2016 discharge: EU general budget, European Ombudsman

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The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the European Ombudsman in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Ombudsman for the 2016 financial year.

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 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**.

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.

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 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: Parliament 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. The results in the handling of complaints in 2016 were noted. 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 addressed a series of observations and recommendations to the Ombudsman to:

- ensure that an updated version of its **organisational chart** is always available on its website;
- strive for **geographical balance** in management positions in the long-term;
- continue to improve **transparency** in Union decision-making;
- 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;
- perform impact assessments on the **implications of Brexit** and inform Parliament of the results by the end of the year 2018.

Given that the Ombudsman is experiencing a significant increase in complaints, Parliament called on the budgetary authorities, when the time comes to plan the future allocation of financial resources to staff to keep in mind the need for building on the capacity of experienced officials to take over management posts.