2017 discharge: EU general budget, European External Action Service (EEAS)

2018/2176(DEC) - 28/02/2019 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Arndt KOHN (S&D, DE) calling on the European Parliament to grant the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European External Action Service (EEAS) for the financial year 2017.

Members welcomed the fact that, according to the Court of Auditors, the overall level of error for the MFF Heading 5 (Administration), including the budget of the European External Action Service (EEAS) continues to be relatively low with an estimation at 0.5 % in 2017. The Court did not identify material levels of error in the EEAS annual activity report.

Members noted with appreciation that the previous recommendations made in relation to the improvement of the monitoring system for the timely updating of the personal situation and data of members of staff, with a potential impact on the calculation of family allowances, have been implemented in most respects. They considered, however, that consistency checks in relation to the management of family allowances require ongoing attention.

The EEAS has also improved procurement procedures in delegations. However, the former weaknesses identified in public procurement and the management of security services still deserve a steady attention and monitoring.

Budgetary and financial management

The report noted that carry-overs of appropriations have increased in 2017 and amounted to EUR 85 911 000 (compared to EUR 77 450 000 in 2016). The total budget of the EEAS for 2017 amounted to EUR 660 million with an increase of 3.75 % compared to 2016.

A contribution of EUR 54.9 million was also received from the EDF and the trust funds. Additional carry-overs and appropriations released from decommitments brought the total amount to EUR 59.7 million (including also assigned revenues of the financial year).

The headquarters' budget amounted to EUR 236.7 million out of which EUR 153.8 million (or 64.6 %) concerned the payment of salaries and other entitlements of statutory and external staff, EUR 32.2 million (or 14 %) were for buildings and associated costs, and EUR 33 million (i.e. 14 %) were related to IT computer systems, equipment and furniture.

Building policy

Members called for the EEAS' buildings policy to be annexed to the annual activity report, particularly in view of the fact that it is important for its costs to be properly rationalised and not to be excessive. The EEAS is urged to provide the discharge authority with a detailed list of building contracts concluded in 2017.

Staff

Members acknowledged that the number of budget lines used to finance the operations related to Commission staff in the delegations (34 different lines originating in various Headings of the Commission budget, plus the EDF Funds) increases the complexity of budget management. They encouraged the EEAS to keep on working with the European Commission to simplify the budget lines when possible in order to reduce the complexity of budget management.

The EEAS reduced its staff by 5 % over the period 2013-2017 in compliance with the inter-institutional agreement. However, Members are concerned that increasing average work load and understaffing issues could have detrimental effects on the health and quality of life of members of staff as well as on the long-term organisational development of the institution.

The report encouraged the EEAS to cooperate with national universities offering courses dedicated to a diplomatic career in order to promote the European diplomatic service at an early stage and to create an institute dedicated to the education of future European diplomats.

Brexit

Lastly, Members noted that the initial assessment of the level of administrative expenditure of EUR 6.7 million for staff and infrastructure expenditure over a period of nine months related to the opening of a delegation in London in view of the fact that the United Kingdom will become a third country.