2014 discharge: EU general budget, European External Action Service (EEAS)

2015/2163(DEC) - 28/04/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European External Action Service for the financial year 2014.

In its resolution accompanying the decision on discharge, adopted 376 votes to116 with 152 abstentions, Parliament welcomed the fact that the European External Action Service ('EEAS') has continued to implement its budget **without being affected by major errors** and that the overall level of error in the administrative budget has been estimated by the Court of Auditors at 0.5 %.

Budgetary and financial management: Parliament noted that the final budget for the year 2014 for EEAS Headquarters was **EUR 518.6 million, representing a 1.9 % increase compared to the preceding financial year.** The budget was split as follows: EUR 212.9 million for EEAS headquarters and EUR 305.7 million for Union delegations. It also noted that, in addition to the EEAS's own budget, the Commission contributed EUR 271 million in compensation for the management of Commission staff in the network of delegations.

Members noted that the EEAS is now **entirely responsible** for all administrative costs related to the functioning of the delegations except for the delegations located in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. They recalled that an **adequate budgeting process** and in particular a simplification of the budget structure remains a core challenge in the short term in order to streamline financial circuits and to help the consolidation of the EEAS's functioning.

EEAS actions: Parliament made a **series of observations** on the management of the EEAS:

- the EEAS should simplify current budget arrangements and make them less rigid, so as to allow **flexible but effective use** to be made of delegation staff in the interests of the Union;
- despite the new organisational chart and the subsequent rationalisation of a formerly top-heavy management structure in favour of fewer hierarchical layers, the **internal administrative and financial framework of the EEAS is still overly complex and rigid**, and needs a further reform in order to streamline its internal processes and simplify its structure and to allow EEAS to react to crises in a timely manner;
- continuing imbalances in the staffing profile of the EEAS **as regards gender** and nationality need to be addressed, especially in higher grades, as does the disproportionate number of high-grade posts;
- the **staffing formula** establishing the balance between staff drawn from Member States and from the Union institutions needs to be revised so that it applies to all levels of the hierarchy, in particular to heads of delegation where Member States' diplomats are strongly overrepresented;
- **geographical balance** should still remain an important element of resources management particularly with respect to the Member States that have acceded to the Union since 2004;
- a clear policy is needed on **seconded national experts**, as is clarification on their entitlements, the financial costs for the EEAS budget and the potential issue of conflicts of interest;
- steps should be taken to better integrate the EU **special representatives** more closely into the administrative structure and senior management of the EEAS;
- the trend of **co-location projects** of Union delegations with Member States should continue;

- adequate tools should be provided to the **heads of delegation**, to effectively manage and oversee the delegations without generating excessive administrative burden;
- the EEAS should: (i) further consider the possibility of providing **consular services** through Union delegations; (ii) establish closer cooperation, coordination and synergies of activities between the Union delegations and Member States´ Embassies abroad;
- the EEAS should regularly pursue its **evaluation programme** of the delegations and provide in its annual activity report a synthesis of the main weaknesses and difficulties encountered in the functioning of the Union delegations;
- the EEAS and EuropeAid need to ensure that the Union delegations actively address the **shortcomings identified** in the external assistance programmes and projects already during the implementation phase, so that ongoing programmes and projects meet their objectives and avoid delays;
- particular attention should be paid to **procurement and human resources procedures** in order to ensure that they are responsive to the CSDP's operational needs;
- **sustainability aspects** should be taken into account in the operational planning of all its mission activities by systematically assessing the local needs and capacity to sustain outcomes;
- the EEAS and the Commission should **coordinate** CSDP missions more thoroughly in advance with other Union efforts, bilateral missions and international efforts with similar objectives;
- the EEAS should clarify its vision for the future in order to give a direction to its otherwise weakly implemented mission and develop expertise on global issues such as climate change or energy security.

Parliament welcomed the signature of an administrative arrangement between the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the EEAS in accordance with the new OLAF regulation that has entered into force. It also stressed that **transparency and accountability** are essential requirements not only for democratic scrutiny but also for the adequate functioning and the credibility of missions carried out under the Union flag. Members reiterated the importance attached by Parliament to exercising oversight over the different common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions and operations.