2013 discharge: EU general budget, European Council and Council

2014/2079(DEC) - 29/09/2015 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the 2nd report by Ryszard CZARNECKI (ECR, PL) and called on the European Parliament to **refuse to grant to 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.**

Members noted 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. The European Council and the Council, as Union institutions, should be subject to democratic accountability.

Members regretted that the Council had not provided any explanation on the increasing underspending and carryovers of commitments in their 2013 budget.

Pending issues: in order to justify the refusal to grant discharge, Members reminded the Council of Parliament's call for progress reports on building projects and a detailed breakdown of the costs incurred to date.

They reiterated their call on the Council to:

- provide a thorough written explanation detailing the total amount of appropriations used in the purchase of the 'Residence Palace' building, the budget items from which those appropriations were drawn, the instalments that had been paid thus far and the instalments that remained to be paid;
- provide information on its process of administrative modernisation, in particular on the concrete implementing measures of that process and on the anticipated impact on the Council's budget.

Members also regretted the difficulties repeatedly encountered in the discharge procedures to date, which were due to a lack of cooperation from the Council, pointing out that Parliament refused to grant discharge to the Secretary-General of the Council in relation to the financial years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 for similar reasons and postponed its decision on granting the Secretary-General of the Council discharge in relation to the financial year 2013 for the reasons set out in its resolution of 29 April 2015.

Increased cooperation: Members insisted that an effective budgetary control exercise required cooperation between Parliament and the Council. They reminded the Council of the Commission's views, that **all institutions were fully part of the follow-up process to the observations made by Parliament in the discharge exercise** and that all institutions should cooperate to ensure the smooth functioning of the discharge procedure.

The committee regretted that the Council continued to fail to provide answers to Parliament's questions, and recalled the conclusions of the Parliament workshop on Parliament's Right to Grant Discharge to the Council held on 27 September 2012, at which the legal and academic experts largely agreed on the **Parliament's right to information**. In this respect, it referred to the third subparagraph of Article 15(3) TFEU which stipulated that each institution, body, office or agency should ensure that its proceedings were transparent.

Once again, Members insisted that the expenditure of the Council must be scrutinised in the same way as that of other institutions and emphasised Parliament's prerogative to grant discharge. They took the view

that Council's failure to submit the requested documents to Parliament above all undermined the right of citizens of the Union to information and transparency and was **becoming a cause for concern, reflecting a certain democratic deficit within the Union institutions.**

Updating the rules: the committee believed that it was necessary to consider different possibilities to update the rules on granting discharge laid down in the TFEU. They considered that satisfactory cooperation between Parliament, the European Council and the Council as a result of an open and formal dialogue procedure could be a positive sign to be sent to the citizens of the Union.