2013 discharge: EU general budget, European Parliament

2014/2078(DEC) - 29/04/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 545 votes to 148, with 6 abstentions to grant discharge to its President in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Parliament for the financial year 2013.

In a resolution adopted by 573 votes to 109, with 11 abstentions, Parliament recalled that Parliament's final appropriations for 2013 totalled EUR 1 750 463 939, or 19.07% of heading Administration of the Multiannual Financial Framework. In 2013, 99.02% of the appropriations entered in Parliament's budget were committed with a cancellation rate of 0.8%. EUR 54 000 000 was transferred from provisional appropriation headings and from other sources so as to help fund the extension and modernisation of the Konrad Adenauer Building (KAD), in Luxembourg.

Centralised activities of the European Parliament and a single seat: Plenary recalled that according to the Court of Auditors, the **potential savings for the Union budget would be about EUR 114 million a year if Parliament centralised its activities**. It stressed that Parliament and the Council, in order to create long term savings in the Union budget, must address the need for a roadmap to a single seat, as stated by Parliament in several previous resolutions.

Court of Auditors' opinions on the reliability of the 2013 accounts: Parliament commended the fact that the audit did not identify any serious weaknesses in respect of the topics audited for Parliament. It reaffirmed that Parliament's governing bodies and administration were held accountable for the resources placed at Parliament's disposal throughout the discharge and that it was therefore essential for the entire decision-making procedure to take place in a completely **transparent** manner to ensure that Union citizens are provided with a true and accurate view of the way that Parliament takes its decisions and uses the resources placed at its disposal.

Election campaign 2014: Parliament is deeply worried that Parliament allocated EUR 17.8 million to promotional activities described as institutional election campaign over the period 2013 to 2014 while turnout in the 2014 European elections declined again to 42.54% (2009: 43%). It encouraged the adoption of a new strategy aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the European elections in the Member States.

Parliament noted that the European Parliament Eurobarometer survey showed that during the 2014 electoral campaign 23% of the respondents had a very negative image of Parliament, related to financial arrangements for Members such as allowances, salaries and the budget of Parliament in general. Parliament was convinced therefore that structural improvements, for example full transparency and the accounting of the general expenditure allowance, are needed to improve **trust and support for Parliament**.

Staffing: Parliament asked to be provided, by the end of 2015, with year-on-year breakdowns of trends in staffing levels and staff costs, by grade and level of management. It asked Parliament's administration to state whether comparable studies of the administrations of international parliamentary assemblies could contain important lessons for Parliament's work. It noted that work outsourced to specialists should also be included in the reports to promote the ethos of transparency, while also serving the best interests of constituents. It noted with concern that the large number of staff based in the office of the President of the

European Parliament, which amounts to 35 staff, including two drivers and a personal usher, is **highly questionable and that this sets a bad example for cost reduction and fiscal responsibility within Parliament**.

Security and Safety: Parliament took note of the creation of Directorate-General for Security and Safety and recalled that the internalisation of Parliament's security services had generated savings of EUR 195 000 in 2013 and is projected to produce savings of more than EUR 11 million over the period 2013-2016. It considered that the **Belgian Government should make a greater contribution on its part to Parliament's security**, given that Belgium benefits economically from the presence of the Union institutions on its territory.

Greater transparency as regards the general spending allowances for Members: Parliament welcomed the fact that Members must be more transparent about the on-the-side activities they do while in public office. It insisted that a more detailed declaration template for Members would help to increase transparency and avoid potential conflicts of interests. It also stressed the need for greater transparency as regards the general spending allowances for Members and called on the Bureau to work on the definition of more precise rules regarding the accountability of expenditures authorised under this allowance, without causing additional costs to Parliament. Parliament was also concerned with the lack of ex post verification of the use of service cars by Members and questioned the **availability of two service cars for the President of Parliament**.

Administration and management of the European Parliament: Parliament made a series of recommendations concerning certain DGs, with particular reference to the following:

- **Directorate-General for Communication**: Parliament commented on more information on (i) the multiannual grants programme 2012 to 2014, aimed at raising awareness on Parliament's role, and costing some EUR 14 500 000, asking for a full breakdown of all the grants for communication projects funded; (ii) the budget for the EuroparlTV at EUR 5 000 000 in 2014, appreciating that the performance of the service had been improved; (iii) the expenditure on the LUX Prize in 2013 amounted to EUR 448 000. On this issue, Parliament called for a representative survey of Members to be conducted by the end of 2015 to determine whether the LUX Prize is well known and how, if at all, it is viewed in their respective Member State; (iv) Parliament’s new logo and the lack of transparency regarding its use.
- **Directorate-General Personnel**, with Parliament deeply regretting the fact that Parliament was condemned for being unable to help Parliamentary Assistants in cases of harassment and irregular layoffs. It called for the names of the service providers and the services provided to the Member to be made accessible to the public on the homepage of the Members of Parliament, next to the data on the APAs and the local assistants;
- **Directorate-General for Innovation and Technological support**: Parliament noted (i) the process of the internalisation of staff in the Directorate-General for Innovation and Technological Support and the promised increased level of expertise among the staff in the IT area; (ii) the problem of personal and confidential individual mail-boxes of selected Members, parliamentary assistants and officials which were compromised after Parliament had been subject to a hacker attack.

Parliament also made a series of recommendations on Parliament’s policies on contracts and calls for tenders and negotiated procedures and the issue of greening Parliament. Lastly, as regards the financing of political parties, plenary did not accept the committee’s position which called for a gradual reduction, up to the eventual abolition, of contributions to European political parties from Parliament’s budget.