tomáš Zdechovský
Renew	Gilles Boyer, Olivier Chastel, Ilana Cicurel, Alin Mituța
S&D	Caterina Chinnici, Corina Crețu, Isabel García Muñoz, Maria Grapini, Lara Wolters
The Left	Luke Ming Flanagan, Anne-Sophie Pelletier
Vers/ALE	Daniel Freund, Mikuláš Peksa

0	-

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention