2012 discharge: EU general budget, European External Action Service

2013/2205(DEC) - 03/04/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a decision concerning the discharge to be granted to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in respect of the implementation of the European External Action Service's budget for the financial year 2012.

In its resolution accompanying the decision, adopted by 523 votes to 76, with 9 abstentions, Parliament noted the conclusion of the Court of Auditors that the payments as a whole for the year ended on 31 December 2012 for administrative and other expenditure of the institutions and bodies were free from material error.

However, Parliament was concerned that in 2012, the PMO system was not yet fully operational, leading to the incorrect payment of social allowances to staff members.

Financial and budget implementation: Parliament noted that at the end of 2012, the final budget for EEAS headquarters was EUR 184.1 million, with an execution of commitments rating of 99.35% and was EUR 304.5 million for the delegations, with a commitments rating of 99.45%. It also noted that the budget of the delegations had to be supplemented by the Commission for a total of EUR 268 million.

Parliament welcomed that in its second financial year, the European External Action Service has continued to implement its budget without material errors being identified by the Court of Auditors and that most of the problems identified in the 2011 Annual Report of the Court of Auditors as result of the setting-up process have not recurred. Concerned with the carrying over of appropriations in 2012, Parliament recalled that the EEAS is a recently created institution, **resulting from the consolidation of different services**, and that 2011 was its first year of operation with numerous technical challenges to be overcome, particularly in procurement and recruitment.

If, overall, Parliament was satisfied with the progressive setting up of this institution, it is concerned, however, that the Chief Operating Officer of the EEAS has maintained his reservations concerning some of the security contracts of Union Delegations and several Union Delegations have issued reservations as well.

Future framework for discharge exercises: Parliament noted the importance of the current discharge in establishing the framework for future discharge exercises and believed that it will reinforce the expectations of future developments and improvements in the effectiveness of the EEAS and its operations.

Taking note of the difficulties in implementing a budget with various sources that lack equilibrium, Parliament:

- believed that the current structure of the EEAS budget, with contributions from the Commission's 26 different budget lines and the European Development Fund makes it impossible to have a clear overview of the real costs and expenses of the work of the EEAS and its Delegations: it supported the simplification proposal made by the EEAS in 2013 and asked the Commission to implement the changes proposed and to examine the further simplification of the EEAS's current financing;
- observed the over-representation of diplomats from the new Member States and called on the EEAS to **strengthen the geographical balance**;

- noted the over-representation and quick promotions in the higher grades in the institution;
- requested clarification as regards the responsibilities of the **Union Special Representatives** (EUSRs) and the review of this statute given that the High Representative was planning to do away with EUSRs in 2010. It was concerned that the EUSR budget was raised from EUR 15 million in 2011 to EUR 27 million in 2012 and that the travel budget for 2012 was tripled; it calls for an **end to the parallel foreign policy pursued through the EUSRs** and, in terms of pay, insists that EUSRs should not be treated more favourably than Union ambassadors in post;
- called to introduce a requirement that newly appointed EEAS staff give a declaration of honour stating that they have not worked for intelligence services in the past;
- called for improvements to be made in the financial management of security contracts;
- pointed to the need for parliamentary scrutiny to be brought to bear on INTCEN, EUMS INT, the Situation Room, and the Satellite Centre, which produce analyses for decision-makers, based on national intelligence service information;
- called for the publication of how many classified documents the EEAS has received from or sent to individual institutions, other bodies, Member States, and third parties;
- demanded clarification of the housing policy of those employed in Union delegations given that in year 2012 the housing costs paid for the accommodation of 675 officials in Union Delegations had a total cost of EUR 30 million;
- asked that the **EEAS's building policy** be attached to the annual activity report and for the EEAS to provide the discharge authority with the list of building contracts concluded in 2012, including the details of the contracts, the country where the contract is entered in and the length of the contract. In addition, Parliament called on the EEAS to compile a summary – to be submitted to Parliament – showing how many embassies and consulates of Member States in countries with Union delegations have been closed since the EEAS was set up or specifying the countries where the establishment of the EEAS has served to create synergies. Efforts should be made to increase savings in this area.

Parliament reiterated the importance of continuing efforts to identify opportunities for **long-term savings and synergies,** both between EEAS and Commission and with Member States, to ensure the sustainability of the EEAS budget in a time of budgetary restraints.

Lastly, Parliament invited the EEAS to explain **why it was necessary to create the post of Deputy Head of Delegation for Afghanistan** and it emphasised once again the need for the Union to create a delegation in Panama.