2016 discharge: EU general budget, European Ombudsman

2017/2143(DEC) - 26/03/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Ingeborg GRÄSSLE (EPP, DE) calling on the European Parliament to **give discharge** to the European Ombudsman in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Ombudsman for the financial year 2016.

It welcomed the fact that the Court of Auditors observed that **no significant weaknesses** had been identified in respect of the audited topics relating to human resources and procurement for the Ombudsman. The Court concluded that the payments as a whole for the year ended on 31 December 2016 for administrative and other expenditure of the institutions and bodies were **free from material error**.

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

The Ombudsman's budget is purely administrative and amounted in 2016 to EUR 10 658 951 (EUR 10 346 105 in 2015). Of the total appropriations, 95.40% were committed (92.32% in 2015) and 85.89% paid (86.19% in 2015), with a **utilisation rate of 95.40%** (92.32% in 2015).

Ombudmans’s actions: the report noted that the Ombudsman closed five strategic inquiries and opened four new ones in 2016 on issues related, *inter alia*, to transparency and conflicts of interest. Results in the handling of complaints was noted in 2016. Union institutions complied with the Ombudsman’s decisions at a rate of 84% (83% in 2015). This has been the second highest rate of compliance with the Ombudsman’ s decisions and recommendations so far.

Members made a series of observations and recommendations to the Ombudsman:

- strive for geographical balance in management positions in the long-term;
- continue to improve transparency in Union decision-making;
- 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;
- perform impact assessments on the implications of Brexit and inform Parliament of the results by the end of the year 2018.

Lastly, Members regretted the lack of data from 2016 in different sections of the Ombudsman’s annual activity report for 2016.