2018 discharge: EU general budget, European External Action Service (EEAS)

2019/2064(DEC) - 14/05/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 597 votes to 97, with 7 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European External Action Service (EEAS) for the financial year 2018.

In the resolution accompanying its discharge decision (adopted by 591 votes to 91, with 21 abstentions), the European Parliament made a series of observations:

Budgetary and financial management

Parliament welcomed that for the second consecutive year the Court found no material level of error in the EEAS Annual Report and governance arrangements. However, it stated that more audit work should be dedicated to operational expenditure or to issues that are becoming of high relevance or even critical for the EEAS, such as cybersecurity, the performance of global security measures for delegations or the financial management and administrative support provided by the Mission Support Platform to civilian activities under the Common Security and Defence Policy.

The total EEAS budget for 2018 amounted to EUR 678.5 million (an increase of 2.8 % compared to 2017) with an implementation rate of 99.9 % for commitments and 84.8 % (slightly lower than the 2017 rate of 86.7 %) for payments from the end of the year and with additional contributions from the Commission to cover the administrative costs of Commission staff working in EU delegations. The budget for headquarters amounted to EUR 249.7 million while the budget for the Delegations was EUR 428.8 million.

Parliament encouraged the EEAS to simplify the current budget nomenclature to allow for easier and more efficient management for the EEAS by progressively streamlining the 35 budget lines used to finance Commission staff operations in the delegations, reflecting geographical and various development instruments.

Building policy

In view of the complexity of building administration policy in the light of the EEAS mission, Members stressed that good cooperation between Parliament and the EEAS was essential for the management and examination of building files. They encouraged the EEAS to forward the building files for approval in due time to allow time for their thorough examination and follow-up. They invited the EEAS to provide sufficient explanations regarding its tendering procedures and the cost of the buildings in the remit of the discharge exercise.

Staff

In a context in which the Union is facing an increasingly difficult international environment, Parliament stressed the central role of the EEAS in the conduct of the Union's foreign policy. Given that the strengthening of the role of the EEAS has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in its staffing levels, Members called for sufficient human resources to be made available to it in order to avoid

undermining the Union's effectiveness as a global player. They insisted on the need to provide the resources necessary for the proper implementation of an effective EU common security and defence policy.

Concerned that there are still imbalances in the nationality composition of the EEAS workforce, Members called on the EEAS to improve the geographical balance in its ranks.

Other comments

The EEAS has been invited, *inter alia*, to:

- create posts for local agents responsible for reporting on legislative work in countries of strategic interest, particularly accession countries and those of the Eastern Partnership, in order to increase the Union’s understanding of the neighbourhood and its approximation to the acquis;

- take action to resolve the problems leading to the procurement errors identified and to prevent future infringements of the relevant rules;

- intensify monitoring of the adequacy of financial circuits in operations in remote areas and increased temporary support;

- continue to provide specific support for all procurement of value in Delegations;

- progressively strengthen its chain of assurance by placing greater emphasis both on the skills and responsibility of individuals for their role in ensuring controls are effective and on the risk of fraud;

- respect the staffing formula set out in Decision 2010/427/EU, namely a ratio of one third of staff from Member States and two thirds from EU institutions;

- review its gender and opportunities strategy to include concrete targets for the presence of women in management positions;

- ensure that co-location in its buildings is open to all interested EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, such as Parliament or the European Investment Bank, under the same conditions as for the EEAS;

- develop a culture of zero tolerance of harassment, ensure strict follow-up of reported cases and extend the network of confidential counsellors;

- indicate in its annual activity report the number of cases transmitted to OLAF and the ongoing investigations carried out by OLAF into possible conflicts of interest within the EEAS;

- take measures to improve the operational effectiveness of the missions in Mali and Niger by providing appropriate practical guidance and adequate support;

- fight propaganda and to expose disinformation and malicious foreign influence;

- develop a long-term vision of the early warning system and to promote coordination with Member States and other key partners;

- invest in digital communications through social networks and its websites;

- put in place a concrete action plan to reduce its environmental footprint in its headquarters and delegations.

Parliament called for an expansion of the Diplomatic Exchange and Secondment Programme between the EEAS and the Member States' diplomatic services that is aimed at contributing to the evolution of a shared diplomatic culture.