

# 2015 discharge: EU general budget, European Parliament

2016/2152(DEC) - 27/04/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 490 votes to 144, with 9 abstentions, to **grant discharge to its President** in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Court for the financial year 2015.

In a resolution adopted by 350 votes to 273, with 12 abstentions, Parliament made a series of recommendations which should be taken into consideration when granting discharge.

These recommendations may be summarised as follows:

**Parliament's budgetary and financial management:** Parliament noted that Parliament's final appropriations for 2015 totalled EUR 1 794 929 112, or 19.78 % of heading V of the Multiannual Financial Framework set aside for the 2015 administrative expenditure of the Union institutions as a whole, representing a 2.2 % increase compared to the 2014 budget.

It pointed out that four chapters accounted for 71 % of total 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).

**2015 discharge:** Parliament noted that overall audit evidence indicated that the spending on administration is not affected by a material level of error, but that on the basis of the seven quantified errors the estimated level of error present under heading 5 of the MFF on administration is 0.6 % (up from 0.5 % in 2014). It noted that, against this background, the work undertaken by Parliament in the context of the discharge procedure offers an opportunity to consider more thoroughly the accounts of Parliament's administration and called for the **strengthening of in-house expertise on accounts and auditing** that rapporteurs can make use of in the preparation of their discharge reports.

It asked the Internal Auditor to make his reports on follow-up, developments and solutions relating to problems identified in the course of his mandate available to the Committee on Budgetary Control and asked the Secretary-General to introduce procedures for the assessment of performance and results.

It noted that Parliament, which costs about **EUR 3.60 per citizen per year**, does not need to shy away from comparisons with other parliamentary systems, especially since one-third of costs is accounted for by basic factors (multilingualism and number of sites) over which Parliament itself has limited influence and which do not apply to other parliaments in that form.

Members acknowledged that, according to the Court, **the costs of the geographic dispersion of Parliament amount to EUR 114 million per year** and noted the finding, in its [resolution](#) of 20 November 2013 on the location of the seats of the European Union's Institutions, that **78 % of all missions by Parliament staff coming under the Staff Regulations arise as a direct result of the fact that Parliament's services are geographically dispersed**.

Parliament recalled that the estimate of the environmental impact of that dispersal is between 11 000 to 19 000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It called on the Bureau to request the Secretary-General to develop without

delay a roadmap for a single seat for Parliament. It reiterated its call on the Council to address, in order to create **long-term savings**, the need for a roadmap for a single seat, as stated by Parliament in several previous resolutions.

It stated that the withdrawal of the UK and the need to reallocate the European Agencies which currently have their seats in the UK could provide an **excellent opportunity to solve several issues in the same time**. Members pointed however to Article 341 TFEU which establishes that the seats of the institutions of the Union shall be determined by common accord of the governments of the Member States and Protocol 6 annexed to the TEU and the TFEU which lays down that Parliament shall have its seat in **Strasbourg**. In this regard, Members recalled that a single-seat solution **requires Treaty change**.

**Long-term missions:** Parliament recalled that the Administration decided to discontinue the practice of long-term missions leading to considerable savings. Parliament views this as a major contradiction given the fact that 13 members of staff are currently on long-term missions, with an expatriation allowance and daily allowances, to a place where that person was already living and working. This is a reprehensible use of taxpayers' money. This is why the Parliament insisted on a clarification of the circumstances of every long-term mission, and in particular on the disclosure of the reasons and costs for that long-term mission.

**Missions of some Parliament officials:** Parliament recalled that **all officials and other servants of the Union**, even those who work within cabinets, are to **carry out their duties solely with the interests of the Union in mind**, according to the rules laid down in the Staff Regulations. They are paid by taxpayers' money, which is not intended to finance press or other staff engaged in promoting any national political interest of a President.

Moreover, Parliament noted that, on 15 December 2015, the President gave himself authority to **allocate an uncapped special allowance** to his cabinet staffers, over and above the existing cabinet allowance. It raised the question of the lawfulness of that authority and the validity of the special allowances and asked for consideration to be given to whether the decision concerned should be revoked.

**Transparency register and conflict of interest:** Parliament stressed that some journalists find it difficult to obtain the specific information they are looking for. However, it pointed out that transparency of Parliament and its administration is essential for the legitimacy of the institution and that, always respecting the rules governing the protection of personal data, access to information should be improved. It recalled, in an amendment adopted in plenary, the obligation on Members to inform the administration immediately of any change in their declarations of interests.

It believes that Members ought to be able to use Parliament's website to provide their constituents with the greatest possible transparency on their activities and, therefore, called upon the Secretary-General to develop a system that Members can use to publish details of their meetings with interest representatives.

**Administration and management of the European Parliament:** Parliament made a series of recommendations concerning the following:

- management of the subsidy scheme for visitors' groups;
- conflicts of interest;
- parliamentary assistants and Members;
- the LUX prize;
- the house of European history;
- the activities of certain DGs.

Parliament also considered the issue of the **general expenditure allowance** and called on the Bureau to define and publish the rules concerning the use of this type of allowance. It reminded Members that the **GEA does not constitute an additional personal salary**. It asked the Secretary-General to publicise this possibility as a priority and urged Members to **return surpluses at the end of their mandate**.

**As regards the financing of European political parties**, Members called on the Parliament and the Commission to present a **proposal for a revision of the current Union legal act** on the statute and funding of **European political parties and European political foundations**, including stricter requirements for the setting up of European political parties and foundations, in order to prevent abuses.

It considered it to be essential to look into any deficiencies in the current system of internal and external controls in respect of the avoidance of major irregularities.

**On communication**, Parliament expressed concern about the effectiveness of Parliament's communication strategy. It called for a comprehensive review of the current strategy and, in particular for a more active approach towards those who are not automatically interested in Parliament's activities or who may even be sceptical about its functioning.

It noted that with the establishment of the Parliamentarium and the opening of the House of European History, the **Parliament and its surroundings are becoming a citizens' and tourist attraction** that will bring about a better knowledge of the role of Parliament and illustrate for citizens Parliament's commitment to consensual values such as human rights and solidarity.

Lastly, Parliament made a number of recommendations regarding energy performance and the reduction of food waste on the different sites of the European Parliament.