2013 discharge: EU general budget, European Council and Council

2014/2079(DEC) - 29/04/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 669 votes to 13, with 5 abstentions, to **postpone its decision on granting the Secretary-General of the Council discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Council and of the Council for the financial year 2013**.

In a parallel resolution, Parliament recalled by 642 votes to 40, with 7 abstentions that all Union institutions ought to be transparent and fully accountable to the citizens of the Union for the funds entrusted to them as Union institutions.

On the reasons for postponing the discharge, Parliament stressed that the **Council must take part fully and in good faith in the annual discharge procedure, just as the other institutions do**. It regretted the difficulties encountered in the discharge procedures to date. It took note, nonetheless, of the interest shown by the current Presidency of the Union in reconciling positions, regarding actively tangible measures to reach a modus vivendi to improve the capacity for dialogue between the two institutions.

Greater cooperation: Parliament reiterated that it was only possible to implement effective budgetary control with the cooperation of Parliament and the Council, the main elements of which must comprise of formal meetings between representatives of the Council and Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control, answering questions asked by the committee’s members. Without the cooperation of the Council, **Parliament was not in the position to make an informed decision on granting discharge**. In this regard, Parliament agreed with the Commission's views in its letter of 23 January 2014 to Parliament that it was desirable for Parliament to continue to give, postpone or refuse discharge to the other institutions – including the Council – as has been the case up until now. It endorsed the view that **all institutions should cooperate to ensure the smooth functioning of the discharge procedure** in full respect of the relevant provisions in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the relevant secondary law. **It regretted that Parliament repeatedly encountered problems in receiving answers from the Council**.

Recalling the relevant Treaty provisions on discharge, Parliament stated that granting or not granting discharge was a duty Parliament had towards the Union citizens and considered that the discharge-related legal framework of the Union should be revised in order to clarify the discharge making process.

In general, Parliament felt that the Council could do more on matters related to transparency.

Internal management of the Council and the European Council: Parliament noted that in 2013, the European Council and the Council had an overall budget of EUR 535 511 300 with an implementation of 86.7%. It took note that EUR 71 376 244 of commitments were cancelled in 2013 due to underspending and a reduction in the use of facilities. Parliament was surprised to learn that **EUR 5 million committed for the acquisition of the 'Europa' building** was carried over to 2014 for actual payment. This balance, in addition to other appropriations carried over, went against the principles of annuality and sound financial management of the Financial Regulation.

As regards building policy, Parliament took note that some of the audit recommendations on the 'Europa' building project are still lagging behind execution. It reiterated its call for the Council to provide a **thorough written explanation** detailing the total amount of appropriations used in the purchase of the building.

A separate budget for the two institutions: Parliament reiterated that the budget of the European Council and the Council should be separated in order to contribute to the transparency of the financial management of the institutions and to improve the accountability of both institutions. It called on the European Council and the Council to send Parliament their annual activity report with a comprehensive overview of all human resources available to both institutions, broken down by category, grade, sex, nationality and vocational training.

Parliament went on to make a series of observations on the costs of translation in Council (which shows some disparity with other institutions) and asked for a unified methodology of presenting translation costs and better practice on translation issues.

Lastly, it considered that at a time of crisis and budgetary cuts in general, the cost of away days for staff at the Union institutions had to be reduced and that these should take place, where possible, on the institutions' own premises as the added value derived from these away days did not justify such high costs.