2016 discharge: EU general budget, European Council and Council

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the second report by Ingeborg GRÄSSLE (EPP, DE) in which it called on the European Parliament to **postpone its 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 2016.

Members noted that in 2016, the European Council and the Council had an overall budget of EUR 545 054 000 (compared to EUR 541 791 500 in 2015), with an implementation rate on average of 93.5 %, this is an increase of EUR 3.3 million (equivalent to 0.6 %) in the 2016 budget of the European Council and the Council.

The report 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.

Members expressed their support for the successful paradigm shift towards performance-based budgeting in the Commission's budget planning and encouraged the European Council and the Council to apply the method to their own budget-planning procedure.

Members observed that the objective of the Council's establishment plan to comply with the interinstitutional agreement to reduce staff by 5 % over the period of five years was achieved on 1 January 2017. They called on the Council to provide full details on the human resources and facilities at the disposal of the ATHENA mechanism, to guarantee the maximum level of transparency with respect to that mechanism. They also expressed the need to establish an independent disclosure, advice and referral body with sufficient budgetary resources, in order to help whistleblowers use the right channels to disclose information on possible irregularities affecting the financial interests of the Union, while protecting their confidentiality and offering needed support and advice.

The late delivery of the Europa building had a significant impact on the 2016 budget of the European Council and of the Council and Members asked to be informed of the overall financial impact of the delay. They regretted that there is still a **lack of information on the buildings policy** and related expenditures, which should be public as a sign of transparency for the European citizens.

Once again, they regretted that the Council has still not joined the Union transparency register despite being one of the most important institutions involved in the Union's decision-making process.

Members regretted the decision by the **UK to withdraw from the Union** and stated that at this point no predictions can be made about the financial, administrative, human and other consequences related to the withdrawal. The European Council and the Council are asked to perform impact assessments and inform the Parliament of the results by the end of the year 2018.

State of play: Members noted that **failure to grant discharge** has so far not led to consequences of any kind. They stressed that the situation should be resolved as rapidly as possible in the interest of the citizens of the Union. They recalled that the procedure of giving discharge separately to the individual Union institutions and bodies is a long-standing practice accepted by all the other institutions except the Council, and that this procedure has been developed to guarantee transparency and democratic

accountability towards Union citizens. The Council was urged to take part fully and in good faith in the annual discharge procedure, just as the other institutions do.

Members criticised the irregular nomination, without a call for applications, of two judges for the Tribunal of First Instance for a mandate which moreover lasted only from 14 April 2016 until 31 August 2016. They noted with regret the costs associated with one of those judges taking up and ending his '4 month mandate', amounting to EUR 69 498.25 in addition to the salary received by the judge. They condemned such a waste of Union taxpayers’ money.