2015 discharge: EU general budget, European External Action Service (EEAS)

2016/2160(DEC) - 30/03/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Benedek JÁVOR (Greens/EFA, HU), calling on the European Parliament to grant 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 2015.

Members noted that, according to the Court of Auditors, the **overall level of error** in Heading 5 (Administration), including the budget of the European External Action Service (EEAS), continues to be **relatively low** with an estimation at 0.6 % in 2015. No significant weaknesses were identified as regards the annual activity report and the internal control system of the EEAS.

Budget and financial management: Members noted that the total budget of the EEAS for 2015 was EUR 602.8 million, representing a total **increase of 16.2 % compared to 2014**, which resulted from the transfer to its budget of EUR 71.5 million from the Commission's administrative budget (EUR 25.2 million) and from other budget lines (up to EUR 46.3 million) to finance the common costs of the Union's delegations such as rents, offices' security and IT costs.

Members regretted the increase **of the average rate of anomaly on commitments** to 22.4 % in 2015 (compared to 18.3 % in 2014) at the level of ex ante controls. They pointed out that the **execution of the EEAS administrative budget** remains a point of concern as certain delegations receive budget contributions from the Commission.

EEAS actions: Members made a series of observations on the management of the EEAS:

- remedy certain weaknesses found by the Court in the **recruitment procedures** of local agents in delegations and in **procurement procedures**;
- pay attention, especially in delegations, to 'business continuity' and 'document management' as key internal control standards;
- ensure a more **balanced distribution of staff**: the **share of Member States' diplomats** represents 32.9 % of the EEAS overall AD staff in comparison to 33.8 % in 2014; this proportion is higher in delegations with 43.1 %;
- reshape its conditions and recruitment policies in order to attract both genders equally for management positions, the ratio is currently at 21.4 % / 78.6 %.
- make **geographical balance** an important element of the EEAS human resources management, particularly with respect to the Member States that have acceded the Union in 2004 or after;
- develop the role of **Union delegations**, particularly facilitating and supporting coordination between Member States in providing consular assistance;
- join the future Inter-Institutional Agreement on a Mandatory **Transparency Register**, including for the Union delegations, insofar as this is legally possible.

The EEAS is called upon to present a **review of its human resources policy** in the course of 2017, addressing issues such as gender balance and mobility of staff between institutions, while taking also into consideration its impact in terms of human resources for the strengthening of the Union 'external action and visibility through the Union global strategy.

Members called on the EEAS for an **overhaul of its building policies** in line with the recommendations made by the Court of Auditors. They supported the implementation of a medium and long term strategy to identify all possible options in this area from investment priorities or possibilities of purchases to renting renewals or to the sharing of premises with Member States, taking into account staff projections and policy planning and development.

Members urged the EEAS to reinforce its management control and monitoring tools of all the **costs incurred** in the building policy in order to ensure an accurate overview and follow-up of all the expenditure in this area.

Lastly, Members stated that the **security** of the EEAS and of its delegations needs to be further strengthened. They called on the EEAS to give priority to it when choosing buildings and spaces for its delegations.