2014 discharge: EU general budget, Economic and Social Committee

2015/2159(DEC) - 28/04/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant 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.

In its resolution accompanying the decision on discharge, adopted 526 votes to 116 with 5 abstentions, Parliament welcomed the fact that on the basis of its audit work, the Court of Auditors concluded that the payments as a whole for the year ending 31 December 2014 for administrative and other expenditure of the institutions and bodies were **free from material error**. Members noted with concern, however, that in its 2014 annual report, the Court of Auditors observed weaknesses at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in four cases out of the 15 procurement procedures it examined. They welcomed the fact that, in response to the observations made by the Court of Auditors, the EESC has set up a specific support service for public procurement to assist directorates other than the logistics directorate. They expected it to be fully operational in the second half of 2016.

Budgetary and financial management: Parliament noted 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 noted the increase in the utilisation rate in 2014 but regrets that it still has not reached the 96.8 % achieved in 2012. It also regretted the **increase in staff mission costs** from EUR 338 366 in 2013 to EUR 387 481 in 2014 (14.5 % increase).

Members took note that the EESC has implemented the system regarding new reimbursement rules for members' travel expenses based on real costs, has become fully operational with the beginning of the current new EESC term starting in autumn of 2015. On the other hand, they **regretted the increase of staff mission costs** from EUR 338 366 in 2013 to EUR 387 481 in 2014 (14.5 %).

EESC actions: Parliament noted 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. It welcomed the EESC response to Parliament's request to make an individual assessment of the impact of the cooperation agreement.

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 and the European Parliament** with a view to developing further synergies that will enhance productivity at all levels;
- EESC members to be polled on their satisfaction with the services provided to them by the European Parliamentary Research Service;
- 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;
- mandatory participation of all staff in the EESC specific course on '**Ethics and Integrity'** to improve knowledge and awareness of staff members' rights and obligations;
- the immediate and effective 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.