2012 discharge: EU general budget, Court of Auditors

2013/2200(DEC) - 03/04/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a decision concerning the discharge to be granted to the Secretary-General of the Court of Auditors in respect of the implementation of the Court of Auditors' budget for the financial year 2012.

In its resolution accompanying the discharge decision, adopted by 535 votes to 55 with 19 abstentions, Parliament concluded, with 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.

Parliament recalled that the Court of Auditors' annual accounts are audited by an independent external Auditor – PricewaterhouseCoopers SARL – in order to apply the same principles of transparency and accountability that it applies to its auditees. It took note of the auditor's opinion that "the financial statement gives a true and fair view of the financial position of the Court and of its financial performance and its cash flows for the year ... ended". Parliament requested, however, that it be given access to the assurance report concerning the regularity of the use of the Court of Auditors' resources and the validity of the control procedures in place in 2012 and called for scrutiny to be brought to bear on the Court of Auditors as regards the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying its accounts.

Budgetary and financial management: Parliament emphasised that in 2012, the Court of Auditors' commitment appropriations amounted to a total of EUR 137.345 million and that the overall rate of implementation for the budget was 96%. Supporting the Court of Auditors' assessment of the quality and impact of its work and commending the results achieved, it believed that the Court of Auditors should improve target setting to ensure that the results achieved effectively reach the targets.

Discharge procedure: Parliament called on the Court of Auditors to examine the possibility of presenting its annual report by 30 June, as this would lead to a significant improvement in the audit of the Union accounts and would enhance and streamline both the performance and the effectiveness of Union spending by having the discharge voted before 31 December of the year following the financial year audited. It reminded the Court of Auditors of the need to improve time plans, even where there is no deadline, as in the case of Court of Auditors' Special Reports. It challenged the Court of Auditors to streamline targets and to pay particular attention to ensuring the improvement of quality in each of the stages of the audit process for the strategy 2013-2017.

Moreover, Parliament invited the Court of Auditors to take into consideration in its annual work programme the **political priorities of the legislators and the issues of major interest to Union citizens** communicated by Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control.

Court of Auditor's framework action: Parliament also made a series of observations on the daily management of the Court of Auditors and called for:

- a greater geographical balance in the representation of staff at all levels of the administration of the Court;
- clarification regarding the completion of the K3 building (delay and budget);
- clarification on the cost of translations as well as the activities of the High-level group to monitor the new initiative to streamline the reporting process to produce reports;
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review procedures for dealing with ongoing harassment and abuse of power in order to improve the working conditions of its staff and its Members.

Parliament also called on the Court of Auditors to include in its Annual Activity Report the results and consequences of closed OLAF cases where the institution or any of the individuals working for it were the subject of the investigation, as well as the results of the cases referred to OLAF by the Court of Auditors arising from its audit work and from denunciation letters.

Harassment: lastly, Parliament recalled the case of alleged harassment and abuse of power by a former Member of the Court of Auditors which occurred in 2012 and which resulted in a lawsuit filed by three employees of the Court of Auditors against their institution. It took note of the efforts of the Court of Auditors with regard to this harassment case, including preventive measures introduced and assistance and protection given to complainants. It encouraged the Court of Auditors to review its procedures for dealing with harassment and abuse of power and to further improve the working environment for its staff and its Members in order to fully guarantee dignity in the workplace.