2016 discharge: EU general budget, European Committee of the Regions

2017/2142(DEC) - 18/04/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 490 votes to 200, with 4 abstentions to **grant discharge** to the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of the EU's general budget for the 2016 financial year, Section VII – Committee of the Regions.

Members 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 Committee. 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**.

Parliament stressed that the discharge procedure needs to be streamlined and sped up. It requested that the Committee and the Court of Auditors follow best practice in the private sector and proposes in this regard to **review the timetable for the discharge procedure** so that the vote on the discharge would take place in Parliament's plenary part-session in November, thereby closing the discharge procedure within the year following the accounting year in question.

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

In 2016, the Committee had an approved budget of EUR 90.5 million (EUR 88.9 million in 2015), of which EUR 89.4 million were commitment appropriations with a utilisation rate of 98.7 %.

The increase of the utilisation rate in 2016 was welcomed.

Committee activities: Members stressed the importance of **deepening the cooperation with Parliament** based on the cooperation agreement between the Committee and Parliament and asked to be kept informed of any developments in this regard. They asked that the Committee's strategy strengthen connections first of all with Parliament, but also with other Union institutions in order to **increase the involvement of the regions** in the Union legislative process. They stressed that a joint assessment of the budgetary savings resulting from the cooperation between the Committee and Parliament is of interest to both institutions and to Union citizens and suggested that the Committee and Parliament consider carrying out this exercise as a complement to the ongoing political strategic dialogue.

The report welcomed the **administrative cooperation agreement between the Committee and the European Economic and Social Committee**, which entered into force in 2016 and provides for shared translation and logistics directorates. This agreement will ensure also further efficiency in both committees' performance and economic savings.

Members addresses a series of recommendations to the Committee:

- correct the continued shortage of **women** holding senior and middle-management posts;
- put in place measures for improving wellbeing at work, but also of duly verifying absences;
- organise **citizen dialogues**, whilst avoiding overlap with the activities of other Union institutions;
- assess the possibility of further **interinstitutional cooperation** with regard to translation;

- report to the discharge authority on the actions undertaken to reverse the trend of the average time for payment to the Committee's creditors which increased in 2016;
- establish an independent body with sufficient budgetary resources to support **whistleblowers** wishing to disclose information on possible irregularities negatively impacting on the Union's financial interests, while ensuring their confidentiality is protected.

Following an *ex post* control exercise carried in 2016, the Committee has a recurrent recommendation to update or establish **written procedures**. The Committee is urged to make sure that that recommendation is duly followed up.

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