2016 discharge: EU general budget, European External Action Service (EEAS)

2017/2145(DEC) - 09/02/2018 - Supplementary non-legislative basic document

Based on the observations contained in the report by the Court of Auditors, the Council called on the European Parliament to **grant discharge** to all of the EU institutions in respect of the implementation of their respective budgets for the financial year 2016.

The Council notes with satisfaction that the **estimated level of error** reported by the Court for payments in the "Administration" policy area further decreased by 0.6 percentage points to **0.2 % in 2016**, well below the materiality threshold of 2 %. It welcomes that **no serious weaknesses** were identified by the Court in the systems examined.

The Council underlines the need to respect the principles of annuality and of sound financial management and that the carry-over of appropriations should always be compliant with the rules of the Financial Regulation and be motivated with factual and genuine reasons.

The Council regrets that not all the EU institutions, bodies and agencies have achieved **the 5 % reduction of posts in the establishment plan** by the end of 2017 and urges these institutions, bodies and agencies to carry out the remaining reduction as soon as possible in order to achieve this target fully.

The Council also notes the Court's findings that the total number of staff posts in the establishment plans decreased by 1.1 % between 2012 and 2017, the number of posts actually occupied by staff increased by 0.4 % over the period from 1 January 2013 to 1 January 2017, and the actual payments for salaries for permanent officials and temporary agents increased by 9.2 % between 2012 and 2016.

While recognising that during the period 2013-2017 some EU institutions, bodies and agencies were tasked with new responsibilities and equipped with new resources, the Council considers that the gap between the expectations and the outcome is significant.

In this context, the Council acknowledges that by focusing solely on the headcount based on establishment plan posts, the methodology chosen was **not suited** to achieve the goal of reducing administrative expenditure.

The Court **detected weaknesses in the procurement procedures** put in place by the EEAS in third countries. These were brought to the attention of the management.