



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Senato della Repubblica for its Opinion on the Commission's Report on the Progress on the Implementation of the Common Approach on EU Decentralised Agencies {COM (2015) 179 final}.

The Commission welcomes the Senato della Repubblica's broad support for the Common Approach and the roadmap for its implementation.

The Common Approach on EU decentralised agencies, agreed in July 2012 by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, provides a more coherent and efficient framework for the functioning of agencies. The Commission committed to follow up on the Common Approach by means of a roadmap listing a number of initiatives for which action was needed on its side, and/or on the side of agencies, the Member States, the European Parliament and the Council. The Senato della Repubblica's opinion refers to the Commission's second report on the implementation of the roadmap. It focuses in particular on progress made since the adoption of the first report in December 2013, in respect of roadmap actions under the Commission's responsibility.

The Commission concurs with the Senato della Repubblica on the need to pay close attention to the administrative expenditures of agencies and recalls that as part of the agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission committed to reducing the number of staff in all institutions, bodies and agencies by 5% over the period 2013-2017. The Commission's approach to delivering on the 5% staff reduction in the agencies is set out in the Communication on the programming of human and financial resources of decentralised agencies 2014-2020 {COM(2013) 519}, which is based on an analysis of the scope for synergies and efficiency gains in each agency.

The Commission also recalls that an Inter-institutional Working Group on decentralised agencies' resources was set up as part of the agreement on the EU budget for 2014. The

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Working Group is tasked with looking at ways to define a clear development path for agencies to progressively reduce their staff levels by 5% over five years, including examining structural measures such as potential mergers, closures or transfers of tasks.

The Working Group will formulate recommendations which the European Parliament and the Council, as the two arms of the budgetary and legislative authority, as well as the Commission may take into account in their deliberations or proposals. The Working Group is expected to continue its work until 2018 by when the agreed staff reductions should be reached.

As concerns the involvement of the European Parliament in the scrutiny of the operations of agencies and their administrative expenditure, the Commission would like to recall that the European Parliament, together with the Council, approves the budget and staff numbers of each agency. The European Parliament is also a member of the above-mentioned Working Group on agencies. Moreover, the specialised committees of the European Parliament regularly meet with individual agencies to discuss their operations.

Concerning the political scrutiny of the operations of agencies to which the Senato della Repubblica refers, the Treaty of Lisbon has introduced the possibility for national Parliaments to participate in the political monitoring of Europol and the evaluation of Eurojust's activities. The Commission has proposed modalities for such scrutiny in its legislative proposals establishing these agencies and welcomes the adoption of the Europol proposal following the recent agreement reached by the EU co-legislators. Concerning the European Parliament, the Common Approach on EU decentralised agencies and the agencies' founding acts lay down the institutional, administrative and budgetary modalities for monitoring the work of EU Agencies.

The Commission notes that the Senato della Repubblica strongly urges the Commission to continue to pay close attention to the need to reduce expenditure on the bureaucracy of the agencies, assessing, on a case-by-case basis, the advisability of implementing synergies or amalgamations of agencies and, in any event, closely monitoring the audit procedures and the goal of more efficient use of resources, particularly for agencies financed by the EU budget.

The Commission takes the view that the audit arrangements are already efficient: With the entry into force of the new Framework Financial Regulation applicable to Agencies, the Commission's Internal Audit Service (IAS), which is carrying out the internal audit function within the Agencies, was able to seek further efficiency gains as it allows to direct scarce audit resources to those agencies which are assessed as more risky. It should also be noted that the overall volume of resources devoted by the IAS to audits in Agencies is proportionate to the risks involved and in absolute figures modest (less than 30 members of staff).

In addition, audit work is closely coordinated between the IAS and the external auditor, i.e. the European Court of Auditors, to avoid any overlaps or duplication of audit work.

It should also be noted that audits are a means to identify inefficiencies and waste of resources and the IAS has increased the number of performance audits, thus contributing to seeking efficiency gains in Agencies.

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Senato della Repubblica and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*