2014 discharge: EU general budget, European Parliament

2015/2155(DEC) - 28/04/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to grant discharge to its President in respect of the budget of the European Parliament for the financial year 2014.

In a resolution adopted by 480 votes to 149, with 16 abstentions, Parliament recalled that Parliament's final appropriations for 2014 totalled EUR 1 755 631 742, or 20.13% of heading 5 of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) set aside for the 2014 administrative expenditure of the Union institutions as a whole representing a 0.3% increase over the 2013 budget.

It recalled that four chapters accounted, in 2014, for 72 % of the total of the commitments:

- Chapter 10 (Members of the institution),
- Chapter 12 (Officials and temporary staff),
- Chapter 20 (Buildings and associated costs),
- Chapter 42 (Expenditure relating to parliamentary assistance).

2014 discharge: acknowledging the Internal Auditor’s observations, Parliament deplored the transfer of responsibilities from the administration to the offices of Members. It called for a review by and about the administration to check which obligations (e.g. responsibility for insuring trainees) can be returned to the administration. It noted that after considerable delay, internal whistleblowing rules have been adopted and are in force since January 2016. It also expressed concern at the lack of protection granted to whistleblowers and called on Parliament to ensure that their rights are fully respected.

EP President: Parliament noted that there was an inconsistency between the dates of the presentation of the draft report for the Parliament discharge and the scope for tabling additional questions to the Secretary-General. It noted that it was difficult to differentiate fully the President's political activities from his preparation as "Spitzenkandidat" to head the Party of European Socialists in the 2014 European election. It considered that an unequivocal distinction has not been made between the two roles and called for a **clear segregation of office holders' functions and candidacies for European election campaigns**. It regretted the **at least indirect use of Parliament staff to help prepare the campaign** and called for action to ensure that it does not happen again in future. It regretted that the President transformed the Twitter profile of the European Parliament Presidency into his personal profile and used it during the campaign.

Parliament requested further information on the campaigns of all "Spitzenkandidaten", in particular whether they were accompanied by officials and other statutory staff not on leave during the election campaign.

Parliament mandated the new European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) to conduct a comparative analysis of the legal framework governing the compatibilities of candidates who run for election campaigns in other international organisations and in the Member States (election of Prime minister, Secretary General, Chancellor, etc.).

It highlighted that the official international missions undertaken by the President were mostly with government and official representations attached to socialist parties and organisations and called for further information in this regard. It also requested further information on the campaigns of all

"Spitzenkandidaten", in particular whether they were accompanied by officials and other statutory staff not on leave during the election campaign.

General expenditure allowance (GEA): Parliament recalled that the GEA is intended to cover expenditure in the Member State of election, such as a Members' office rent, equipment, supplies, documentation or logistical organisation of events. It noted that a comprehensive system of control of the Member's parliamentary mandate allowance would represent 40 to 75 new administrative posts, which would go against the staff reduction scheme. It supported **full transparency regarding the GEA** in order to allow European citizens to have an insight into the general expenditure of the Members of the European Parliament. Plenary urged the Bureau to revise the list of expenses which may be defrayed from the GEA.

Conflicts of interest: Parliament welcomed the fact that the Commission has started a public consultation procedure in respect of the **revision of the current transparency register of the Commission and Parliament and its extension to the Council**. It requested that immediately after the public consultation an inter-institutional working group be set up for preparing proposals concerning the revision of the register, the accompanying code of conduct, and the functioning thereto. It called additionally for a report by Parliament's administration on which former managers, CEOs, directors and board members in relevant European NGOs are now Members of the Parliament.

Parliament's administration is called upon to present a report on the use of the Parliament's premises by **interest groups and other external organisations** and called on the Bureau to examine the compatibility of these events with parliamentary work.

Parliament is also urged to adopt rules in order to disclose all input received from lobbyists/interest representatives on draft policies, laws and amendments as a '**legislative footprint**'.

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

- **DG for Communication**: Parliament noted that VoteWatch received two grants (EUR 149 172 in 2012 and EUR 350 000 in 2013) for the co-financing of specific projects related to the European elections. It requested an added value assessment of those projects. Members noted that DG COMM is extremely vocal in calling for a reduction in expenditure and a greater stress on efficiency. They noted that **despite the large sums spent on the Parliament website**, it remains complex, difficult to navigate and fails to generate the desired visibility. Members are disappointed to learn that the works on the Eastman Building, which will provide the premises for the **House of European History**, has continued to accumulate delays. The works should have been completed by the end of 2014. While welcoming the success of the Parlamentarium, Parliament is concerned the budget line for the European Parliament Visitors' Centre increased by 24 % over the previous year in comparison with the visitors increase which was only 1%. Regarding the **LUX Prize**, Parliament noted that the expenditure on the LUX Film Prize itself has been significantly reduced from previous years and recalled that advertising and promoting the LUX Film Prize, together with the Sakharov prize and women's rights, aims to illustrate Parliament's commitment to consensual values such as human rights and solidarity, as well as its commitment to cultural and linguistic diversity. Parliament regretted the fact that the results of a survey on awareness and impact of the LUX-Prize, requested in the 2013 discharge report, is not yet available and called for the results of this study to be available to the public by mid-May 2016.
- **DG for Personnel**: Parliament stressed that in the context of the 2014 revision of the staff regulations and the current MFF as at 1st January 2014, 67 posts had been deleted from the establishment plan in order to achieve the reduction of 5 % of the number of posts over the period from 2013 to 2017, excluding political groups. It pointed out that the increase in working hours from 37.5 to 40 hours a week under the revision of the staff regulations is the equivalent of over 350 extra posts and that this virtually offsets the staff cuts of 5 % over several years agreed as part of the

reform of the staff regulations. Parliament called for clearer qualification requirements for staff particularly in sensitive functions such as, for instance, in the committee secretariats or the department for ex ante impact assessments, in particular in terms of respecting the **ideological and political neutrality of staff**. It pointed out that 114 former interim staff members for the Strasbourg plenary sessions were recruited in 2014 by Parliament as contract agents. It underlined that the judgement by a French court on these "intérimaires" in itself cannot justify the decision to recruit them under the staff regulations. Regarding the issue of **accredited parliamentary assistants** (APA), Parliament called for account to be taken of the specific circumstances of APAs with regard to the timing of activities organised to increase well-being at work (mindfulness), lunchtime conferences, etc. It took note of the report on the evaluation of the Statute for parliamentary assistants drawn up by Parliament and called on it, as a result, to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth evaluation of the Statute and the implementing rules before the end of 2016 and for the official representatives of the APAs to be involved in this process.

- **DG for Security and Safety**: Parliament stressed that further security measures and an urgent revision of the **global security concept** as adopted by the Bureau in 2011 should take place in view of the recent security context. It expressed concern with regard to the different approaches taken by the Brussels and Strasbourg authorities concerning the security of parliamentary premises. It considered it indispensable to enhance the security perimeter around the Parliament's buildings. It called for effective **screening** of all security staff with a view to ensuring their aptitude for the completion of their tasks in terms both of reliability and levels of professional competence and insisted that reinforcing the security of the Parliament's buildings and their immediate surroundings be given the highest priority. It called for a revision of building security measures and for **greater control at the entrance to the Parliament's carparks** by means of automatic number plate recognition. In a series of amendments adopted in plenary, Parliament noted that Union institutions and bodies, when addressing today the security and anti-terrorist challenges, display segregated resources, different rules and diverse equipment, which are not compatible. This situation not only implies the weak management of resources within the respective administrations (the annual budget for security-related expenditure for the Commission and Parliament is around EUR 40 million each, with Council having around EUR 15 million and the European External Action Service (EEAS) having more than EUR 5 million for the security of their headquarters in Brussels alone) but also could **increase the vulnerability of the Union institutions**. Plenary expressed concern about the current security environment where a severe terrorist threat is extended across Europe and beyond, notably since the coordinated attacks in Brussels and Paris and the foiled attack in the Thalys train. It called on all Union institutions to proactively promote reinforced cooperation amongst themselves, as well as with the national authorities of the host countries where they are based, have offices or delegations, or carry out their tasks. It urged the Secretary-General, as well as the respective administrative authorities of the Commission, the Council, the EEAS and the parliamentary committees to explore the possible grounds for a **Common Interinstitutional Security Policy** including an action plan to develop common elements such as risk assessment assets and methodologies, personnel and means for the protection of the respective political authorities and VIP guests, training syllabus and resources for security staff which should be in synergy with the competent authorities of the host countries of the Union's main sites, external offices and delegations.

Lastly, Parliament encouraged a number of recommendations to improve energy efficiency in its different premises (in particular, the need to implement Green public procurement for all contracts and calls for tenders).