

2014 discharge: EU general budget, European Ombudsman

2015/2161(DEC) - 28/04/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the European Ombudsman in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Ombudsman for the financial year 2014.

In its resolution accompanying the decision on discharge, adopted 541 votes to 64 with 29 abstentions, Parliament welcomed the fact that the Court of Auditors observed that **no significant weaknesses** had been identified in respect of the audited topics relating to human resources and procurement for the Ombudsman. The payments as a whole for the year ended on 31 December 2014 for administrative and other expenditure of the institutions and bodies **were free from material error**.

Budgetary and financial management: Parliament observed that the Ombudsman's budget amounted in 2014 to EUR 9 857 002 and that of the total appropriations, **97.87 % were committed** and 93.96 % paid, with a utilisation rate of 97.87 %. It noted a decrease in the utilisation rate in 2014. It noted a particular **increase of commitments** in 2014 related to the Members of the institution, and asked the Ombudsman to give a comprehensive description of those amounts.

Actions of the Ombudsman: Parliament welcomed the fact that the ratio of closed to ongoing inquiries reached **the highest ever level** at the end of the previous exercise (2013), with a score of 1.4 closed enquiries for every ongoing one, against a target of 1.1. It made a series of observations and recommendations on the daily management of the body:

- regular information on **own-initiative inquiries**, carried out in line with its new Strategy Towards 2019. This is an **effective tool** taking up a more systemic approach of complex issues falling within its mandate. Parliament pointed out, however, that the Ombudsman's priority should be to address complaints from citizens within a reasonable time frame and that own-initiative inquiries should under no circumstances infringe on that objective;
- a strategy for the mitigation of any potential weaknesses regarding the very **specific targets** introduced in the Strategy Towards 2019. These objectives have not been attained: the Ombudsman has scored lower in terms of the proportion of inquiries closed within 12 and 18 months and furthermore in the proportion of cases in which the admissibility decision is taken within one month;
- compliance with the principle of **transparency**, in particular as regards identifying and assigning clear lines of responsibility, and to ensure that the Ombudsman website is updated regularly and accurately reflects the organisation chart of the institution;
- improvement in the Ombudsman's **information and communication policy**, in view of the fact that the number of complaints falling outside the Ombudsman's remit remains very high, and stronger links for smooth and regular cooperation with the European Network of Ombudsmen and national and regional ombudsmen;
- reduction in the number of **missions** between Brussels and Strasbourg and increased use of videoconferencing;
- bringing **staff selection criteria** into line with the European civil service's standards of quality, transparency, objectivity and equal opportunities; Members were concerned at the Ombudsman's recruitment policy, which has involved using emergency procedures directly to employ former trainees on short-term contracts;
- setting medium-term objectives to achieve the necessary gender balance;

- including in the **annual activity report**: (i) a table of all human resources broken down by nationality, gender and grade; (ii) the rate of requested but unused interpretation services for 2014; (iii) the results and consequences of closed OLAF cases, where the Ombudsman or any of the individuals working for it were the subject of an investigation.

Lastly, Parliament took note of the Ombudsman's calculations with regard to **potential savings of EUR 195 000** should it only have one seat. It stressed that such centralisation should be actively promoted.