

2013 discharge: EU general budget, European Council and Council

2014/2079(DEC) - 27/10/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 655 votes to 30, with 3 abstentions, 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.**

Democratic accountability: Parliament 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 the same democratic accountability.

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

Parliament stated that the European Council and the Council, as Union institutions, should be subject to **democratic accountability towards the citizens of the Union** as far as they are beneficiaries of the general budget of the European Union.

In this regard, Parliament is the sole directly elected body among the Union institutions and has responsibility to grant discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union

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

It 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.

It 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.

Parliament 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, Parliament 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. It 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: Parliament believed that it was necessary to consider different possibilities to update the rules on granting discharge laid down in the TFEU. It 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.