2015 discharge: EU general budget, European Council and Council

2016/2153(DEC) - 27/04/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 603 votes to 14, with 15 abstentions, **to postpone the decision on granting the Secretary-General of the Council discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Council and of the Council for the financial year 2015**.

Parliament postponed the closure of the accounts for the Council and the European Council in accordance with Annex IV, Article 5 (1) (a) to Parliament's Rules of Procedure.

Parliament noted that in 2015, the European Council and the Council had an overall budget of EUR 541 791 500 (EUR 534 202 300 in 2014), with an implementation rate of 92.6 %. It also took note of the increase of EUR 7.6 million (+ 1.4 %) in the Council's budget for 2015.

Systematic underspending: Parliament noted the publication by the General Secretariat of the Council (GSC) of the annual activity reports of the Legal Service, the Communication and Document Management and the Administration directors-general on under spending and called for key performance indicators to be put in place to improve the budgetary planning.

Moreover, Parliament is still concerned about the very high amount of appropriations being carried over from 2015 to 2016 particularly those on property, plant and equipment.

It reiterated that the **budget of the European Council and the Council should be separated in order to contribute to the transparency of the financial management** of the institutions and to improve the accountability of both institutions.

Human resources: Parliament stressed that the geographical balance, namely the relationship between staff nationality and the size of Member States, should still remain an important element of resources management particularly with respect to the Member States that have acceded to the Union since 2004. It regretted the fact that Member States which acceded to the Union in 2004 or after are still **under-represented at the higher level of administration** and in managerial posts, for which progress is still awaited.

Building policy: Parliament expressed concern at the delivery delay of the Europa building and asked for the Council's building policy to be provided to the discharge authority. It reminded the Council of Parliament's call for progress reports on building projects and a detailed breakdown of the costs incurred to date.

Council/European Council discharge procedure: state of play: Parliament once again noted the lack of transparency which has characterised Parliament's information on the discharge procedure concerning the Council and the European Council and noted that they ought to be **transparent** and fully accountable to Union citizens for the funds entrusted to it as a Union institution.

The Council must take part fully and in **good faith in the annual discharge procedure, just as the other institutions do**. In this regard, Parliament considered that effective supervision of the Union's budget implementation requires cooperation between Parliament and the Council through a working arrangement. It deeply regretted the difficulties encountered in the discharge procedures to date.

As with previous years, it insisted that the expenditure of the Council must be scrutinised in the same way as that of other institutions and pointed out that the basics of such scrutiny have been laid down in its discharge resolutions of the past years. It hoped for a much improved cooperation with the Council's secretary-general for whom the year 2015 was the first year he took on these new responsibilities.

Towards improved cooperation: Members stated that the Parliament and the Council should show greater goodwill on both sides. They recalled Parliament's power to grant discharge pursuant to Articles 316, 317 and 319 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Articles 164 to 167 of the Financial Regulation, and affirmed that granting or not granting discharge is a duty that Parliament has towards the Union citizens.

Parliament recalled that each of the institutions, as defined in Article 2(b) of the Financial Regulation, is autonomous in implementing its own section of the budget given its budgetary autonomy laid down in Article 55 of that Regulation. Parliament grants discharge to **each institution individually**.

In this regard, Parliament considered that satisfactory cooperation between Parliament, the European Council and the Council as a result of an open and formal dialogue procedure can be a positive sign to be sent to the citizens of the Union.