



TEXTS ADOPTED

P8_TA(2019)0243

Discharge 2017: Court of Auditors' special reports in the context of the 2017 Commission discharge

European Parliament resolution of 26 March 2019 on the Court of Auditors' special reports in the context of the 2017 Commission discharge (2018/2219(DEC))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the special reports of the Court of Auditors drawn up pursuant to the second subparagraph of Article 287(4) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2017¹,
- having regard to the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the financial year 2017 (COM(2018)0521 – C8-0370/2018)²,
- having regard to the Court of Auditors' annual report on the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2017, together with the institutions' replies³,
- having regard to the statement of assurance⁴ 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 2017, pursuant to Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to its decision of 26 March 2019 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2017, Section III – Commission⁵ and to its resolution with observations that forms an integral part of that decision,
- having regard to the Council's recommendation of 12 February 2019 on discharge to be given to the Commission in respect of the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2017 (05824/2019 – C8-0053/2019),

¹ OJ L 51, 28.2.2017.

² OJ C 348, 28.9.2018, p. 1.

³ OJ C 357, 4.10.2018, p. 1.

⁴ OJ C 357, 4.10.2018, p. 9.

⁵ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0242.

- having regard to Articles 317, 318 and 319 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to Article 106a of the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002¹, and in particular Articles 62, 164, 165 and 166 thereof,
 - 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 966/2012², and in particular Articles 69, 260, 261 and 262 thereof,
 - having regard to Rule 93 of and Annex IV to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A8-0088/2019),
- A. whereas, under Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the Commission is to execute the budget and manage programmes and, pursuant to Article 317 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, is to implement the budget in cooperation with the Member States, on its own responsibility, having regard to the principles of sound financial management;
- B. whereas the special reports of the Court of Auditors (the “Court”) provide information on issues of concern related to the implementation of funds, and are thus useful for Parliament in its role as discharge authority;
- C. whereas its observations on the special reports of the Court form an integral part of Parliament’s aforementioned decision of 26 March 2019 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2017, Section III – Commission;

Part I – Special Report No 15/2017 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Ex ante conditionalities and performance reserve in Cohesion: innovative but not yet effective instruments"

1. Notes the Court’s findings and conclusions, and regrets that the Commission has not taken them into consideration when preparing the proposals for respective regulations for the next programming period;
2. Regrets, in particular, that some of the criteria proposed by the Commission in its proposal for the Common Provisions Regulation 2021-2027 may not affect the

¹ OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1.

² OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1.

implementation of the related specific objectives and would not materially improve efficiency and effectiveness of the cohesion policy, contrary to the Court's recommendation in this regard;

3. Recalls that ex-ante conditionalities for the 2014-2020 period were introduced with the aim to facilitate implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) by ensuring that the necessary prerequisites for the effective and efficient use of Union support are in place;
4. Draws attention, however, that the Court questioned whether the introduction of the ex-ante conditionalities had effectively led to changes on the ground despite, in the Court's opinion, having provided a framework for assessing the Member States' readiness to implement cohesion policy;
5. Underlines, in case ex-ante conditionalities are maintained and replaced by enabling conditions in the next programming period, that they have to be appropriate for the national and regional context, incentive-oriented and conducive to smooth implementation of regional development objectives, as well as excluding overlaps and room for ambiguity, and differing interpretations;
6. Notes that around 75 % of all applicable ex-ante conditionalities were fulfilled at the time of adoption of ESIF programmes, that 86 % were fulfilled at the beginning of 2017 and that 99 % by May 2018, demonstrating that the fulfilment of ex-ante conditionalities was longer than the period envisaged under Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (the 'Common Provisions Regulation') and that by the December 2016 deadline, around 15 % of ex-ante conditionalities remained unfulfilled;
7. Acknowledges that ex-ante conditionalities have represented an additional administrative burden and that, as recognised by the Commission, have been one of the possible reasons for the registered delays in implementation of the ESIF 2014-2020; acknowledges, as well, that although there have been no cases of suspension of payments to programmes by the Commission for non-fulfilment of ex-ante conditionalities by the end of 2016, managing authorities concerned refrained from submitting payment claims, thus imposing a kind of self-suspension and delaying implementation with the result that the absorption at the end of the fourth year of the current period (2017) was significantly lower than the absorption rate on the corresponding date (end 2010) of the previous period 2007-2013 (17 % and 41 % respectively), thus further putting into question the added value of ex-ante conditionalities as an instrument introduced with the aim to facilitate cohesion policy implementation;
8. Underlines, as regards the time until the end of the current programming period, that it is crucial for the Commission to provide the necessary assistance to Member States in order to fulfil remaining ex-ante conditionalities, as well as to implement in practice the respective provisions in particular with regard to public procurement and State aid;
9. Notes the Court's view that the inclusion of the performance reserve in the performance framework was intended to provide an effective incentive to reach the intended outputs and results;
10. Agrees with the Court's opinion that, overall, the 2014-2020 performance framework is

not significantly more results-oriented than similar arrangements in previous periods, remaining essentially focussed on spending and project outputs, with the large majority of indicators that constitute the basis for allocating the performance reserve representing output indicators (57,1 %), financial indicators (33,4 %) and key implementation steps (9,2 %), with - regrettably - only marginal use of result indicators (0,3 %);

11. Observes, in this regard, that as stipulated in Annex II to the Common Provisions Regulation, milestones for intermediate targets on implementation of results indicators were envisaged for application in the performance framework only “where appropriate”, in contrast to the mandatory inclusion of milestones regarding implementation of output indicators closely linked to the supported policy interventions;
12. Is of the opinion that the time having been set for 2019 for undertaking the review of performance of the programmes for each Member States has resulted in preventing countries and regions that have achieved their milestones from accessing the funds allocated to them before the last year of the period, having been blocked in the performance reserve; calls, therefore, for providing the possibility for an earlier performance review and accession to such funds at an earlier date;
13. Calls on the Commission, in case the performance reserve is continued in the post-2020 period, to base its proposal on the lessons drawn from the 2014-2020 period, and to propose the corresponding revision of the performance framework in order to create real incentives for a results orientated system; such a system should also provide the necessary balance between simplification for unhindered project implementation and the necessary provisions for sound financial management and control;
14. Recalls that cohesion policy is primarily about support and solidarity, thus enabling and incentive instruments being more appropriate than disciplinary and sanctioning innovations;

Part II – Special Report No 19/2017 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Import procedures: shortcomings in the legal framework and an ineffective implementation impact the financial interests of the EU"

15. Calls on the Commission to provide information on the gap in customs duty collection identified in the Commission’s Traditional Own Resources (TOR) inspections and complete analysis based on that data;
16. Calls on the Commission to provide information about the amounts of customs claimed from the Member States and collected in favour of the Union budget; believes the current system of incentives for customs controls can be improved;
17. Calls on the Commission to prepare an analysis on actions required by the Member States in the Mutual Assistance communications, as well as the status of achievement of the main goal of having equivalent results;
18. Calls on the Commission to provide an assessment of the quantitative results of implementing of the Union programmes “Customs 2020” and “Hercule III”, responsible for financing the exchange of information and cooperation among customs in the protection of Union’s financial interests during the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF);

19. Calls on the Commission to analyse the level of abuse of the low-value consignment reliefs on e-commerce trade of goods with third countries;

Part III – Special Report No 20/2017 of the Court of Auditors entitled "EU-funded loan guarantee instruments: positive results but better targeting of beneficiaries and coordination with national schemes needed"

20. Welcomes the Court's special report, its findings and recommendations;
21. Welcomes the fact that the Commission accepted the majority of the recommendations and will act upon them;
22. Is of the opinion, together with the Court, that financial instruments should be used only if commercial loans are unobtainable because the project is too small or too risky, or the borrower cannot offer the necessary collateral; urges the Commission to develop a methodology for analysing the effect of guarantees on the loan supply, competition between banks and business innovation activity and for analysing the split of implicit subsidy between supplier and beneficiary;
23. Draws the attention of the Commission and the Court to the fact that the Loan Guarantee Facility and the InnovFin SME Guarantee Facility creates potentially intermediaries' loan portfolios worth EUR 24,42 billion, of which the discharge authority knows very little, as the system is highly complex and opaque;
24. Reiterates Parliament's position as expressed in its resolution of 27 April 2017 with observations forming an integral part of the decisions on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2015, Section III – Commission and executive agencies¹:
 - "20. Points out the increasing use of financial instruments principally composed of loans, equity instruments, guarantees and risk sharing instruments under indirect management for the 2014-2020 period, and points out further that the European Investment Bank Group managed almost all of the financial instruments under indirect management; does not believe there is enough information available for an assessment of what these instruments have achieved, especially with regard to their social and environmental impact; emphasises that financial instruments can supplement grants but should not replace them;"
25. Reminds Commissioner Oettinger of his intention to bring the various shadow budgets, in the long run, back under the roof of the Union budget; considers that this would hugely increase democratic accountability; calls on the Commission to draft a communication on how this can be done by June 2019;

Part IV – Special Report No 22/2017 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Election Observation Missions – efforts made to follow up recommendations but better monitoring needed"

26. Welcomes the Court's special report and sets out its observations and recommendations

¹ OJ L 252, 29.9.2017, p. 28.

below;

27. Recalls that the EU Election Observation Missions (EOMs) constitute a highly visible instrument of Union foreign policy as well as a strategic parliamentary objective, since the Chief Observer of the EOMs is a Member of Parliament, and an instrument for promoting democratisation and improving election process;
28. Believes that election observation activities - properly, fairly and objectively executed - play a key role in public diplomacy by offering impartial assessment and constructive recommendations which can be followed up by national stakeholders, including civil society organisations;
29. Reminds that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model to manage well the issue and that flexibility should be considered taking into account of the specificities of any host country;
30. Is of the opinion that direct stakeholder consultation on the possible recommendations of the EOM, before the finalisation of the report, is questionable and should not be an option under any circumstances for a Chief Observer with regard to the independence of the EOM;
31. Is of the opinion that the follow-up to EOM should be further enhanced within political dialogues including the participation of Parliament *ad hoc* delegations and, by possibly exploring new ways such as electoral dialogues for enriching the overall electoral observation process, in particular the factual assessment of an election process;
32. Invites the European External Action Service to follow as much as possible the effective implementation in third countries of the EOM's recommendations, while respecting the sovereignty of each country and involving Parliament, and also by allocating a sufficient level of human resources from Union's delegations with adequate technical expertise to this important political task, necessary in some areas identified by the EOM;
33. Believes that it would be useful to consider involving the Chief Observer at an early stage in setting up the EOM core team (particularly for certain functions such as the political advisor, the electoral expert or the deputy chief of the EOM) with the view to facilitate rapid, more efficient and consistent deployment of EOMs;
34. Considers that the creation of a database, in that context, for the EOM missions is a valuable operational option to consolidate the credibility and transparency of this Union instrument and process on mid-long term;
35. Requests, as a general matter, to put more emphasis on the sustainability of European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights-funded actions, particularly in the context of EOMs, where there is significant scope for stepping up the transfer of knowledge to local actors and improving the follow-up to recommendations;

Part V – Special Report No 23/2017 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Single Resolution Board: Work on a challenging Banking Union task started, but still a long way to go"

36. Welcomes the Court's special report, and endorses its remarks and recommendations;

37. Criticises the Single Resolution Board (SRB) for not having provided all documentation requested in the course of this audit; reminds the SRB that the TFEU allows the Court full access to such documentation of the auditee as is necessary for the audit;
38. Deplores that the SRB has been understaffed since it became operationally independent; calls on the SRB to accelerate its recruitment efforts, in particular by engaging resolution and policy experts, including at senior level;
39. Is concerned about the current Memorandum of Understanding between the SRB and the European Central Bank (ECB) which does not ensure that the SRB receives all information from the ECB on a consistent and timely manner; calls on the SRB to engage into discussion with the ECB to improve the situation;

Part VI – Special Report No 1/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) - time for better targeting"

40. Welcomes the Court's special report, its findings and the Commission's readiness to implement the recommendations;
41. Welcomes that in some cases, JASPERS' efforts have led to progress in Member States' ability to handle project preparation and the projects have been of good quality as confirmed by their fast approval by the Commission;
42. Asks the Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) to ensure that the programme is implemented in such a way that it brings better results with regard to administrative capacity of Member States;
43. Observes that between 2006 and 2016 the actual costs for JASPERS and the Commission's financial contribution initially increased and subsequently remained stable at about EUR 30 million per annum, with a Commission contribution fluctuating between 70 and 80 %;
44. Believes that beneficiaries should participate in the costs for the JASPERS at an appropriate level;
45. Is of the opinion that JASPERS task "(...) to provide the Member States that joined the Union in 2004 or later with independent free-of-charge advice to help them to prepare high-quality proposals for large investment projects for funding through the Union's Cohesion and European Regional Development Funds. (...)" should logically have become lighter as newer Member States adjust to Union systems and procedures;
46. Is very much concerned about the Court's observation: "VIII. The EIB was unwilling to provide information on JASPERS's real costs, and the Commission was only partially able to demonstrate the plausibility of the standard costs of JASPERS used up to 2014 for staff members provided by the EIB";
47. Insists that the EIB makes available, to the Court all relevant information for its audit work; asks the Commission to undertake any necessary measures to ensure that the EIB cooperates in this respect;

Part VII – Special Report No 2/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "The operational efficiency of the ECB's crisis management for banks"

48. Welcomes the Court's special report, its recommendations and the Commission's readiness to implement all but one recommendation;
49. Is deeply concerned by the fact that the ECB did not grant the Court access to all documents or information requested which the Court deemed necessary to carry out its task, and calls on the ECB to remedy this policy;
50. Is of the opinion that the ECB's full cooperation is absolutely necessary, should be forthcoming, and would have enhanced transparency and accountability;
51. Recalls with regret that the Court is not the main external auditor of the ECB, and that the Court is only entitled to examine the operational efficiency of the management of the (Article 27 of Protocol No 4 annexed to the TEU and the TFEU);
52. Points to an apparent inter-institutional imbalance: whereas the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) plays a prominent role in supervising the ECB's activities (Article 35 of the Protocol No 4), the Court was only granted a modest role in verifying the bank's financial management (to examine the operational efficiency of the management), to the detriment of transparency and accountability;
53. Calls therefore on Member States and the Union institutions to develop the role of the Court vis-à-vis the ECB further during the next revision of the Treaties;

Part VIII – Special Report No 3/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Audit of the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP)"

54. Notes the Court's special report, its recommendations and the Commission's readiness to implement the majority of them;
55. Points out that the MIP is part of the European Semester exercise, which starts with the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and the Alert Mechanism Report (AMR) in autumn of the year n-1; if the AMR, based on a scoreboard of indicators and thresholds, signals that a specific problem might arise, the respective Member State is submitted to an in-depth review (IDR);
56. Notes that, if, on the basis of the outcomes of the IDR, the Commission finds that "macroeconomic imbalances" exist, it informs the European Parliament, the Council and the Eurogroup; the Council may then, on recommendation from the Commission, address a recommendation to the Member State concerned (in accordance with procedure set out in Article 121(2) TFEU); these preventive MIP-recommendations form part of the country-specific recommendations (CSRs);
57. Concludes, together with the Court, that the Council recommendations are subject to political weighting; that this seems to be the rule, rather than the exception;

Part IX – Special Report No 4/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "EU Assistance to Myanmar/Burma"

58. Welcomes the Court's special report and sets out its observations and recommendations below;
59. Recognises the difficult political situation and complex operational challenges that the EEAS, the Commission and the Union delegation have to deal with, in particular in the states of Rakhine, Kachin and Shan;
60. Calls on the EEAS and the Commission to press ahead with the establishment of a long-term, comprehensive and ambitious development cooperation programme, using all the instruments at their disposal to help Myanmar develop and fine-tune its comprehensive development strategy, while at the same time taking steps to establish a national results framework with tools to measure the impact and sustainability of assistance;
61. Calls for a suitable policy mix to be defined with regard to Union intervention and in the selection of key development sectors on the basis of regular, sector-specific needs assessments, with a focus on fostering the viability, complementarity and sustainability of projects; calls for the results of the strategic country evaluation that is to be completed in 2018 to be forwarded to Parliament as soon as possible;
62. Deems it necessary, furthermore, to ensure there is enough flexibility in the design and implementation of support schemes, bearing in mind the particularly difficult political and operational situation, so as to consolidate national capacities more systematically and to ensure appropriate geographical coverage, taking account of the country's actual absorption capacity;
63. Regrets the fact that the Commission has not sufficiently defined the regional geographical priorities of its assistance; notes that the first study on the specific needs of Rakhine State was carried out in 2017; takes the view that a specific assessment of Rakhine State should have been the priority of the Union delegation when it arrived in 2013;
64. Calls for capacity-building in the public sector and within institutional structures so as to create a more responsible framework for governance, with more strategic support being provided for the country's key audit institutions;
65. Points out that 'state-building' must be at the heart of the Union's development strategy, in line with the principles for intervention in fragile situations, with a focus on institution-building, transparency and the efficient management of public finances, combined with enhanced political dialogue across the board;
66. Supports the consolidation of cooperation on the ground with international partners to increase the cost-effectiveness of multi-donor actions, as effective coordination among donors is still an essential prerequisite with a view to preventing the duplication and fragmentation of assistance;
67. Regrets the weaknesses identified in the exchange of information between DG DEVCO and DG ECHO in the states of Rakhine and Kachin; regrets the fact that a procedure for the exchange of information between the two DGs was not introduced until September 2016; with that in mind, calls for humanitarian and development aid to be dovetailed more effectively, with a stronger link being forged between relief, rehabilitation and development by means of a permanent inter-service LRRD (linking of relief,

rehabilitation and development) framework; takes the view that integrated approaches, with clearly stated coordination targets and a coherent country strategy need to be put in place between DGs ECHO and DEVCO wherever possible, alongside the sharing of best practices; with that in mind, calls for the LRRD approach to be mainstreamed throughout the funding cycle;

68. Calls, furthermore, for the Commission to give more consideration to linking and moving from short-term humanitarian activities to long-term development interventions, and to establish coherent coordination, not only among the various development stakeholders on the ground, but also with national priorities by means of a common strategy and framework for humanitarian aid and development;
69. Recommends that improvements be made in monitoring the implementation of projects and actions by improving the justifications given in programming and management documents, for allocations by priority sector, with a view to considering, where necessary, any readjustments in aid required in order to meet new needs between now and 2020, while at the same time seeking to raise the profile of Union actions; takes the view that donor visibility and adequate project management information are important in ensuring that all contributions are recognised and that accountability is maintained;
70. Regrets that fact that the largest component of the Joint Peace Fund has not been set aside for Rakhine State; takes the view that this represents a genuine missed opportunity for this particularly vulnerable region; calls on the Commission to expand the scope of the fund so that it covers Rakhine State;
71. Points out that where budget support is selected as one of the significant ways of implementing aid, the Commission must, in conjunction with other donors:
 - provide adequate support for capacity-building and focus on the key functions of public finance management, including accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms;
 - support the timely preparation of an appropriate public finance management reform programme;
 - where appropriate, lay down shorter-term measures for safeguarding Union funds against waste, leakage and inefficiency;

Part X – Special Report No 5/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Renewable energy for sustainable rural development: significant potential synergies, but mostly unrealised"

72. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take into account the circumstances and specific needs of each rural community and economy, consider potential positive and negative policy impacts, and ensure that rural areas receive equitable policy outcomes when designing their future renewable energy policy; in order to do so, the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, should develop a relevant mechanism that could be inspired by the rural-proofing mechanism as envisaged under "Policy Orientation 1" of the Cork 2.0 Declaration of 2016;
73. Calls on the Commission to introduce this tool in the consultation process with Member States on the integrated national energy and climate plans, which have to be notified to

the Commission by 1 January 2019 and guide Member States on how to apply it;

74. Calls on the Commission, together with the co-legislators, to design the future policy framework for bioenergy in a way that provides for sufficient safeguards against the unsustainable sourcing of biomass for energy; the framework should acknowledge and address the sustainability risks of boosting the use of bioenergy through targets and financial support schemes, and ensure that the associated environmental and socio-economic risks are mitigated;
75. Calls on the Commission to set out what European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) investments in renewable energy should achieve; how they should add value in rural areas; and how the EAFRD should complement the existing Union and national funding schemes without risking to become simply another funding source for renewable energy with no priority given to rural development when designing their future rural development policy;
76. In this context, calls on the Commission to use relevant good practice experience found during the Court's audit (evaluation of renewable energy in rural area, third party energy supply projects financed under the EAFRD, own use of renewable energy projects), as well as similar experience described in the OECD study 'Linking Renewable Energy to Rural Development';
77. Calls on Member States, with regard to EAFRD support for renewable energy, to provide the Commission with pertinent information on programme achievements of renewable energy projects in their enhanced annual implementation reports of 2019; this information should allow the Commission to know how much of EAFRD expenditure has been paid out for renewable energy projects, the energy capacity installed or the energy produced from such projects; calls on the Commission to define the various types of indicators more accurately when preparing the post-2020 programming period;
78. Calls on the Commission to remind Member States to apply relevant selection procedures, in order to give support only to viable renewable energy projects with a clear additional benefit for sustainable rural development;

Part XI – Special Report No 6/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Free Movement of Workers – the fundamental freedom ensured but better targeting of EU funds would aid worker mobility"

79. Welcomes the Court's special report, and calls on the Commission and Member States to implement the Court's recommendations;
80. Underlines that free movement of workers is a fundamental principle of the Union and one of the biggest advantages of the single market as long as it constitutes an advantage for both sides of the working relation and it ensures protection of workers' rights and the abolition of any discrimination based on nationality between workers of Member States as regards employment, remuneration and other conditions of work and employment;
81. Observes with concern that many obstacles for free and fair mobility of workers in the Union persist and that actions undertaken by the Commission and Member States cannot fully address the problems faced by workers who want to work in other Member

States, such as insufficient information about workers' rights related to employment and working conditions and to social security rights, but also inadequate measures to prevent discrimination against mobile workers and to ensure efficient enforcement of their rights;

82. Takes note of the Court's observations that the Commission has put in place tools to inform citizens of their rights and has set up systems to report discrimination against freedom of movement of workers; is concerned, however, that the Court found that, despite these tools and systems, the Commission does not have information about the level of awareness regarding such tools and about the scale of discrimination against the freedom of movement at Union level;
83. Notes that some of the tools put in place by the Commission to support labour mobility are often unknown to the potential beneficiaries and is concerned that in a number of Member States only a small fraction of job vacancies are published on the European Job Mobility Portal (EURES); draws attention that these tools are financed through the Union budget and that the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSI) under MFF 2014-2020 provide possibilities for financing of measures and activities concerning labour mobility at Union and national level, but which, however, are not being sufficiently utilised;
84. Asks the Commission and Member States to use the available funding opportunities to implement measures ensuring that the tools provide complete information about existing vacancies and workers' rights, to increase the awareness of citizens about these tools and the information which they offer, and to monitor the level of awareness in order to further enhanced it; encourages, in this regard, the Commission to promote the advertising of the labour mobility practicalities, namely through new technologies, web search motors and publicity and insists for enhanced cooperation between the Commission and Member States; invites in particular the respective national authorities and coordinators from EURES to work more actively with employers to promote EURES and the opportunities of job mobility across the Union; calls, also, on the Commission and Member States to ensure proper complementarity and additionality between actions funded by the ESF and EaSI;
85. Shares the Court's opinion that information and an understanding of the scale and types of existing discrimination of free movement of workers are necessary in order to effectively address such cases; urges, therefore, the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, to undertake measures to improve the effectiveness of the existing systems in order to identify cases of discrimination and to undertake further steps to prevent and eliminate obstacles and discrimination in relation to fair labour mobility;
86. Stresses that the lack of portability of social security contributions deprives workers from certain social rights and constitutes a disincentive to workers' mobility; calls to the Commission to consider coming up with relevant legislative proposals and encourages putting in place incentives to the Member States willing to implement portability of pension rights, in full respect of the existing legal framework;
87. Notes that mutual recognition of university diplomas and professional qualifications by Member States remains a challenge and an important obstacle to labour mobility; underlines that this process should be easy, affordable and user-friendly for both citizens and national administrations involved; encourages the Commission to promote

exchange of best practices among Member States within Council working groups and, when appropriate, in OECD platforms;

88. Is concerned with the lack of comparability of data provided by Member States concerning labour mobility; asks the Commission to provide guidelines to Member States regarding which data need to be collected for what purpose; insists also that the Commission improve the collection and presentation of the statistical data for free movement of workers and particularly for the problems faced by mobile workers in countries different from their own;
89. Regrets that matching of supply and demand for labour as well as matching of skills on the labour market across Member States continues to be an objective to be achieved in labour mobility policy; calls on Member States to fully utilize the opportunities provided by the ESF, EaSI and EURES for promotion of labour mobility in order to lower unemployment in certain Member States and regions and to address mismatches of skills and labour shortages elsewhere;
90. Notes with concern the problems related to requirements for cross-border mobility projects funded in the framework of the EsSI and calls on the Commission to address these issues in its next calls for proposals by including mandatory result indicators which would allow to measure in practice the value added of Union funding and the impact from the support provided;
91. Given the Court's findings regarding the necessity for additional efforts to be made to strengthen Union labour mobility and to overcome existing obstacles to it, calls on the Commission and Member States to ensure adequate financing in the 2021-2027 period for measures on fair labour mobility which will allow the continuation and smooth functioning of the relevant tools and systems in this area; asks also the Commission and Member States to ensure the continuation and increased effectiveness of measures and activities which facilitate free movement of workers both through better targeting of financial resources and through reinforced cooperation and coordination among responsible Commission services, national authorities and all relevant stakeholders at Union and national level;

Part XII – Special Report No 7/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "EU pre-accession assistance to Turkey: Only limited results so far"

92. Is of the opinion that from the 2018 pre-accession assistance (IPA) programme onwards, the Commission should better target IPA funds in areas where reforms are overdue and necessary for credible progress towards accession to the Union, in particular for the independence and impartiality of justice, fight against high level corruption and organised crime, reinforcement of press freedom, prevention of conflicts of interest and strengthening external audit and civil society;
93. Asks the Commission in its next update of its sector approach assessments to comprehensively cover all the key features of Turkey's donor coordination, a sector budget analysis and, in particular, its performance assessment framework;
94. Given the impact that backsliding is already having on project sustainability in Turkey, calls on the Commission to increase the use of political and project conditionality by:

- making proposals to the IPA II Committee to adjust total IPA II allocations for year ‘N’, including re-directing or reducing IPA II funds in order to address cases of backsliding in the rule of law and governance sectors identified in its annual Turkey Report in year ‘N-1’;
 - deciding, by the end of 2017 and 2020, whether to award the performance reward to Turkey. This decision should accurately reflect the progress made towards enlargement, efficient IPA implementation and the achievement of good results;
 - making progressively more use of the direct management mode to address fundamental needs where there is a lack of political will, in particular, for the fight against high level corruption and organised crime, reinforcement of press freedom, prevention of conflicts of interest and strengthening civil society;
 - for new projects and, when applicable, setting conditions in the form of minimum requirements to support the timely delivery of expected outputs and sustainability. When these conditions are not met, this should lead to corrective measures (e.g. suspension of payment or project cancellation);
95. Encourages the Commission to widen the coverage of its reports of results orientated monitoring (ROM) concerning Union-funded operations in Turkey and improve the relevance and reliability of its project indicators by including the availability of baseline data, when applicable;
96. Is of the opinion that under IPA II, the Commission should apply indirect management selectively, taking into account the volume of funds involved, the complexity of the projects to be prepared and tendered by the Turkish authorities, and the capacity of the agency responsible for contracting and financing of Union-funded programmes ;

Part XIII – Special Report No 8/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "EU support for productive investments in businesses - greater focus on durability needed"

97. Welcomes the Court's special report, in particular as a timely drawing of attention to the need for additional monitoring and guarantee mechanisms required at both Union and Member State level in order to ensure durability of project results; highlights in this connection the Court's findings that in the operating programmes examined the specific needs of the businesses in different sectors and of differing sizes (market failures) were not properly identified and the achievement of long-lasting results was not a priority;
98. Considers that the role of productive investments from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) should be enhanced as a key factor for growth, sustainable jobs, reducing disparities and inequalities in the context of the forthcoming development of Cohesion policy for the next programming period, with the aim of achieving upward convergence together with economic, social and territorial cohesion between Member States and regions;
99. Notes that while a number of the audited projects have respected the relevant rules and have achieved the envisaged outputs they were not able to provide proof as to the effectiveness of the projects and that lasting improvements had been achieved;
100. Observes, in this regard, that for the 2014-2020 period the Common Provisions

Regulation (Article 71) did not include provisions which define the achievement of results and their sustainability as criteria for durability of operations; therefore, draws attention to the Court's finding regarding the substantial difference between measuring outputs rather than results from the point of view of assessing project durability;

101. Is of the opinion that, in order to ensure real added value from productive investments, it is necessary to include the achievement of results as a core consideration in evaluating project durability; strongly supports, in this regard, the Court's definition of durability as "the ability of a project to maintain its benefits for a long time after the project has been completed";
102. Regrets that the Commission has not taken into consideration in its legislative proposals for regulations for the 2021-2027 period the explicit recommendation of the Court concerning clearly prioritising not only outputs, but also the necessary indicators for measuring results;
103. Shares the Court's concern regarding ensuring durability of investments in SMEs in light of their limited business capacity, high rates of failures and/or particular vulnerability to adverse economic conditions; invites in this regard the Commission and Member States to focus attention on ways and means to promote successful and lasting associations between interested SMEs, taking into consideration both positive and problematic experiences in the past;
104. Furthermore, considers that future productive investments would achieve lasting results if integrated into an updated comprehensive industrial strategy as part of the future cohesion policy; is of the opinion that in such a way productive investments should materially contribute to overcoming severe disparities in levels of industrial development between Member States and regions as described by the 6th and 7th cohesion reports;
105. Calls on the Commission to fully engage in implementing the Court's recommendations and in providing Member States with timely and appropriate guidance, including by issuing clear and transparent guidelines on ways to define and apply criteria for project durability, as well as in using all available mechanisms, such as approval of operational programmes, monitoring and control, in order to encourage Member States to implement their corresponding responsibilities, while avoiding additional administrative burden for beneficiaries or respective national authorities;
106. Overall, calls on the Commission to put greater focus on project durability in the preparatory and negotiation phase for the future programming period, establishing a clear framework of earmarks and targets; and urges Member States' authorities to observe and implement the Court's recommendations and to work together with the Commission to examine the existing practices and establish common rules and procedures aimed at ensuring durability of project results;

Part XIV – Special Report No 9/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Public Private Partnerships in the EU: Widespread shortcomings and limited benefits"

107. Is of the opinion that the Commission and Member States should not promote a more intensive and widespread use of public private partnerships (PPP) until the issues

identified in this report are addressed and the following recommendations are successfully implemented; in particular, improving the institutional and legal frameworks and project management and increasing assurance that the choice of the PPP option is the one that provides most value-for-money and that PPP projects are likely to be managed in a successful manner; stresses that failing to identify and allocate project risks correctly may have financial implications for the public partner and hamper the achievement of the project objectives;

108. In order to better share the cost of delays and re-negotiations between the partners, with the aim to mitigate the financial impact of delays attributable to the public partner and contract re-negotiations on the final cost of PPPs borne by the public partner, recommends that:
 - Member States identify and propose standard contractual provisions that limit the amounts of possible extra costs to be paid by the public partner;
 - Member States assess any early contract re-negotiation to ensure that consequent costs borne by the public partner are duly justified and in line with value-for-money principles;
109. In order to ensure that the PPP option is the one that maximises value-for-money and achieves its potential benefits, recommends that:
 - Member States base the selection of the PPP option on sound comparative analyses, such as the public sector comparator, and that there are appropriate approaches to ensure that the PPP option is selected only if it maximises value-for-money also under pessimistic scenarios;
 - the Commission ensures that the Court has full access to the necessary information in order to assess the choice of the procurement option and the related procurement by the public authorities even where Union support is provided directly to private entities through financial instruments;
110. In order to ensure that Member States have the necessary administrative capability and clear PPP policies and strategies are in place to implement successful Union-supported PPP projects, recommends that:
 - the Member States establish clear PPP policies and strategies that clearly identify the role that PPPs are expected to play within their infrastructure investment policies, with a view to identifying the sectors in which PPPs are most suitable and establishing possible limits to the extent to which PPPs can be effectively used;
 - the Commission proposes legislative amendments to concentrate financial support to future PPPs in sectors that it considers of high strategic relevance and compatible with the long-term commitments of PPPs, such as the Core TEN-T network;
111. In order mitigate the risk of bias towards selecting the PPP option, to promote further transparency and to ensure that PPPs can be effectively supported by Union funds, recommends that:

- the Commission links the Union-support to PPP projects to the assurance that the choice of the PPP option was justified by value-for-money considerations and thus not unduly influenced by considerations relating to budgetary constraints or to their statistical treatment;
- Member States improve transparency by publishing periodic lists of PPP projects, including sufficient and meaningful data on the assets financed, their future commitments and their balance-sheet treatment, while preserving the protection of confidential and commercially sensitive data;
- the Commission assesses the additional complexity of Union-blended PPP projects in view of further actions aiming at simplifying relevant rules and procedures of Union programmes;

Part XV – Special Report No 10/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Basic Payment Scheme for farmers – operationally on track, but limited impact on simplification, targeting and the convergence of aid levels"

112. Asks the Commission to ensure the appropriate implementation of key controls by Member States and that Member States correct BPS entitlements where values are significantly affected by the non-application of the relevant rules or the absence of up-to-date land use information;
113. Calls on the Commission to:
 - review and take stock of the effectiveness of its systems for disseminating information among Member States, with a view to maximising their consistent interpretation and application of the BPS legal framework;
 - assess options for future legislation that would enable it to enforce the transmission of key information by Member States on the implementation of direct support schemes;
 - clarify the respective roles of the Commission and of the certification bodies in checking the existence of effective key controls and the central calculation of BPS entitlements;
114. Calls on the Commission, before making any proposal for the future design of the common agricultural policy, to assess the income position for all groups of farmers and analyse their income support need, taking into account the current distribution of Union and national support, the agricultural potential of land, differences of areas mainly dedicated to agricultural production or maintenance, cost and viability of farming, income from food and other agricultural production as well as from non-agricultural sources, the factors for efficiency and competitiveness of farms and the value of the public goods that farmers provide; the Commission should link, from the outset, the proposed measures to appropriate operational objectives and baselines against which the performance of the support could be compared;

Part XVI – Special Report No 11/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "New options for financing rural development projects: Simpler but not focused on results"

115. Welcomes the Court's special report, and endorses a number of its remarks and recommendations;
116. Regrets that the new simplified cost options are only used for a marginal part of rural development spending and that they are not enhancing the potential of this source of funding, although simplification should be a way to encourage beneficiaries to engage in projects;
117. Regrets that there are very few indicators at hand allowing to assess whether the objectives of this measure were attained or not;
118. Calls on the Member States as well as the beneficiaries and their associations to fully exploit the possibilities offered by the system of simplified cost options in rural development;
119. Recalls that simplification must allow appropriate levels of control, the responsibility of which must be clearly defined;
120. Recalls that simplification must be beneficial to both administrations and projects bearers;

Part XVII – Special Report No 12/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Broadband in the EU Member States: despite progress, not all the Europe 2020 targets will be met"

121. Welcomes the Court's special report and sets out its observations;
122. Welcomes the Commission's ambition to invest in the future digital transformation as evident from the proposal for a MFF 2021-2027;
123. Acknowledges the significant legislative initiative of the Commission in the field of digitalisation and draws attention to initiatives such as "WiFi4EU" that supports the installation of state-of-the-art Wi-Fi equipment in the centres of community life;
124. Notes the Commission's efforts in improving the broadband coverage across the Union but regrets that many rural areas are still broadband blackspots;
125. Acknowledges the Commission's efforts in significantly increasing and diversifying funding sources in support to broadband connectivity; recalls that for the 2007-2013 programming period the Union invested EUR 2,74 billion, while for the current programming period Union investments amount to almost EUR 15 billion, which represents an increase of over five times;
126. Is convinced that high-speed internet connections are an essential element of the Digital Single Market and can therefore give Member States a competitive edge in economic, social and educational matters; good internet speed and access are crucial for our lives, business and national governments;
127. Underlines that investments in broadband will help promote social inclusion and fight against depopulation in rural and isolated areas; rural and remoter areas should have access to broadband in the interest of creating a homogenous single market;

128. Welcomes in this regard the Commission proposal on revised Union telecom rules, which aims to triggering investment, in particular in economically less viable areas characterised by low population density or in rural areas;
129. Agrees with the Court's recommendation that Member States should develop revised plans for the period after 2020;
130. Calls therefore on all Member States to make sure that not only the Europe 2020 objectives for broadband are met in good time, but also the Commission's "Gigabit Society 2025" targets; all urban areas and all major terrestrial transport paths to have uninterrupted 5G coverage, and all European households, SMEs and local public administrations in rural or urban areas, in particular in depopulated and sparsely populated areas, to have access to internet connectivity offering a download speed of at least 100 Mbps, upgradable to Gigabit speed;
131. Shares the Court's view that Member States should review the mandate of their national regulatory authorities in accordance with the revised Union regulatory framework for telecommunications, so they are able to impose their recommendations and remedies (including penalties for non-compliance) on operators;
132. Believes that financial support to broadband should represent a balanced mix of grants and financial instruments, where investments should be guided through intervention logic and take into consideration regional and market realities;
133. Is convinced that support to broadband through financial instruments is predominantly focused on economically viable regions and well-developed local markets. Notes that grants are more suitable for rural, mountainous and remote areas, where private investments and operations with financial instruments are riskier by default;
134. Shares the Court's view that the Commission should collect and disseminate best practices in the area of broadband, more specifically on planning investments and implementation of projects;
135. Is convinced that the Commission will continue clarifying for Members States the application of the State aid for broadband and welcomes the Commission's intention to include further information with regard to the 100 Mbps and Gigabit society targets;

Part XVIII – Special Report No 13/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Tackling radicalisation that leads to terrorism: the Commission addressed the needs of Member States, but with some shortfalls in coordination and evaluation"

136. Welcomes the Court's special report, endorses its recommendations and sets out its observations and recommendations below;
137. Calls on the Commission to examine how the management of the actions addressing radicalisation can be simplified, for example by integrating the number of funds on which these actions rely, or by concentrating management which is currently done by eight of its directorates-general, as well as by Europol, Eurojust and Member States, with a view to improve coordination and efficiency;

138. Recognises that performance based budgeting may be a particular challenge in the case of actions aimed at preventing radicalisation, but emphasises that indicators related to, for example, the number of experts participating in meetings, are not sufficient in themselves to measure performance; calls upon the Commission to examine, in particular, why participation levels in its activities vary considerably between Member States and to concentrate on those activities that are relevant for most Member States;
139. Calls on the Commission to keep Parliament informed about the follow up on the interim report of the High-Level Commission Expert Group on radicalisation, where it concerns the discussions with Member States on how to better evaluate relevant programmes and interventions;
140. Recognises that preventing radicalisation often requires in-depth knowledge of the situation at local, i.e. neighbourhood levels, and that this type of information cannot be generalised, as each neighbourhood may have its own challenges and opportunities; points in this regard to the important role of local educational institutions, local social and charitable organisations and local authorities, including police officers assigned to a specific neighbourhood; calls on the Commission and Member States to bear this in mind, when exchanging best practices and to avoid stereotyping or generalisations;
141. Emphasises that the efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission's activities with respect to helping Member States in preventing radicalisation are likely to be highest, when they are referring to cross-border cases, in particular, when it concerns information provided through the Internet; supports the de-confliction procedure of Europol's European Union Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) and the decision to focus the EU IRU on online propaganda which terrorists use to attract as many followers as possible; calls upon the Commission to improve its methods for measuring the effectiveness of the EU IRU by examining how much terrorist content has been removed by internet companies at EU IRU's request alone, without also having been flagged by national IRUs, civil society or the internet companies themselves, as well as by developing methods to demonstrate effectiveness in terms of the amount of terrorist propaganda that remains available on the internet, for example because the removed propaganda is simply re-uploaded or moved to other platforms;

Part XIX – Special Report No 14/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "The EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Centres of Excellence: more progress needed"

142. Welcomes the Court's special report and notes with satisfaction that the Court, the Commission and the EEAS agree on most of the recommendations;
143. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS carry out a joint Union analysis identifying external CBRN risks to the Union to comprehensively link internal and external action;
144. Calls on the Commission to embed systemic risk assessments into the needs assessment and national action plan methodologies and to respond quickly to all partner countries requesting assistance to finalise their needs assessment and national action plan exercises;
145. Calls on the Commission to increase the number of regional activities, such as field and table-top exercises;

146. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to assign CBRN responsibilities to designated focal points and/or to “Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace” (IcSP) long-term regional cooperation officers in all the Union delegations, and to include CBRN in the policy, security and political dialogue;
147. Calls on the DG DEVO of the Commission and the EEAS should to work together with other relevant Commission Directorates-General, in particular with DG NEAR, as well as with other donors in order to identify potential synergies and available funding sources which could be better used to support CBRN activities;
148. Calls on the Commission to translate the initiative’s overall objective into more specific objectives that can be used at project level, enabling results to be measured from the project level up to the national, regional and Initiative-wide level;
149. Calls on the Commission to also define outcome and impact indicators allowing the Initiative’s effectiveness to be assessed against the set objectives;
150. Calls on the Commission to ensure that all relevant information is available on its web-based portal with the appropriate levels of access authorisation; and to guarantee best practices and guidelines are accessible through the CBRN portal;

Part XX – Special Report No 15/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled " Strengthening the capacity of the internal security forces in Niger and Mali: only limited and slow progress"

151. Welcomes the Court’s special report and sets out its observations and recommendations below;
152. Stresses, first of all, the efforts made by all the relevant stakeholders in preparing and implementing these two Union missions and the staff deployed in the field to carry out lasting structural capacity-building for internal security institutions in Mali and Niger, in an extremely fraught geopolitical context that has become critical given the combination of existing threats;
153. Deplores the fact that mission personnel received no training prior to their deployment and no assistance in gaining familiarity with procedures and projects on the ground; takes the view that this lack of training manifestly caused delays in the implementation of operations;
154. Considers that the EEAS and the Commission should carry out constant monitoring of support functions to facilitate the rapid, effective and coherent deployment of CSDP missions, provide all staff with pre-deployment training on Union procedures and policies and develop comprehensive guidelines on operational tasks (assessment of needs, and planning and follow-up of tasks and reports); takes the view, too, that that lessons learned from previous CSDP missions should also be put in practice to improve the operational efficiency of missions and facilitate the transfer of knowledge and synergy effects between missions;
155. Deplores that fact that the safety of staff in Niger was jeopardised when they were obliged to lodge and work in hotels for six months without any dedicated security arrangements;

156. Stresses that a safe working environment is essential for the effective implementation of operations and the recruitment of skilled staff; urges the EEAS and the Commission to maintain a sufficient level of security-related expenditure in budgets for the missions to ensure their mandates are properly implemented;
157. Reiterates, further, the need to make effective use of all appropriate funding channels for future CSDP missions – namely the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the European Development Fund, the Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and humanitarian aid – to ensure the achievement of the political objectives of the missions and sound financial management;
158. Encourages the EEAS to collaborate with the Member States to ensure that ongoing and future CSDP missions have sufficient staff to operate speedily at close to their maximum authorised capacity (or total number of posts available) and, if possible, for terms equal in duration with the mandate of missions;
159. Stresses that the lack of operational efficiency of these two missions has been a major hindrance to the smooth running of action by the Union; deplores the fact that it took 18 months before a legal entity was set up for the EUCAP Sahel Niger mission;
160. Considers that the Council and the Commission should ensure that future CSDP missions should be given legal personality and the budgets they require as soon as possible;
161. Calls on the EEAS and the Commission to pay particular attention to procurement procedures and human resources to ensure that they are responsive to the CSDP's operational needs; notes that the implementation of operations has been hampered by cumbersome procurement procedures, and that this has caused sub-standard performance;
162. Notes the difficulties encountered in filling vacant posts; points out that 72 % of posts were filled in Niger and 77 % in Mali; urges the EEAS and the Commission to propose longer secondments of staff from Member States to missions, to make greater use of contract agents and to launch calls for contributions which can be used to draw up reserve lists of potential agents to expedite recruitment as soon as posts become vacant;
163. Encourages the EEAS, with a view to helping that CSDP missions yield lasting results, to ensure that operational planning for all mission activities takes account of sustainability aspects by systematically assessing local needs and the capacity for activities to have a lasting effect on the local area;
164. Urges the EEAS to step up monitoring of mission activities (training, advice or provision of equipment) by assessing regularly, using indicators, the results obtained and the degree of ownership of the national authorities concerned;
165. Invites the EEAS and the Commission to coordinate CSDP missions more effectively with other Union efforts at regional level (such as the integrated border management assistance mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya) and G5 Sahel), bilateral missions and international efforts with similar objectives; calls, to that end, for increased cooperation and coordination between the Union and its Member States by promoting synergies;
166. Asks the EEAS and the Commission to ensure that winding-up of CSDP missions and

the liquidation of the corresponding assets take place under the best possible conditions; takes the view in this regard that the EEAS and the Commission should devise a common, comprehensive exit strategy clearly defining roles and responsibilities in the winding-up of CSDP missions, while minimising the risks inherent in this process;

167. Reiterates, more broadly, the need to improve cooperation between Member States in their foreign and security policies with a view to achieving economies of scale and keeping costs to a minimum; stresses that it is crucially important for the Member States to be able to respond decisively to the issues of shared security and management of migratory flows at a time when these challenges are clearly becoming greater and more acute than ever before;

Part XXI – Special Report No 16/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Ex-post review of EU legislation: a well-established system, but incomplete"

168. Welcomes the Court's special report, and endorses its remarks and recommendations;
169. Notes that the 2018 monitoring exercise concerning the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making¹ (IIA-BLM) will start very soon and the High Level inter-institutional meeting will take place at the end of the year;
170. Notes that Court presented a very thorough and comprehensive piece of research (e.g. good sample size), and could be an example for future analysis in other areas of the IIA-BLM; also notes that the development of additional performance indicators to monitor the implementation of the IIA-BLM should be considered;
171. Is of the opinion that the active involvement and participation of the Court will benefit the IIA-BLM by enhancing its monitoring exercise; believes that greater use of Court's briefing papers may also contribute to achieving that objective;
172. Notes that the establishment of a joint-interinstitutional vademecum on monitoring and review clauses with guidelines and drafting clauses could be an improvement in the legislative scrutiny, as long as it would not undermine the co-legislators freedom of political choice;
173. Notes that common guidelines for ex post reviews could be considered in a future review of the IIA-BLM;
174. Notes the importance of setting a framework under which information on the transposition of Union law into national law should be made available to the Commission by Member States;

Part XXII – Special Report No 17/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Commission's and Member States' actions in the last years of the 2007-2013 programmes tackled low absorption but had insufficient focus on results"

175. Welcomes the Court's special report and the valuable comparison between previous and the current programme periods, thus focusing attention to expected forthcoming

¹ OJ L 123, 12.5.2016, p. 1.

challenges for Member States and the Commission regarding the sound and result-oriented absorption of cohesion policy funds;

176. Considers as unsatisfactory the reply of the Commission with regard to the recommendation to propose a timetable with key milestone dates for adoption of the legislative framework so that the implementation of operational programmes starts on time and asks the Commission to put forward a concrete proposal based on its evaluation of the timeframe required for programmes' timely implementation;
177. Shares the Court's position that while absorption is important for achieving policy objectives, it is not an end in itself but rather to achieve results in line with cohesion policy objectives; is of the firm opinion that value for money is not simply how much is spent but what has been achieved with the resources disbursed;
178. Is deeply concerned that the Commission seems to be underestimating the risk, of which the Court warns as well, that delays in the budgetary execution for the 2014-2020 period could turn out to be greater than those for the 2007-2013 period, thus creating significant pressure for the proper absorption of funds at the end of the programming period and heightening the risk of insufficient consideration for value for money and the achievement of results;
179. Is concerned that the Commission is neglecting the risk, also identified by the Court, due to the highly unsatisfactory level of absorption in the middle of the programming period, which is twice lower compared with the corresponding moment in the previous period, as well as the pressure on absorption due to the overlapping of the end of the current period with the first years of implementation of the next period;
180. Asks the Commission to present a forecast and assessment about every Member State with regard to accumulation of commitments which are under risk of not being absorbed on time by the end of the period and to suggest measures for assisting Member States to mitigate a potential negative effect for insufficient absorption of the available funds;
181. Asks the Commission to ensure that measures which will be undertaken for avoiding automatic decommitment by Member States respect objectives and results pursued by operational programmes and projects and that relevant monitoring and reporting of amended operational programmes is implemented;
182. Calls on the Commission to use the resources for technical assistance at its own initiative and to assist proactively Member States to speed up result-oriented absorption of the cohesion policy funds;
183. Draws attention to the ultimate purpose of cohesion policy is to support economic and social cohesion among different regions and countries in the Union and to contribute to reducing disparities and inequalities therein; underlines that this must be the guiding principle for Member States, the Commission and all relevant stakeholders when implementing and absorbing Union funds;

Part XXIII – Special Report No 18/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Is the main objective of the preventive arm of the Stability and Growth Pact delivered?"

184. Considers that the Court's special report provides a most timely and important analysis,

examining the manner in which the Commission has been implementing the provisions governing the preventive arm of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) from the point of view of achieving its main objective, that is for Member States to successfully move towards reaching their respective mid-term objectives regarding budgetary balances;

Part XXIV – Special Report No 19/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "A European high-speed rail network: not a reality but an ineffective patchwork"

185. Welcomes the Court's special report;
186. Shares the Court's views and supports its findings;
187. Takes note with satisfaction that the Commission will implement the Court's recommendations;
188. Underlines that the chances to improve the situation remain slim unless each and every Member State shows the political will to improve the situation;
189. In this context, points to the important role of the "European Coordinators" in this area (TEN-T);
190. Recalls the mandate of the European Coordinators, which comprises
 - drawing up the relevant corridor work plan (together with the Member States concerned) or the work plan for a horizontal priority;
 - supporting and monitoring implementation of the work plan; as and when necessary, highlighting difficulties and looking for appropriate remedies;
 - regularly consulting the corridor forum (a consultative body bringing together Member States and various stakeholders);
 - making recommendations in areas such as transport development along corridors or access to financing / funding sources;
 - annual reporting to the European Parliament, Council, Commission and the Member States concerned on the progress achieved;
191. Emphasises the European added value of cross-border projects financed by European Structural and Investment Funds, and by the Connecting Europe Facility; stresses the importance of continuing to rely on these financing mechanisms to overcome political and infrastructural obstacles and accelerate the territorial and socio-economic cohesion of Union regions through high-speed rail connections;
192. Reminds the Commission of the importance of promoting not only accessible and quality passenger rail transport but also freight rail transport in light of its economic, environmental, logistical and safety benefits;

Part XXV – Special Report No 20/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "The African Peace and Security Architecture: need to refocus EU support"

193. Welcomes the Court's special report and sets out its observations and recommendations below;
194. Acknowledges that the EEAS and the Commission are facing highly complex situations in Africa with numerous political and operational challenges and constraints in many domains, in particular the cooperation of main stakeholders, the funding and shortcomings of the institutions, the political willingness to intervene, prevent and manage conflicts;
195. Is aware of the complexity of the institutional framework at stake for addressing conflict prevention and promoting peace and security with the African Union, the African Peace Facility (APF), sub-regional organisations (SROs), regional economic communities (RECs) and regional mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolutions (RMs);
196. Notes with concern that the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) suffers from a strong dependency on external financial sources (due to the Member States' low contribution to the Peace Fund and limited additional funding attracted by the APSA from alternative sources of finance);
197. Regrets that this absence of African ownership and financial sustainability with a high dependency on donors and international partners leads to operational shortcomings notably with staffing issues i.e. the presence of few qualified staff or military experts dealing with the core missions of peace and security on the African continent;
198. Believes that, although Union support for APSA is designed on the basis of a strategic framework defined in roadmaps, appropriate coordination of donors should be constantly sought;
199. Regrets also that Union support is mainly focused on basic operational costs with a lack of long term plan; highlights the necessity to move away from supporting costs of the APSA by the Union and to support clear long-term prospects and objectives contributing to the Africa's stability and, more broadly, the partnership between the African Union (AU) and the European Union;
200. Recalls the importance of fostering capacity building plan, operational capacity of the AU and SRO's coupled with a better coordination framework between all actors with the view to optimising as much as possible the coherence of activities and results of the Union support at longer term;
201. Is seriously concerned by the insufficiencies of monitoring systems with regard to its capability to provide adequate data on the results of activities; asks the Commission to increase the evaluation system's capability of activities and performance to clearly show that Union contributions can be mostly linked to tangible and positive effects on peace and security on the ground;
202. Points out, as a core principle, that the monitoring system has to be developed in order to collect and analyse data/indicators at activity, output, specific objective and strategic objective levels in order to assess the effective implementation of the agreed APSA roadmap, its relevance and sustainability;
203. Invites the Commission's services to launch a 'Results-Oriented Monitoring' mission

(ROM) and to report to Parliament as soon as possible;

Part XXVI – Special Report No 21/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Selection and monitoring for ERDF and ESF projects in the 2014-2020 period are still mainly outputs-oriented"

204. Welcomes the Court's special report and calls on the Commission and Member States to implement the Court's recommendations;
205. Is concerned that the low implementation rates in the middle of the current programming period put in danger the achievement of results which are most urgently needed in the areas supported by the ERDF and ESF, and thus delays the expected effect of the Union budget investments for cohesion and reducing regional disparities;
206. Calls, therefore, on the Commission to assist Member States in speeding up the absorption of ESIF and to strengthen its monitoring and performance assessment of ESIF in order to ensure that these funds contribute to the achievement of the objectives of cohesion policy and the Europe 2020 Strategy targets;
207. Urges the Commission to take all necessary measures to address the identified shortcomings in the current ESIF performance framework, as well as to use the lessons learnt from the 2014-2020 period in order to improve the performance framework for the next period and to ensure that clear rules are provided for indicators, monitoring and evaluation of achievement of results;
208. Calls on the Commission to ensure a smooth and uninterrupted process of monitoring and reporting of results' achievement during the transition period to a new College of Commissioners, as well as to ensure that the results-oriented performance of ESIF at the end of the programming period will not be weakened by pressing accelerated absorption;
209. Takes note of the replies of the Commission that its legislative proposal for the post-2020 programming period includes a list of common results indicators for the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and the ESF;
210. Is, however, concerned that the Commission's legislative proposals for the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and ESF do not include provisions which allow "actions determined in accordance with sector-specific rules", as stipulated in the definitions of "result" and "output" in the Financial Regulation, to be identified as results envisaged to be achieved and consequently to be measured with result indicators under these funds;
211. Asks the Commission to address this shortcoming and to ensure that any negative effect for the establishment of the performance framework by Member States for the 2021-2027 programming period will be avoided;
212. Deeply regrets that the Commission has failed to present a comprehensive proposal for a post-2020 Union Political Strategy which would provide milestones for the next MFF objectives as well as the necessary orientation for Member States to pursue results that contribute to common Union priorities and the achievement of a more coherent and cohesive Union;

Part XXVII – Special Report No 22/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Mobility under Erasmus+: Millions of participants and multi-faceted European Added Value, however performance measurement needs to be further improved"

213. Welcomes the findings of the Court about the additional forms of European Added Value generated by the Programme Erasmus + (2014-2020), and going beyond those considered under its establishing legal basis; observes that evaluation techniques and indicators for the Programme Erasmus+ should be, as much as possible, global and qualitative, taking into account the multidimensional nature of the effects of such type of long-term actions;
214. Notes that the definition of “disadvantaged participants/ participants with fewer opportunities” is currently not harmonised, and varies from one Member State to another; observes that a common definition would allow for a more precise assessment of the impact of the Program and provide a sounder basis to increase its outreach to such participants, as well as to develop positive actions in their support;
215. Welcomes the reintroduction of individual mobility for school students under the Key Action 1 (KA1) in the proposal for the new Erasmus Programme (2021-2027);
216. Acknowledges the importance of the Online Linguistic Support (OLS); considers that such instrument should be open to all participants and tailored to their specific needs while, at the same time, it should be complemented by on site classroom language courses;
217. Welcomes the introduction of simplified funding methods (lump sums, flat rates and unit costs). Acknowledges, nonetheless, the necessity to adjust and regularly review the grant amounts to the living and subsistence costs of the host country or region, in order to ensure a fairer access to Erasmus individual mobility to participants with fewer opportunities;
218. It is of the opinion that, with the aim of promoting the access to individual mobility of participants disadvantaged and with fewer opportunities, pre-financing under the Key Action 1 of the new Erasmus Programme should be considered;
219. Observes that a better promotion of mobility for doctoral students would require more flexibility as to the minimum mobility period of three months currently foreseen;
220. Acknowledges that Student Loan Guarantee Facility did not deliver the results expected as well as its exclusion from the Proposal for the new Erasmus Programme (2021-2027);

Part XXVIII – Special Report No 23/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled " Air pollution: Our health still insufficiently protected"

221. Is of the opinion that, to take more effective action to improve air quality, the Commission should:

- share best practice from Member States who have successfully reflected the requirements of the AAQ Directive¹ in their Air Quality Plans, including on issues such as information relevant for monitoring purposes; targeted, budgeted and short-term measures to improve air quality; and planned reductions in concentration levels at specific locations;
 - actively manage each stage of the infringement procedure to shorten the period before cases are resolved or submitted to the Court of Justice of the European Union;
 - assist the Member States most affected by intra-Union transboundary air pollution in their cooperation and joint activities, including introducing relevant measures in their Air Quality Plans;
222. Calls on the Commission to address the following issues when preparing its proposal to the legislator:
- considering updating the Union limit and target values (for PM, SO₂ and O₃), in line with the latest WHO guidance; reducing the number of times that concentrations can exceed standards (for PM, NO₂, SO₂ and O₃); and setting a short-term limit value for PM_{2.5} and alert thresholds for PM;
 - improvements to the Air Quality Plans, in particular by making them result oriented; and by requiring yearly reporting of their implementation; and their update whenever necessary; the number of Air Quality Plans by air quality zone should be limited;
 - the precision of the requirements for locating industrial and traffic measuring stations, to better measure the highest exposure of the population to air pollution; and to set a minimum number of measurement stations per type (traffic, industrial or background);
 - the possibility for the Commission to require additional monitoring points where it considers this is necessary to better measure air pollution;
 - advancing the date (currently 30 September of year n+1) to at least 30 June n+1, to report validated data, and explicitly requiring Member States to provide up-to-date (real time) data;
 - explicit provisions that ensure citizens' rights to access justice;
223. In order to further mainstream air quality into Union policies, asks the Commission to produce assessments of:
- other Union policies that contain elements that can be detrimental to clean air, and take action to better align these policies with the air quality objective;
 - the actual use of relevant funding available in support of Union air quality objectives to tackle air pollution emissions, notably PM, NO_x and SO_x;

¹ Directive 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (OJ L 152, 11.6.2008, p. 1).

224. Calls on the Commission, in order to improve the quality of information for citizens, to:
- identify and compile, with the help of health professionals, the most critical information that the Commission and Member States authorities should make available to citizens (including health impacts and behavioural recommendations);
 - support Member States to adopt best practices to communicate with and involve citizens in air quality matters;
 - publish rankings of air quality zones with the best and worst progress achieved each year and share the best practices applied by the most successful locations;
 - develop an online tool that allows citizens to report on air quality violations and provide feedback to the Commission on issues related to Member States' actions on air quality;
 - support the Member States to develop user-friendly tools for the access of general public to air quality information and monitoring (for example, smartphone apps and/or social media dedicated pages);
 - together with Member States, seek an agreement on harmonising air quality indices;

Part XXIX – Special Report No24/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Demonstrating carbon capture and storage and innovative renewables at commercial scale in the EU: intended progress not achieved in the past decade"

225. Welcomes the Court's special report and sets out its observations and recommendations below;
226. Welcomes the ambitious commitments of the Union to achieve cutting of its emissions compared to 1990 by at least 20 % levels by 2020 and by 40 % by 2030, and to spend at least 20 % of its budget on climate related action for the 2014-2020 budgeting period;
227. Welcomes the Union ambition of being a global leader in renewables; considers it of high importance for the Commission to continuously demonstrate sufficient leadership and commitment to climate change issues to consolidate its international credibility and impact of its instruments for shaping conditions for the Union's climate policy and green diplomacy in future years;
228. Believes that more synergies across the various Union bodies, the relevant Commission services and industry partners are needed and the efforts should be combined in order to achieve a conducive environment for the transition to a low carbon economy with innovative low-carbon technologies, by adapting and developing investment conditions and instruments;
229. Stresses that coordination between the Commission services related to climate issues still needs improvement to meet not only the international commitments but also to allow the Union to stay a frontrunner in terms of climate change;

230. Reiterates its call on the Commission to develop intensified coordination of activities in the area of development of new technologies and environmental innovations;
231. Points out the need for the Commission to particularly deliver enhanced coordination among Member States in terms of climate-change related policies to be able to reach the objective of addressing at least 20 % of the Union budget to low carbon and climate resilient society;
232. Regrets the lack of low-carbon strategies by the Member States that creates an environment of uncertainty, harming the investments conditions, affecting the financial viability and progress of innovative low-carbon energy demonstration projects and offers only limited possibility of recovering money from failing projects; calls on the Commission to enhance the Member States' active participation on achieving the low-carbon objectives;
233. Regrets the general low viability and sustainability of financed projects and the lack of utilization of projects' tangible results;
234. Believes that better aimed strategies at Union and national level are needed to succeed in this area; calls on the Commission to develop a concrete overall strategy on reaching the set targets that will entail area-specific action plans including in-depth assessments, detailed measures and instruments, methodology of measurement and reporting, and performance indicators;
235. Call on the Commission to increase in general the compatibility of different budget areas to complement the programmes aimed at building low-carbon economy; regrets the absence of specific targets in substantial parts of the Union budget;
236. Calls on the Commission to swiftly develop conducive environment for the transition to a low carbon economy by adapting its investment conditions and spending frameworks and instruments for innovation and modernisation in all key relevant sectors;

Part XXX – Special Report No 25 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Floods Directive: progress in assessing risks, while planning and implementation need to improve"

237. Calls on the Commission, in its supervisory capacity under the Floods Directive¹, to check that the Member States set quantifiable and time-bound objectives for flood-related action, thereby allowing the progress made towards their achievement to be assessed, in accordance with the Floods Directive when reviewing the flood risk management plans (FRMPs) of the second and subsequent cycles; calls on the Commission to share good practice in objective-setting with all Member States;
238. Calls on the Commission, in its supervisory capacity under the Floods Directive and in time for the second cycle of the Flood Directive, to assess and report on whether Member States have:
 - identified sources of financing to cover investment needs arising from FRMPs and established a timeline for implementation in line with available funding;

¹ Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood risks (OJ L 288, 6.11.2007, p. 27).

- for flood measures on international river basins, considered cross-border investment;
239. Calls on the Commission, in its supervisory capacity under the Floods Directive and under the shared management mode, to only co-finance flood measures prioritised in accordance with the future FRMPs when Union funds are requested; this prioritisation by Member States should be based on objective and relevant criteria, including:
- a good-quality cost-benefit analysis, to achieve the best value for money for the investments, and
 - where relevant, a criterion considering the cross-border impact of projects;
240. Calls on the Commission, in its supervisory capacity under the Floods Directive and the Water Framework Directive, to enforce the compliance with the Water Framework Directive of new floods infrastructure proposed in FRMPs by Member States;
241. Calls on the Commission, in its supervisory capacity under the Floods Directive and the Water Framework Directive, to check that, whenever Union co-financing is requested, Member States have analysed the feasibility of implementing significant green measures, alone or in combination with grey solutions;
242. Calls on the Commission, in its supervisory capacity under the Floods Directive, to check that FRMPs include measures to improve the knowledge and modelling of the impact of climate change on floods;
243. Calls on the Commission, when reviewing the documents required for the second cycle of the Floods Directive, the Commission and in its supervisory capacity under the Floods Directive, to check whether the Member States:
- estimate and model the impact of climate change on floods through studies and research;
 - develop appropriate tools to better analyse and forecast:
 - a) pluvial floods, including flash floods;
 - b) coastal flooding due to rising sea levels;
 - where the impact of climate change is not quantifiable, plan flexible measures to adjust the level of protection if needed;
244. Calls on the Commission, in its review of the FRMPs for the second cycle, to check whether Member States have planned action to:
- raise public awareness of the benefits of insurance coverage against flood risks; and
 - increase coverage, e.g. via cooperation between the public and private sectors in relation to flood insurance;
245. Calls on the Commission, in its supervisory capacity under the Floods Directive, to:

- check whether Member States have used their FRMPs to assess the extent to which land use planning rules in Member States are adequately designed and effectively enforced in areas at risk of flooding; and
- disseminate good practices and guidance to Member States;

Part XXXI– Special Report No 26/2018 of the Court of Auditors entitled "A series of delays in Customs IT systems: what went wrong?"

246. Notes the observations by the Court assessing the implementation of Customs' Information Technology Systems;
247. Praises the analysis of the situation and the conclusions presented by the Court;
248. Welcomes the recommendations to the Commission directed toward modernization of customs processes that is a key to the functioning of the Union; appreciates the approach of taking into account of the lessons learned with the Customs 2020 programme;
249. Points out that the Commission, despite some additional explanations and disagreements on a part of the observations, accepts all of the recommendations in Court's special report;
250. Points out that, while for the next programme, the Commission envisages EUR 950 million in current prices and there is a consensus with the Parliament on this number, it is imperative that the implementation will be on time, with the full scope and within the financial limits;
251. Stresses that there is a need to have in place a sound multi-annual strategic plan setting down a strategic framework and milestones for managing IT projects coherently and effectively; the objectives, the indicators, timetable and the necessary financial resources to be correctly set in that plan;
252. As with the beginning of the new MFF, several programmes, for example EU Anti-fraud Programme, FISCALIS and Customs, as well as the Integrated Border Management Fund should act in synergy, points out that there is a need of impact assessment of the negative influence of possible delays in implementation of one of the elements to the functioning of the whole system;
253. Underlines that it is imperative to implement performance-based budgeting in order to improve the outcomes and to assure achievement the objectives of the programme;
254. While Member States have not used their 20 % share of collection costs retained from customs duties for covering expenditure for implementing customs IT system, supports the Commission's own resources proposal to reduce the percentage of collection costs to 10 %;

Part XXXII – Special Report No 31 of the Court of Auditors entitled "Animal welfare in the EU: closing the gap between ambitious goals and practical implementation"

255. Calls on the Commission, in order to guide its future animal welfare actions, to:
- carry out an evaluation of the 2012-2015 animal welfare strategy - particularly in relation to live animal transportation - to identify to what extent its objectives have been achieved and if the guidance it has issued is being applied;
 - define baseline and target indicators to measure and compare the Member States' degree of compliance in remaining risk areas identified by the evaluation;
 - reflect on how to address the conclusions of the above evaluation (for example, through a new strategy or action plan and/or a review of animal welfare legislation) and publish the results of its assessment;
256. Welcomes the conclusion of the Court that Union actions on animal welfare have improved compliance with animal welfare requirements and supported higher standards with a clear positive impact on animal welfare, where properly implemented;
257. Recommends that, with a view to better addressing risky areas and disseminate good practices, the Commission:
- develop an enforcement strategy to strengthen arrangements for the follow-up of DG SANTE's recommendations, with the aim to reduce the time to trigger satisfactory actions to its recommendations issued after audits and to enforce legislative provisions, particularly those that have been in force for a long time;
 - determine, together with the Member States, how the tools available in TRACES (Trade Control and Expert System) can support the preparation of risk analyses for inspections on the transport of live animals, and disseminate guidance on the use of these tools;
258. To strengthen the links between the cross-compliance system and animal welfare, recommends that the Commission:
- in its conformity audits on cross-compliance, assess the completeness of Member States' reporting of non-compliances identified during official inspections performed by the same control authority as for cross-compliance checks, for example by crosschecking between the results of official inspections and the database of beneficiaries subject to cross-compliance;
 - building on previous actions, further share best practices on cross-compliance and inform Member States of the conformity findings underlying decisions to impose financial corrections because of the lenient sanctioning systems linked to animal welfare;
259. To encourage the effective use of rural development support for animal welfare, recommends that the Commission:
- when approving changes to the existing rural development programmes, as well as when approving the new programming documents for the rural development programming period post-2020, challenge Member States on the use of the animal welfare measure in sectors where there is evidence of widespread non-compliance (such as pig tail docking) and check the potential overlap with private schemes

covering similar commitments;

- encourage the exchange between Member States of good practices on additional, voluntary result and impact indicators for the animal welfare measure under the common monitoring and evaluation system that will be established for the programming period post-2020;
- for the programming period post-2020, provide structured guidance to Member States on the use of other rural development measures to support improved animal welfare standards, in order to give farmers a wider range of incentives to improve animal welfare, with a view to a complete abolishment of the cruel practices;

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260. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to 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).