2018 discharge: EU general budget, European Ombudsman

2019/2062(DEC) - 14/05/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 665 votes to 23, with 3 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the European Ombudsman in respect of the implementation of the European Ombudsman's budget for the financial year 2018.

In the resolution accompanying its discharge decision (adopted by 666 votes to 21 against, with 6 abstentions), the European Parliament made a series of observations:

Budgetary and financial management

In its report on the European Ombudsman's annual accounts for the financial year 2018, the Court of Auditors did not identify any significant weaknesses as regards human resources and public procurement issues. It concluded that all payments for the year ended 31 December 2018 for the Ombudsman's administrative expenditure were free from material error and that the supervisory and control systems examined were effective.

The Ombudsman's budget in 2018 amounted to EUR 10 837 545 (compared with EUR 10 905 441 in 2017), a reduction of EUR 67 896 (0.62%).

Parliament welcomed the Ombudsman's overall sound financial management and prudence in the financial year 2018. Of the total appropriations, 95.33 % were committed (compared with 93.91 % in 2017) and 91.33 % were paid (compared with 86.20 % in 2017). It noted the improvements related to the appropriations carried over from 2018 to 2019. However, it highlighted the unused appropriations for several budget lines, such as 'external meetings' and 'publications', recalling the need to take measures to minimise budget over-estimates.

Staff

Taking note of the limited resources of the Ombudsman to deal with an ever increasing workload, Parliament supported the Ombudsman’s request to align the establishment plan with the actual needs and workload by identifying functions of a permanent nature which should be carried out by permanent staff. It asked the Ombudsman to report back on potential efficiency gains due to the sole fact of reorganisation and reallocation of tasks.

It welcomed the exemplary gender balance in management positions, with 4 women and 4 men.

The Ombudsman was encouraged to continue to develop a long-term human resources policy framework that takes into account work-life balance, lifelong guidance and career development, gender balance, non-discrimination, teleworking, geographical balance and recruitment of its staff, as well as the integration of persons with disabilities into its workforce.

Cooperation with Parliament

Parliament supported the Ombudsman's intention to cooperate more closely with Parliament to ensure that it is informed of shortcomings, particularly as regards cases of maladministration revealed by inquiries or the institutions' negative responses to recommendations made by the Ombudsman. Members considered

that this information, provided in a summarised and structured way, would be extremely useful to Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control.

Performance

Parliament found that the proportion of inquiries closed within six months and 18 months is 57% and 88% respectively and that the ‘proportion of cases in which the decision on admissibility is taken" within one month has increased significantly, from 69% in 2016 to 86% in 2017. In addition, the average time for processing all categories of complaints increased to 79 days in 2018 (compared to 64 days in 2017), while the average time for investigations was reduced to 255 days in 2018 (compared to 266 days in 2017 and 369 days in 2013). The number of complaints lodged under the mandate (880, compared to 751 in 2017) continued to increase significantly in 2018 (+17%) after a 5.5% increase in 2017.

In addition, the average time for dealing with all categories of complaints increased to 79 days in 2018 (compared to 64 days in 2017), while the average time for dealing with inquiries decreased to 255 days in 2018 (compared to 266 days in 2017 and 369 in 2013). The number of complaints within the mandate (880, compared to 751 in 2017) has continued to increase significantly in 2018 (+ 17 %) after an increase of 5.5 % in 2017.

Information for citizens

Parliament stressed the importance of making EU citizens aware of the possibility of having recourse to the Ombudsman in cases of maladministration. It noted the Ombudsman's efforts to increase its visibility through tools such as the new website launched in 2018, and further invited it to use free, open-source and self-hosted social networking platforms having special regard to users’ data protection. It encouraged the Ombudsman to make progress on a coherent policy for the digitalisation of its services.

In general, Parliament highlighted the work achieved in recent years on issues such as performance-based budgeting, the ethical framework and the many related rules and procedures, enhanced communication activities and the increasing number of measures to improve transparency. It underlined the importance of collaboration and of sharing of experience among Union institutions and bodies and suggested that an analysis be made of the possibility of formalised networking activities in different domains in order to share best practises and to develop common solutions.