2014 discharge: EU general budget, Economic and Social Committee

2015/2159(DEC) - 08/04/2016 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Anders Primdahl VISTISEN (ECR, DK) calling on the European Parliament to give discharge to the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in respect of the implementation of the Committee's budget for the financial year 2014.

Budgetary and financial management: the report notes that, in 2014, the EESC budget amounted to **EUR 128 559 380** (EUR 130 104 400 in 2013), corresponding to a **decrease of 1.19%** relative to the 2013 annual budget, with a **utilisation rate of 95.6%**. It notes the increase in the utilisation rate in 2014 but regrets that it still has not reached the 96.8 % achieved in 2012. It also regrets the **increase in staff mission costs** from EUR 338 366 in 2013 to EUR 387 481 in 2014 (14.5 % increase).

Members noted with concern that in its 2014 annual report, the Court of Auditors observed **weaknesses at the EESC in four cases out of the 15 procurement procedures** it examined. They welcome the fact that, in response, the EESC has set up a **specific support service for public procurement** to assist directorates other than the logistics directorate, which already has such a service; expects it to be fully operational in 2016.

They also note with satisfaction that a **cooperation agreement** between the EESC and Parliament, with two annexes on administrative cooperation and budgetary impact in common with a parallel agreement between Parliament and the Committee of the Regions, was signed on 5 February 2014 with the objective of developing political and administrative cooperation.

EESC's actions: Members made a series of observations on the daily management of the EESC:

- information on the reasons for the increased number of legal opinions issued by the legal unit in 2014;
- the adoption of specific detailed provisions concerning the **functioning of the services** shared by the **EESC, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Parliament** with a view to developing further synergies that will enhance productivity at all levels;
- a detailed breakdown per institution of the **savings and/or increased budgetary expenditure** resulting from the cooperation agreement to be included in its mid-term review;
- the development of a **systematic strategy** to reduce substantially travel expenses and allowances paid to EESC beneficiaries (reimbursements amounted to EUR 17 375 864 in 2014);
- the inclusion of an **overview of staff holding management positions** sorted by nationality, sex and position in the annual activity report;
- the setting of medium-term objectives to achieve **gender balance** in management posts;
- the organisation of **a specific course on 'Ethics and Integrity'** to improve knowledge and awareness of staff members' rights and obligations that is mandatory both for new and existing members of EESC staff;
- the adoption of measures necessary to ensure recognition, respect and consideration of **whistle-blowers** in cases acknowledged as such by the General Court;
- information on progress made in the use of **videoconferencing**;
- the more effective use of **language training** to ensure that less interpretation is needed, further **reductions in interpretation costs**, and more **outsourcing of translation**.
- strengthened **information and communication policy**, as well as social media presence;

- better **planning** of internal events.