2018 discharge: EU general budget, Committee of the Regions

2019/2061(DEC) - 13/05/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 486 votes to 90, with 15 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions in respect of the implementation of the Committee of the Regions' budget for the financial year 2018.

In the resolution accompanying its discharge decision (adopted by 604 votes to 85, with 5 abstentions), the European Parliament made a series of observations:

Budgetary and financial management

In its 2018 Annual Report, the Court of Auditors found no significant weaknesses in the audited topics of human resources and public procurement for the Committee of the Regions. It concluded that the payments for the financial year ended 31 December 2018 relating to the Committee's administrative expenditure were generally free of material error and that the supervisory and control systems examined were effective.

In 2018, the Committee's budget amounted to EUR 96 101 000, compared to EUR 93 295 000 in 2017, an increase of 3 %. 99.3 % of all appropriations were committed before the end of 2018 (compared to 98 % in 2017 and 98.7 % in 2016), and 91 % of the appropriations were paid in 2018 (compared to 89.9 % in 2017 and 89.6 % in 2016).

Parliament welcomed the Committee's overall prudent and sound financial management in the financial year 2018. Noting the unused appropriations for several budget lines, such as 59 % for courses for members, 33.3 % for staff missions, 77.9 % for medical services and 92.7 % for fitting-out of premises, it nevertheless reiterated the need to take measures to minimise over-budgeting.

Members noted that the administrative cooperation agreement concluded by the Committee, the Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and Parliament in 2014 had expired on 31 December 2019, as the agreement had not been renegotiated or extended. If a new agreement is negotiated, Members agreed that, from a political point of view, the agreement would need to be updated to meet current challenges, such as the new multiannual financial framework or the new cohesion policy rules.

Other observations

Parliament expressed its concern about the confirmation of the presence of asbestos in critical areas of the VMA building, including the parking area. Deploring the lack of information for stakeholders and Members and staff, it invited the Committee to remedy the situation.

The Committee was invited, *inter alia*, to:

- inform Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control of the amounts disbursed in the framework of interinstitutional cooperation agreements, including service level agreements concerning human resources policies, etc;

- report on the results achieved in developing a model, in cooperation with other Union institutions and bodies, for ongoing consultations of Union citizens, with a view to combining local debates and a feedback mechanism to inform decision-makers at Union level;

- urgently adopt rules to deal with cases of harassment involving its members;

- intensify its efforts with regard to the code of conduct for its members in order to prevent and resolve conflicts of interest;

- step up the deployment of IT tools to modernise its procurement procedures;

- report to Parliament on any progress made in increasing the proportion of women in middle and senior management positions;

- implement as soon as possible the new digital strategy and the new multi-annual IT expenditure plans and continue to pursue a real policy for the digitalisation of its services.

Parliament noted that the Council stipulated that, from the date on which the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union legally enters into force, three out of the 24 seats attributed to the United Kingdom shall be attributed to Estonia, Cyprus and Luxembourg respectively. The number of seats on the Committee is thus reduced by only 21 seats.

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.