# 2016 discharge: EU general budget, European Economic and Social Committee

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Ingeborg GRÄSSLE (EPP, DE) calling on the European Parliament to **grant discharge** to the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Economic and Social Committee for the financial year 2016.

Members welcomed the conclusion of the Court of Auditors, according to which the payments as a whole for the year ended on 31 December 2016 for administrative and other expenditure of the European Economic and Social Committee were **free from material error**. No significant weaknesses were identified in respect of the audited topics relating to human resources and procurement.

**Financial and budgetary management**: Members welcomed the overall prudent and sound financial management of the Committee in the 2016 budget period. They expressed support for the successful paradigm shift towards performance-based budgeting in the Commission's budget planning. They encourage the Committee to apply that method to its own budget-planning procedure.

In 2016, the Committee's budget - purely administrative - amounted to EUR 130 586 475 (EUR 129 100 000 in 2015), **with a utilisation rate of 97.55 %.** An increase of the utilisation rate was noted in 2016 when compared to 2015.

**EESC's actions**: Members made a series of recommendations to the EESC:

- continue applying performance-based budget principles in its daily operations and keep Parliament informed of the update of the key activity performance indicators (KAPIs) in 2017;
- provide the discharge authority with clarifications of expenditure in connection with the modernisation of the Committee, in order to boost transparency and accountability, and to publish the cost-benefit assessment;
- provide the discharge authority with a cost-benefit assessment of the missions for the Union and visited countries, and the list of the visited countries in 2016;
- further strengthen the contacts between the Committee and the chairs and the rapporteurs of Parliament's committees in order to ensure better follow-up of the Committee's contribution to the Union legislative process;
- put in place measures for improving staff well-being at work and for a closer monitoring of absences;
- urge the President, the Vice-Presidents and the Secretariat of the Committee to publish their declarations of interest on its website by the end of June 2018;
- put forward a unique and complete form of declaration of conflicts of interest to replace the declaration of absence of conflicts of interest;
- encourage the adoption of appropriate measures in order to make savings and reduce environmental pollution;
- assess the potential of other instruments which may contribute to economic savings, *inter alia* on travel expenses;
- establish an independent disclosure, advice and referral body with sufficient budgetary resources, in order to help whistleblowers use the right channels to disclose their information on possible irregularities affecting the financial interests of the Union, while protecting their confidentiality and offering needed support and advice;

- improve policy in order to further prevent any form of psychological and sexual harassment.

Lastly, Members regretted the decision of the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union and that at this point no predictions can be made about the financial, administrative, human and other consequences related to the withdrawal. Members called on the Committee to perform impact assessments and inform Parliament of the results by the end of 2018.