2013 discharge: EU general budget, European External Action Service

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PURPOSE: presentation by the Commission of the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the financial year 2013, as part of the 2013 discharge procedure.

Analysis of the accounts of the EU Institutions: **European External Action Service (EEAS)**.

Legal reminder: the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the year 2013 have been prepared on the basis of the information presented by the institutions and bodies under Article 148(2) of the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Union. They were prepared in accordance with Title IX of this Financial Regulation.

(1) Purpose: the document helps to bring insight into the EU budget mechanism and **the way in which the budget has been managed and spent in 2013**, including the different expenses of the European institutions. It should be recalled that only the Commission budget contains administrative appropriations and operating appropriations. **The other Institutions have only administrative appropriations.**

The document also presents the different financial actors involved in the budget process (accounting officers, internal officers and authorising officers) and recalls their respective roles in the context of the tasks of sound financial management.

Amongst the other legal elements relating to the implementation of the EU budget presented in this document, the paper focuses on the following issues:

- accounting principles applicable to the management of EU spending (business continuity, consistency of accounting methods, comparability of information ...);
- consolidation methods of figures for all major controlled entities (the consolidated financial statements of the EU comprise all significant controlled entities –institutions, organisations and agencies);
- the recognition of financial assets in the EU (tangible and intangible assets, financial assets and other miscellaneous investments);
- the way in which EU public expenditure is committed and spent, including pre-financing (cash advances intended for the benefit of an EU organ);
- the means of recovery following irregularities detected;
- the modus operandi of the accounting system;
- the audit process followed by the European Parliament's granting of the discharge.

Discharge procedure: the final control is the discharge of the budget for a given financial year. The discharge represents the **political aspect of the external control of budget implementation** and is the **decision by which the European Parliament, acting on a Council recommendation, "releases" the Commission from its responsibility for management of a given budget** by marking the end of that budget's existence. When granting discharge, Parliament may make observations which it considers important and often recommends the Commission and the other institutions to **take actions concerning these matters**.

The document also details specific expenditure of the institutions, in particular: (i) pensions of former Members and officials of institutions; (ii) joint sickness insurance scheme and (iii) buildings.

The document also presents a series of tables and detailed technical indicators on (i) the balance sheet; (ii) the economic outturn account; (iii) cashflow tables; (iv) technical annexes concerning the financial statements.

(2) Implementation of the EEAS's appropriations for the financial year 2013: the document comprises a series of detailed tables, the most important concerning the implementation of the budget.

Budget 2013: at the end of 2013, an amount of EUR 761 million was committed.

Budget implementation: information concerning the implementation of the budget of the EEAS is drawn from the Report on Budgetary and Financial Management 2013 which sets out that the budget for this institution is presented as follows:

- **the final budget of the EEAS Headquarters** (Brussels): EUR 195.81 million;
- **the final EEAS budget for managing delegations in third countries**: EUR 312.95 million;
- **the total budget of the EEAS**: EUR 508.8 million in 2013. A contribution from the European Commission is added to this amount in order to finance the costs of the Commission staff in delegations (EUR 210.4 million). The implementation rate for the level of commitments was 98% and 88% for payments.

(3) Implementation of the budget - conclusions in more general and political terms, the implementation of the EEAS budget during 2013 was mainly marked the difficulty of managing a hybrid budget from various sources, particularly regarding the distribution costs and expenses to be distributed among the staff of the Commission and the EEAS (requiring transfers between budget items and lines).

Lastly, the document also raises the difficulty of managing the 140 delegations, including some which are in a state of acute crisis (Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, Libya, ...) involving additional costs in terms of safety issues and potential evacuation (costs which are difficult to anticipate).